

PERSPECTIVES

A job classification to facilitate occupational mobility

All attempts to compile or revise national occupational classifications come up against similar problems, arising from developments in the economic situation, changes in the labour market and the speed at which these changes take place, but also from specific difficulties inherent in the principal use to which the future classification is to be put. The revised Operational Directory of Jobs and Occupations (ROME), published in France by the National Employment Agency (ANPE), illustrates both generic trends, common to all revised classifications, and specific aspects resulting from an operational choice, namely that of meeting the needs of labour market actors: employers wishing to recruit personnel, first-time jobseekers, those wishing to change their jobs, and the ANPE officials whose task it is to bring them together.

Universal trends

There are problems inherent in any attempt at revising national occupational classifications: a nomenclature is static by nature, whereas the market is essentially dynamic; the revision of such an instrument takes a long time and, during that time, the market changes, new occupations appear, others disappear; information technology must be used, and this imposes its own law on the content of the classification. These constraints make it necessary to define a flexible, adaptable structure.

Moreover, certain current trends entail a reduction in the number of unit groups contained in occupational classifications:

- the increased "multi-skilling" of jobs, which results in fewer relevant occupational distinctions;
- a general weakening of trade unions' ability and willingness to insist on strict demarcations between different job categories;
- developments in technology and work organization which create new types of jobs and eliminate old ones;
- in certain cases, a reduction in the financial resources available to the agencies compiling the classification, with the result that their research capacity is limited.

Another common tendency in the revision of classifications concerns the actual definition of jobs, with the emphasis less on the outcome of the

activity than on the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to perform the tasks and assume the responsibilities of the job in question.

These tendencies can be observed in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), compiled by the ILO, the latest version of which, ISCO-88, contains 390 unit groups, whereas the earlier version, ISCO-68, contained 1,506. They also appear in the new or revised national classifications produced in recent years, whether in industrialized market economy countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Hong Kong, Italy, Singapore and the United Kingdom), developing countries (Fiji, Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Trinidad and Tobago) or countries in transition to a market economy (the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia). The CIS countries where the work of classification is in progress (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine) are also following this trend. They are, however, coming up against additional difficulties due to the occupational structure inherited from the centrally planned economy (see also "Bridging the gap between yesterday's skills and tomorrow's needs in the Russian Federation", pp. 264-274).

Particular uses

National occupational classifications have many users. For some, the chief requirement is that descriptions of the job content should be as detailed as possible: employment agencies, vocational training and guidance centres, migration offices, etc. Others use them primarily for the classification structure and subdivisions they contain: statisticians, labour market or social structure analysts (see also the methodological questions raised in Castells and Aoyama, ILR, Vol. 133, No. 1, 1994). More generally, governments and administrations use these classifications to define policies on labour, education and vocational training; businessmen use them in personnel management; the social partners use them for wage bargaining; psychologists use them to study the relationship between occupation and personality; epidemiologists use them in their study of work-related differences in morbidity and mortality; sociologists use them to gain insight into the lifestyles of various social groups; and economists use them to study income and consumption habits.

The list could be extended. Obviously the multitude of particular uses can conflict with the unity of any classification system. Does a multipurpose instrument necessarily entail a sacrifice in its effectiveness for particular uses? In this respect, a clear choice has been made in France, where there are three classification systems:

- the PCS (*Professions et catégories socioprofessionnelles*) containing occupations and socio-economic categories, mainly for statistical use;
- the nomenclatures of the CEREQ skills study and research centre (*Centre d'études et de recherche sur les qualifications*), which focus primarily on training and its planning; and

- the ROME directory of jobs and occupations, intended for actors in the labour market.

While following the general tendencies referred to above, the revised version of the ROME retains its distinctive, strong emphasis on the possibilities for occupational mobility and redeployment.

Why change?

The first version of the ROME, published in 1974, had a simple purpose: to provide a common vocabulary for employers and jobseekers. It was in the form of an alphabetical directory listing 8,600 job titles. Each of these entries referred to one of the 1,135 occupational "families", roughly corresponding to the concept of trade or profession, subdivided into 42 "groups", equivalent to branches of economic activity. Each occupational family was dealt with on a separate file, which contained: the job's definition, general conditions attached to its performance, the abilities required, its various levels of qualification, the types of training it implies, the various types of specialization it covers, and a diagram showing paths leading to other possible occupations through adjustment, further training, specialization or qualifications. This approach was geared to the logic of branch, profession and trade. In other words, for a given job, the reclassification possibilities were limited to the same sector and emphasized the similarity of tasks and skills.

A concern with occupational mobility was not absent from the first version, but was expressed in terms of "vertical" mobility (within the firm or sector of activity). The concept of mobility has now changed. The first version of ROME was compiled in the mid-1970s, when job vacancies outnumbered applicants and employment agencies were searching for candidates capable of adapting to the jobs available. It is scarcely necessary to stress that the opposite is the case today. Moreover, the notion of career, in the sense of advancement within a trade or profession as a result of experience and qualifications, has lost a lot of its meaning and is often replaced by mobility across professions and branches of activity.

Current redeployment needs require a description of the worker's role as well as an account of the tasks to be performed. "It is no longer a matter of trying to define a series of procedures to be applied within the framework of a predetermined system of work organization, but of work situations that must be managed, where the person must be capable of acting independently . . . Job definition has gone from being based on the post to being a description of the required aptitudes, knowledge, skills and ability to adapt to situations that can vary according to the type of firm or service." (*Grand Angle sur l'emploi*, p. 29). As one can see, the idea of the individual, and concomitantly the worker's profile, are becoming increasingly important. This gives rise to the problem of translating certain subjective criteria into the objective terms required in a nomenclature.

What manner of change?

