

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Model Personnel Classification and Compensation Plan Becomes State Mandate

In the mid-1990s, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) was struggling to reform its personnel hiring and promotion practices and assisting in revising state Career Service Rules. A conversation following a particularly frustrating session proved the impetus for a new approach that considered “how employees do their jobs” rather than classifying specific duties and their levels of responsibility. As a result, FDOT adopted a new system that reduced 1,700 job classification groups to 96. The Florida Legislature authorized the FDOT to institute a model plan. Following a six-year trial, the Legislature has directed all state agencies to adopt a system like FDOT’s.

State of Change

The 1990s were a decade of dramatic change for public and private sector organizations, especially in the legal issues affecting human resources programs. A system relying on classification plans to categorize jobs and establish employee compensation, recruitment and selection, and performance evaluation criteria proved inadequate for most HR programs. This was true of the State of Florida, which had 1,700 job classifications.

As part of a statewide effort in the mid-1990s, representatives of Florida state agencies met to reform the classification plan process and recommend revisions to the state’s Career Service Rules. David Ferguson, Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT’s) Chief of Personnel Resources, participated in those meetings. “It’s always a challenge to try and update personnel rules because there are such broad areas of disagreement about job classification and pay systems,” he says. “It seemed that the more we talked, the less chance we had for reaching consensus.”

After one such meeting, Dave Ferguson returned to his office and met with then Secretary of Transportation Ben G. Watts. After reviewing the meeting’s lack of progress and major obstacles still to be overcome, the Secretary looked at him and said, “Can’t we just make a simple classification system? Why not develop a system that employees and managers can understand and use.” (See sidebar.)

They wondered if they were trying to make it too complicated by trying to effect change within the existing classification structure. Could a simpler approach be the better avenue to reform? Why not classify employees in broad categories

Goals of the Florida Department of Transportation’s New Classification System

- Create a system that is easily understood by supervisors, managers, and employees.
- Incorporate broadbanding concept to establish pay ranges.
- Provide more rational standards for evaluating jobs, classifying positions, and establishing pay ranges.
- Eliminate the practice of using position classification as an arbitrary mechanism to grant employee pay increases.
- Provide that employees/applicants must possess the required and specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the jobs for which they apply.



according to how they did their jobs rather than by what jobs they did—essentially a position-based system. To test the theory, they used the FDOT structure and identified the number of levels separating the worker on a road crew from the Secretary of Transportation. There were six. Could all FDOT jobs be reclassified into six levels?

They liked the idea of the six-level structure, but they also realized that it didn't offer enough flexibility to accommodate the state's 1,700 job classifications in the FDOT. The next challenge was how to reclassify positions within each class and dramatically reduce the current number. Dave Ferguson admits that "Our arbitrary target was to be less than 100."

The final number was 96. They identified 16 broad occupational groups and six classes in each group level based on the criteria of how employees do their jobs.

Do the math: $6 \times 16 = 96$. Ninety-six job classes represent a 94 percent reduction from the original 1,700 classes. (See sidebars.)

From Concept to Model Plan

To achieve true reform, Dave Ferguson organized an FDOT project team to research all existing Florida Career Service Classes, format every classification, and assign each to the appropriate FDOT occupational group and level. This ensured that a new system could, and would accommodate all 1,700 existing classifications.

At the plan's core was the decision to replace the minimum experience and education qualifications with specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary to perform within each job classification and

within each individual position. Dave Ferguson directed FDOT's classification staff to examine current job classifications and identify the general KSAs required to perform each. Staff then allocated each classification to one of the six levels within the sixteen occupational groups. The FDOT refers to the new criteria as pay broadbanding, which allowed the Department to develop new compensation, recruitment and selection, and performance appraisal systems.

Broadbanding essentially reassigned old job classes to the new six-level, sixteen-occupational group structure and created pay bands for each class. In general, the new statewide minimum of each pay band was the minimum of the pay range for the lowest level consolidated into the new class. Conversely, the maximum reflects the pay grade for the highest level of the old class. Shortly after initial implementation, FDOT conducted a pay survey to better determine market-based pay in Florida. Data from the survey, as well as analysis of current employee pay data and available funds, provided the basis for the proposed 16 pay ranges.

