

# Consulting careers: A profile of three occupations



Choosing an industry in which to work is often as important as choosing an occupation. And over the next several years, the best advice for some workers may be to choose an industry that sells advice: consulting.

The management, scientific, and technical consulting services industry comprises businesses that offer specialized advice to other businesses. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment in this industry is expected to grow by 83 percent—representing a gain of more than 800,000 jobs—over the 2008–18 decade. This represents both the fastest projected rate of growth and the largest expected job gain of all detailed industries. And even during the recent recession, this industry has proven resilient, recovering nearly all of the jobs it lost in the downturn.

This article highlights three occupations in the consulting services industry: management analyst, market research analyst, and environmental scientist and specialist. Keep reading to learn more about these workers. The occupational profiles describe what they do, how much they earn, and how they prepare for the work. You'll also find sources of additional information at the end of the article.

## Three occupations in consulting services

Workers in the management, scientific, and technical consulting services industry provide advice and assistance to businesses and other organizations. Some offer advice about general business management on topics such as finances, personnel, marketing, distribution, and other business operations. Others provide advice about environmental, scientific, and technical issues.

The table on page 14 shows the employment and wages of management analysts, market research analysts, and environmental scientists and specialists. For each occupation, the median wage was higher than the \$33,190 median for all occupations in May 2009.



Strong job growth is expected to continue as businesses seek advice about planning and logistics, implementing new technologies, and complying with regulations on workplace safety and the environment. Other trends, such as continued globalization and increased security, are also expected to spur demand for workers in this industry.

### Management analysts

Organizations seek the advice of management analysts to develop ways to enter and stay competitive in the marketplace. These workers, often called management consultants, analyze an organization's structure, efficiency, or profits and then suggest improvements.

With most assignments, management analysts first define the type and scope of the project being evaluated. For the permanent shutdown of a hospital, for example, management analysts might be consulted about the most efficient way to shift patients and equipment to a new facility. During this phase,

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## Employment and wages of selected occupations in management, scientific, and technical consulting services, May 2009

Occupation		Employment	Median annual wage
Management analysts	Across industries	552,770	\$75,250
	Management, scientific, and technical consulting services	144,920	82,100
Market research analysts	Across industries	226,410	61,580
	Management, scientific, and technical consulting services	24,870	56,850
Environmental scientists and specialists, including health	Across industries	83,530	61,010
	Management, scientific, and technical consulting services	17,250	61,880

analysts observe business operations and interview managers and employees. They also analyze relevant information, including data on revenues, expenditures, or employment.

Next, analysts develop ideas based on their review and try to solve existing or potential problems. Problem-solving can take many forms. For example, to determine how low inventory affects product delivery times, an analyst might build and solve mathematical models. The solutions often take into account



the nature of the client's organization and its relationship with others in the industry.

After they have identified solutions, consultants report their findings and make suggestions to the organization. Their suggestions usually are submitted in writing, but oral presentations are also common. For some projects, management analysts may be asked to help implement their suggestions.

Some management analysts work on a team; others operate independently. Workers might specialize in certain business functions—such as mergers and acquisitions—or in a particular industry, such as financial services.

**Employment, outlook, and wages.** BLS data show that there were about 552,770 management analysts overall in May 2009. About 144,920, or 26 percent, of them worked in the management, scientific, and technical consulting industry.

In addition to working in management, scientific, and technical consulting firms, management analysts also worked for computer systems design and related services firms; Federal, State, and local governments; and in management of companies and enterprises. Management analysts worked throughout the country, but employment was concentrated in large metropolitan areas.

BLS projects that, over the 2008–18 decade, employment of management analysts



will grow 24 percent, much faster than the 10-percent average for all occupations. Despite this projected rapid growth, keen competition is expected because of the independent and challenging nature of the work and the occupation's high earnings potential.

Wages for management analysts vary widely by workers' geographic location, level of education, and other factors. Generally, management analysts employed in large firms or in metropolitan areas earn the most money. The median annual wage of management analysts in management, scientific, and technical consulting services was \$82,100 in May 2009, according to BLS. The lowest earning 10 percent in this industry made \$38,100 or less, and the highest earning 10 percent made \$166,400 or more.

**Skills and training.** Management analysts in consulting services work with minimal supervision, so they need to be self-motivated and disciplined. Creativity is a desirable quality for management analysts, who also need good analytical, communication, and time-management skills. As consulting teams become more common, the ability to work

well with a wide range of people also becomes more important.

Educational requirements for entry-level jobs vary. Many employers seek individuals who have a master's degree in business administration or a related discipline. Some employers also require additional experience in the field in which the analyst plans to consult. Other firms hire analysts who have a bachelor's degree to work as research analysts or associates, promoting them after several years to work as consultants.

Few colleges and universities offer formal programs in management consulting. However, many disciplines are suitable because of the diverse fields that management analysts encounter in their work. Among the common fields of study are business, management, marketing, economics, and engineering. Most analysts also have experience in management, information technology, or other specialties.

### **Market research analysts**

Market research analysts help organizations understand what types of products or services people want and how much they will pay for

them. Organizations consult market research analysts for gathering data on competitors, examining prices, and studying distribution methods. These consultants then analyze past practices to predict the organization's future sales.

Market research analysts design surveys and decide which procedures to use for collecting the data they need. Most surveys are conducted online and by telephone, but other collection methods include focus group discussions, mail responses, and setting up booths in public places, such as shopping malls. Trained interviewers usually conduct the surveys under the direction of a market research analyst.