The ROME was revised in four main stages. The first occurred in 1988 and consisted mainly of working out a methodology, analysing the needs of ANPE officials, and informing the social partners. The second stage occurred in 1989 and 1990 and involved completing prototypes and entrusting decentralized teams at regional level with the production of one section of the future ROME corresponding to an occupational family. Each team worked with enterprises, universities, ANPE officials, training institutions and various experts. The next stage, in 1991, was devoted to checking the documentation prepared by the regional teams, in consultation with the social partners and the national institute of economic and statistical information (INSEE), and to testing the instrument in local employment agencies. The analysis of the findings thus obtained resulted in 1992 in agreement on the final version of the ROME, and in its publication and operationalization at the end of 1993.

In its final form the classification is presented in four volumes:

- an alphabetical index listing 10,000 occupation and job titles, with cross-references to the "job/occupation" files;
- a two-volume dictionary, one devoted to the tertiary sector, the other to technical and industrial occupations. It contains 466 files describing the same number of "jobs/occupations" classified in 22 occupational categories and 61 occupational fields;
- a diagram of occupational mobility: the 466 files in the last volume provide, for each job/occupation, a series of concentric circles with arrows showing the possibilities of transfer to other types of employment.

Occupational category, the first level of the nomenclature, links socio-economic status (clerical, skilled manual, executive etc.) with an occupational environment, for example, "business executive". The second level consists of the range of occupational activities organized by reference to a particular function, a type of work organization or a sector of economic activity. Thus, the category "business executive" comprises three occupational activities: sales manager; bank, insurance and real estate executive; and senior manager.

The jobs/occupations

Job/occupation, the basic unit in the ROME system, groups together relatively homogeneous work situations. In addition to the various job titles and activities, the job definition, the general conditions in which the job is done and the training and experience required, each file contains two major sections: skills commonly required in this job/occupation and specific features.

The commonly required skills come under three headings:

- The basic technical skills essential to the performance of the work. For example, for the job of "driver/deliverer", these include the ability to prepare goods for loading and delivery, to establish the most appropriate route, to drive the vehicle, to deliver or collect products or goods, to see that the correct forms are completed by the customer or sender.
- Associated skills, which are not essential but which constitute an advantage in gaining access to or advancing in the job/occupation in question.
- Job-related abilities that indicate the personal capacities generally required to perform the job efficiently. These may include cognitive skills (anticipating a breakdown, analysing the causes of a dysfunction), social skills (ability to work in a team, to delegate tasks), or physical capability (ability to lift heavy loads, to work for long periods standing up). The file for driver/deliverer specifies, for example, observance of road safety regulations, time management, good customer contact.

The section dealing with specific features also consists of three parts:

- Specific activities which describe the different sorts of tasks involved in the job/occupation in question, the areas in which they are applied, products manufactured, technologies used and responsibilities involved. In the case of the driver/deliverer, the principal specific activities are: organization of the delivery round, installation of the materials delivered, collecting payment, vehicle maintenance. This section also provides a list of the vehicles and materials used.
- The place where the activity is conducted, i.e. the sector, the nature and size of the enterprise.
- Specific working conditions such as shift work, night work, etc. The driver/deliverer file mentions work on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Areas of occupational mobility

In order to determine how close jobs may be to each other, the authors of the ROME have used criteria such as the common thought processes applicable in solving the problems that arise in different jobs; perception of time and space; response in emergencies or dangerous situations; frequency and nature of contact with other people (exchange of information, negotiation, customer service, etc.); delegation (of tasks, responsibilities); extent of skills and knowledge essential to success in the job; and field of activity (administrative, commercial, medical, etc.).

For example, the ANPE journal *Grand Angle sur l'emploi* (p. 153) considers the affinity between the occupations of driver/deliverer and waiter/barman as follows:

the waiter/barman is relatively "remote" from the driver/deliverer in the occupational "area", so inevitably there are differences – but why is he present nevertheless? The two occupations have the following in common:

- a similar type of thought process which rates manual experience, dexterity and physical ease highly;
- the fact that these two jobs are performed in the same mental time and space (in this case, in the very short term and the immediate surroundings – the "here and now");
- we find the same referential framework, in this case organization (of time, space, tasks, etc.), though a somewhat higher level thereof is required of a driver/deliverer.

Other uses

The methodology used in the ROME has a wider application than mere job placement. For example, one can discern a degree of convergence between the practical problems encountered by the ROME authors and those that must be solved by enterprises seeking to apply forward-looking management of jobs and skills: namely the need to take into account the diversity of jobs and titles used in the enterprise, while also encouraging mobility, career development and adaptation to organizational or technological change; and to meet the growing demands of multi-skilling while enabling the employee to keep his/her professional identity and to have a coherent assortment of individual skills.

There is also a marked convergence with the concerns of training institutions. Firstly, because the task of defining the trades, skills and subjects to be taught is very close to that of defining the features characterizing a job for purposes of placement. Secondly, because the problem of training systems today is less that of imparting technical skills than of helping individuals to "become professional" by learning to apply, in a variety of situations, the skills and knowledge acquired in the course of training.

Sources: *Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois*, Paris, ANPE-Dokumentation française, 1993. *Grand Angle sur l'emploi* (Paris), No. 6, Oct. 1993. *Liaisons sociales* (Paris), 11 Oct. 1993. *International Standard Classification of Occupations*, ISCO-88, Geneva, ILO, 1991. Information supplied by the ILO's Labour Administration Branch and Statistics Office, Geneva, and by the ANPE National Employment Agency, Paris.

Bridging the gap between yesterday's skills and tomorrow's needs in the Russian Federation

In September 1992 a commission of Russian and Western experts concluded that "millions of adults will need to change their occupation"; "Russians have no idea of the market economy"; "virtually the entire Russian legal profession" and more than 1 million accountants need