To ensure that all voices were part of the negotiations to reach consensus on the new system, Dave Ferguson invited rank and file union members to be part of the team. "We wanted their perspective, but most of all, we needed their endorsement if the plan was to work," he says.

Jim Newell is now an OMS Level V Trade Supervisor. In 1995, He was a Level III Aluminum Welder and president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3049. He was an AFSCME representative on the negotiating team. According to Jim Newell, "The FDOT had an idea and they invited union members

from all levels to help make it work. I admit that we were skeptical at first, but union employees were at the table for the whole process, we participated in every decision, and we saw the value of this new system for our members. That made it easier to sell a new organization to our members. It wasn't just presented to us for our approval, we negotiated every item in the new plan."

The FDOT's legislative staff worked to ensure that state lawmakers understood what the Department was doing and why.

After six months of hard work and creative problem solving by the FDOT teams, the Florida Legislature approved the new position classification system on February 24, 1995. Known agencywide as the Model Plan, the approved system applied only to the FDOT. Authorization came with several caveats, including that the system be implemented at no cost to the state or the FDOT.

More than a Classification and Pay System

Broadbanding is the key to the Model Plan's simplicity and the flexibility it provides for managers, supervisors, and employees. Glenn Boyette, Director of Administration for FDOT's District 1, explains the system's appeal. "With the Model Plan," he says, "managers can cut a lot of red tape by developing and identifying the KSAs necessary to perform the duties and responsibilities of the job. Before, we could only hire or promote based on a job candidate's experience and education qualifications conforming to the minimum qualifications of a position class. Usually, those qualifications were written by someone in a central office who'd never designed a bridge or maintained a road. Justifying that

Standard Six Class Series

Level I—Routine, repetitive, well-defined tasks that follow prescribed steps, methods, and/or procedures. Employees are closely supervised and given step-by-step instruction.

Level II—Interrelated processes or steps that may require discretion or making choices among several established options but require no procedural interpretation. Routine work is performed independently.

Level III—Interpret data and/or procedural applications to address problems and situations not clearly defined. Work may require formal training appropriate to the occupational area.

Level IV—Originate techniques, formulate concepts and procedures, direct and/or plan

operations, and develop solutions to unique issues. Work may require professional certification appropriate to occupational area. Employees are directly accountable for their work product.

Level V—Supervise employees more than 50 percent of the time, including communicating with, motivating, training and evaluating, and planning and directing employees' work.

Level VI—Manage program(s) and/or work units and formulate policies and procedures that affect personnel administration and/or preparing and administering budgets. Employees are directly accountable for program/work unit results.

Standard Occupational Groups

Office Support. Keep records and accounts, prepare and preserve written communications, enter and retrieve data, perform general office work, provide personal secretarial services and/or oversee these activities.

Administrative and Management Support. Assist with purchasing, personnel, budget and/or other general services.

Accounting/Auditing/Tax. Examine, analyze, and interpret accounting records, prepare financial statements, collect tax revenues, and/or recommend financial and/or tax revenues.

Education. Conduct educational research, administration, training and teaching, arts education, and/or library and museum services.

Program Analysis, Planning, and Development. Plan programs, grants, economic analysis, economic development, statistical analysis, and promote Florida products or attractions, or plan civil protection.

Benefits and Determinations. Develop, administer, and/or monitor benefit programs or eligibility determination and appeals.

Data Processing. Use data-processing knowledge, technical abilities, and skills with the full range of computer workstations and networks.

Scientific/Technical. Requires scientific knowledge, technical abilities, or a combination of technical knowledge and manual skills in areas such as biological and physical sciences, geology, health technologies, environmental protection, veterinary science, apply agricultural or silviculture practices.

Engineering/Architecture/Surveying. Apply physical laws and principles of engineering and/or architecture. Perform drafting, land surveying, and/or other related support disciplines.

Real Estate. Acquire, manage, or appraise real and/or personal property.

