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WHAT DO AMERICANS DO ALL DAY? NEW ADDS TO MASTER LIST OF U.S. JOBS

More tech jobs will be in; some obsolete professions are to be dropped from U.S. labor manual

By Lauren Weber
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In corporate America, data scientists and project managers are in high demand. In government labor statistics, they don't quite exist. That is set to change in 2018, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics will begin using an updated set of job titles to track the U.S. workforce.

The BLS has released proposed changes to the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification Manual, which lists the jobs that are held by the vast majority of American workers. The revisions offer a snapshot of how the labor market has changed in the last decade or so, as some professions, such as radar and sonar technicians, dwindle and are replaced with new titles or skills required to keep the wheels of the economy turning.

The revision includes 869 detailed occupations, including a handful of entirely new jobs and changes to some existing ones.

Along with data scientists and project managers, the BLS has added financial risk specialists, an occupation that likely expanded in the wake of the financial crisis. Given the rapid pace of technological change in the economy, the agency also made significant changes to the computer-related occupations category. And with more Americans choosing cremation over traditional burial, crematory operators also will now get an official nod.

The terms reflect social changes, too. The phrase "home economics," as in home ec teachers, has been replaced with "family and consumer sciences." Librarians are now "librarians and media collections specialists."

The Labor Department updates its classification manual every decade or so. In an economy where the skills employers seek can change fast, there has been some demand for more frequent updates. "But it's a long regulatory process and we want to be fair in making these determinations," said Theresa Cosca, a lead economist at the BLS.

The White House's Office of Management and Budget oversees the revision process, with input from multiple government agencies that track or study aspects of the American workforce, such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Education.

The occupations manual must reflect emerging professions, but it also shows how slow economic shifts can be. The 2018 list includes many occupations that are becoming obsolete: motion picture projectionists, meter readers and typists. As some professions shrink, they are consolidated with others. For example, locomotive firers, who monitor tracks for obstacles and malfunctions, have lost their separate designation and are now counted along with railroad brake, signal and switch operators.

For a job to make the list, enough people must hold that job so that meaningful data can be collected and reported. Workers who don't fall into the listed jobs get grouped into an "All Other" category in the broader occupation groups.

The OMB received approximately 300 comments from the public after it announced in 2014 that it would review and revise the 2010 occupations manual. The agency is inviting comments on the proposal through September 20. It plans to announce the final changes in Spring 2017.

For a true dive into the past, peruse the occupational list from 1850, the first year the Census Department collected information on how free Americans spent their working days. Among the occupations from that year were ice dealer, occultist, and lightning-rod maker.