

CHAPTER IV

CLASSIFICATION PROBLEMS

Workshop No. 3

Summary by

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In the workshop on classification problems a number of different questions in this general area were identified and spotlighted. In the discussion of these different types of classification questions, it became clear that there was considerable difference of opinion among the arbitrators present concerning some basic principles applying in this area.

It was noted first that there are two basic types of classification problems. One relates to the proper classification and wage rate for a worker doing a job: "Is Joe Doakes, for the work he is doing, properly classified as an A class General Assembler or as a B class General Assembler?" The second type of problem relates to work assignments: "Should the work now being done by Richard Roe, who is a laborer, be performed by a laborer or by a carpenter?"

Discussion centered for a time on a case cited by the chairman, in which a man classified as a janitor had been given the job of nailing down pre-cut lumber in a truck in order properly to secure heavily laden skids in the truck. The union in this case maintained that since a hammer and saw, tools of the carpenter's trade, were used by the janitor, he was working outside his classification.

In connection with the discussion of this case it was noted that a situation of this type might lead to either of two types

of requested remedies by the union. The union might ask that, for the time spent on this type of work, the janitor should be paid carpenter's wages, both for the time he had spent on this job in the past and for the time spent on the job in the future; alternatively they might demand that the janitor no longer perform this type of work, that carpenters hereafter do the job, and that carpenters who, in the union view, had been improperly deprived of the work in the past be compensated for the work incorrectly assigned to the janitor.

It was observed that sometimes in cases of this type the submission agreement might read: "Is the work in question properly a part of the janitor's duties or of the carpenter's duties?" If such a submission unduly restricts the arbitrator's ability to make what appears to him to be a correct finding, it was suggested by some that he ask the parties for an amendment to the submission. In the actual case under discussion, the arbitrator had a submission that gave him wide latitude, and his finding was that the proper classification for work of this type was that of "Shipper," since the shipper was required by his job description to use a hammer and nails in preparing materials for shipment. The shipper rate was higher than that of the janitor but lower than that of the carpenter.

Discussion brought out that one of the major problems in connection with classification grievances arose from the fact that so often companies and unions had only job titles and had no written, detailed job descriptions. The arbitrator in such cases, it was held by some of the members of the workshop, must then make a job analysis of the disputed job and of other jobs in the two classifications involved. He could then, by a process of job evaluation, slot the disputed job into one or the other of the classifications, or possibly into some intermediate classification between the two for which the parties were contending.

Much of the discussion in the workshop centered around problems of demotion. The question was posed by one member of the group as to whether arbitrators were as rigorous in fol-

lowing job descriptions when it would result in a demotion of a worker as they were in following them when it would result in an up-grading of the employee.

Discussion centered around the following type of situation: The type of work which is the distinguishing characteristic of a higher-rated occupation is no longer being performed in the plant. For a considerable period of time, however, men in the higher-rated classification continue to carry the job title and rate of the higher classification, despite the fact that their job duties now fall completely in a lower-rated job. After a considerable period of time, long enough perhaps to be construed as establishing a past practice, the company, possibly because of economic pressure, attempts to reclassify the men downward in accordance with the job content currently being performed. There appeared to be considerable divergence of opinion as to how a question of this type would be handled by the various arbitrators present.

Attention was also given to the question of the right of a company to "fraction" a job. The following instance was cited and formed the basis of considerable discussion: In a situation in which an A class machinist is required by his job description to operate all types of machine tools, a group of A class machinists are, as a matter of fact, for a period of years, for the convenience of the company, confined exclusively to the operation of the milling machine. Subsequently the company, faced with severe economic pressure by competition, attempts to reclassify these men downward to Milling Machine operator since their work is confined to the operation of that type of machine only. There was considerable sentiment in the group that this would, in the light of past practice, be an improper procedure on the part of the company. In short, the view was expressed by some that how job descriptions are interpreted and applied by the company may be more significant than the literal wording of the descriptions.

The reverse of the situation just described was also considered. The question was posed in this fashion: Suppose that the com-

pany has had men classified as machinists who, in fact, are operating only milling machines. Another worker, classified as a milling machine operator and performing the same work as the men designated as machinists files a grievance asking to be similarly classified as a machinist. Some in the group, contending that the man was properly classified for the work he was doing as a milling machine operator, held that the grievance should be denied. Others, arguing that his fellow workers doing the same tasks were classified in the higher job of machinist, maintained that the grievance of the milling machine operator should be granted.

There seemed, on the whole, to be more sentiment for not downgrading the man who is over classified than for up-grading the man who, apparently, is properly classified but is discriminated against in comparison with other men who may be over-classified.

Some consideration was given to the problems connected with classification matters and "job dignity." A case was cited in which workers classified as operators were asked by the company to do, as part of their work, duties which normally fell in the lower rated porter's classification. There was considerable sentiment in the group for upholding a union contention that such work assignment violated the job dignity of the operators.

A case was considered in which a machine operator had his job duties enlarged by the addition of certain paper work responsibilities. The sentiment of the group appeared to be somewhat divided as to whether that would involve an up-grading of the total job. The view was expressed by some that an arbitrator, faced with this problem, should make a job evaluation of the old and new duties and thus determine if a higher total point value resulted from the addition of the new duties. Considerable discussion was devoted to this type of case in which, in effect, a company changes job content without changing job title. The group was sharply divided on one aspect of this problem. Some believed that, if the arbitrator found that,

in fact, the addition of the paper work had made the job one which should carry a higher rate, he should indicate this fact to the parties and return the problem to them for negotiation as to what the new rate should be. Others in the group felt that the arbitrator should himself establish, as part of the decision in the case, precisely what the higher, new rate should be.

The final question to which the group directed its attention related to the effect of a company's assignment of some elements of a higher-rated job to a lower-rated employee. For purposes of illustration of the principle involved, a hypothetical case was posed in which it was assumed that the least difficult and responsible part of the duties of an airlines pilot was to taxi a plane across an air field. It was then postulated that the Company on occasion instructed an airplane mechanic to taxi the plane across the field. Then the mechanic filed a grievance asking to be reclassified as a pilot. The views of the group on this illustrative case were widely divergent. Some held that the man had a good case for a pilot's classification since as a mechanic he would never be expected to move a plane. Others suggested that the grievance should be denied and that the company should be enjoined to make no more such work assignments. Still others believed that, since the duty of taxiing a plane across a field was such an insignificant part of the duties of the pilot, the grievance should be denied.