Health Care. Perform medical and patient care health services.

Human Services. Provide psychological, social work, vocational rehabilitation, counseling mental health, or chaplain services.

Corrections. Maintain care, custody, and control of convicted felons.

Sworn Law Enforcement. Protect the public, maintain law and order, detect and prevent crime, direct and control motor traffic, investigate and/or apprehend suspects in criminal cases.

Regulatory/Enforcement/Protective. Enforce civil laws or perform inspection or regulatory activities involving security, and firefighting.

an applicant met the minimum qualifications and processing pay adjustments under the old statewide system applicable to all state agencies could be an exercise in creative writing.”

The Model Plan gives managers the latitude to promote and compensate workers beyond the traditional cost of living raises because the system identifies a series of salary movements through the pay range, bonuses, and rewarding employees for assuming extra effort. Under the previous system, employees could only advance vertically in the organization.

Broadbanding also allows more career development opportunity within a single position and/or class through horizontal growth within an occupation category. Glenn Boyette points to the example of an unregistered engineer who has 15 years of experience. Because he lacks the P.E. registration, the employee can only advance to an Engineer Level III. “Broadbanding,” he says, “lets us look at the employees’ KSAs and compensate them for additional duties or reward employees who perform special project assignments beyond their normal responsibilities.” The new system allows managers to compensate employees better and more often, which also boosts morale.

Liliana Clark is an Assistant Personnel Manager in District 1. She cites the example of a classification technician who came to the office as a temporary worker, became a temporary employee, and now works in a permanent assignment. “This employee has the analytical ability and logical mind that make her well suited for her job,” she notes. “However, she would not have qualified for this position under the old system because she lacks the specified years of experience and minimum college education, which are not really necessary to do the job. She’s one of the best classification technicians I’ve ever worked with. I love the new system.”

Communication is Key

Communication, keeping everyone involved and aware of progress throughout development of the Model Plan and its implementation in the Department, was central to the plan’s success. “Our philosophy,” continues Dave Ferguson, “was to keep lines of communication open and going both ways. We sent monthly progress reports to the legislature, we made countless PowerPoint presentations to Department staff and managers, and we worked closely with our union representatives. We were totally open because we knew if people understood what we were doing and why we were doing it, they could understand the benefits and realize that the new plan could make FDOT a better place to work.”

Dave Ferguson stresses the important role Secretary Watts played in the Model Plan process. “Ben is a respected transportation professional who brought credibility to what we were trying to do,” he says. “Legislators and staff saw that the Secretary wanted this to happen, that he believed in its value and was committed to its successful implementation. Ben was instrumental in helping others see how a new way of thinking about the organization would benefit the Department and its employees.”

He also emphasizes the role of Thomas F. Barry Jr., FDOT’s current Secretary. “The Department is very fortunate to have a continuing supporter in Tom,” Dave Ferguson states. “Tom served with Ben and both understand our system and how it works.”

Once the Legislature approved the plan, the team focused on helping employees learn to use it effectively. All managers attended FDOT training sessions on identifying KSAs and using them in the selection process before they were allowed to sit on any selection committee. Open communication and training targeted

to all levels of employees allayed union fears that only managers’ friends could qualify. In fact, union workers are now some of the strongest supporters of the system because they have benefited from it.

According to Jim Newell, “The new classifications in the Model Plan helped our members tremendously. In fact, many of them received major pay raises when it was implemented. AFSCME members helped create the new system. We understand it and we know how to use it to get ahead in our jobs.”

FDOT also developed a computer support system to track and analyze pay actions. Supervisors use it to make more informed pay decisions, and employees use it to request reassignments, promotions, or research and apply for vacant positions throughout the state.

A System at Work

Since its implementation in 1995, the FDOT Model Plan has proven workable, flexible, and popular with all levels of employees. Its utility is evident in the fact that there have been no changes to the Model’s basic structure and features.

The 2001 Florida Legislative session recognized the merit of the FDOT system by passing a bill to implement a broadbanding system very similar to FDOT’s for the entire state. Naturally, the Florida Department of Transportation is very pleased.

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