In their work as consultants, market research analysts make recommendations to their client organization. These recommendations give the organization vital information to help them make decisions about promoting, distributing, and designing products or services. The information also may help determine whether the organization should add new merchandise, open new offices, or diversify operations in other ways.

Organizations also consult market research analysts for help in developing advertising brochures and commercials, sales plans, and product promotions. The type of promotion, such as a rebate or giveaway, is based on the analyst's expertise about the targeted consumer group.

**Employment, outlook, and wages.** There were about 226,410 market research analysts employed overall in May 2009, according to BLS. Of those, about 24,870 (11 percent) worked in the management, scientific, and technical consulting industry.

Because of the wide applicability of market research, these analysts were employed in many industries. In addition to management, scientific, and technical consulting firms, large numbers of market research analysts were employed in the management of companies and enterprises, computer systems design and related services, insurance carriers, and other professional, scientific, and technical services.

Overall employment of market research analysts is projected to grow 28 percent over the 2008–18 decade, according to BLS, much faster than the average for all occupations. This growth will be driven by organizations which, seeking to expand their sales, increasingly consult marketing experts.

The median annual wage of market research analysts in management, scientific, and consulting services was \$56,850 in May 2009, according to BLS. The lowest earning 10 percent in this industry made \$31,890 or less, and the highest earning 10 percent made \$108,330 or more.

**Skills and training.** Market research analysts study data, so being precise and detail-oriented is important. They also must

be persistent to solve problems independently. These analysts sometimes oversee survey interviews or participate as members of a team, so they must also work well with others. Good communication skills are necessary for formulating proper language in surveys and for presenting findings orally and in writing.

A bachelor's degree is the usual educational requirement for many market research analysts. A master's degree is usually required for consultants in technical positions.

In addition to completing courses in business, marketing, and consumer behavior, prospective market research analysts should take social science courses, including economics, psychology, and sociology. Courses in mathematics, statistics, sampling theory and survey design, and computer science are important for the quantitative side of the work. Market research analysts often have advanced degrees in business administration, marketing, statistics, communications, or related disciplines.

Aspiring market research analysts should pursue an internship or part-time job in a consulting firm or other organization. This work will help them gain experience in gathering data, conducting interviews or surveys, and writing reports on their findings.

### **Environmental scientists and specialists, including health**

Environmental scientists and specialists use their knowledge of the natural sciences to protect the environment. As consultants, they often assist organizations in complying with environmental regulations, which minimize health hazards to people and the environment.

These scientists and specialists analyze measurements and observations of air, food, water, and soil. The information helps organizations decide how to clean and preserve the environment. Often, their work stems from the need to comply with environmental regulations and policies. For example, Federal regulations set basic guidelines on the amount of pollutants that organizations may emit. These organizations might consult other environmental scientists and specialists for suggestions on ways to reduce emissions.



Environmental scientists and specialists also help organizations to determine how to clean up or dispose of toxic waste. And they help to identify the environmental impact of a given action. Before new construction can begin, for example, consultants might assess possible changes that the project would have on a nearby ecosystem.

These workers write risk assessments that describe the likely effect of construction and other environmental changes. They also write technical proposals and give presentations about their findings.

#### ***Employment, outlook, and wages.***

According to BLS, there were about 83,530 environmental scientists and specialists employed overall in May 2009. This number includes 17,250, or 21 percent, working in



management, scientific, and technical consulting services.

These workers are also employed by State and local governments; architectural, engineering and related services; and the Federal Government.

Employment of environmental scientists and specialists is projected by BLS to increase by 28 percent over the 2008–18 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations. Job growth should be strongest in consulting firms. Increases in employment will be spurred by demands on the environment from population growth and by greater awareness of the problems resulting from environmental degradation. The need for organizations to comply with complex environmental laws and regulations should also lead to consulting opportunities.

Much of the projected job growth should result from a continued need to monitor environmental quality, to interpret the impact of human actions on ecosystems, and to develop strategies for restoring damaged ecosystems. In addition, planners will consult environmental scientists to develop and construct build-

ings, transportation corridors, and utilities that protect and efficiently use resources.

The median annual wage of environmental scientists and specialists, including health, in management, scientific, and consulting services was \$61,880 in May 2009, according to BLS. The lowest earning 10 percent made \$37,060 or less in this industry, and the highest earning 10 percent made \$122,470 or more.

**Skills and training.** Environmental scientists and specialists need strong oral and written communication skills because they write technical reports and research proposals, present information on health risks to the public, and work as part of a team with other scientists, engineers, and technicians.

A bachelor's degree in one of the earth sciences is adequate for entry-level positions, but consulting firms may prefer that workers have a master's degree in environmental science or a related natural science. Some of these scientists and specialists have a degree in environmental science, but others earn a degree in biology, chemistry, physics, or the geosciences. They often need research or work experience related to environmental science.

For environmental scientists and specialists in consulting services, other useful courses include business, finance, marketing, and economics. And combining environmental science training with other disciplines, such as engineering or business, may qualify these scientists for a wide range of jobs.

## For more information

This article provided brief descriptions of three occupations in management, scientific, and technical consulting. For more detailed data on the occupational breakdown of this industry, visit its BLS Occupational Employment Statistics profile online at [www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4\\_541600.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_541600.htm).

And for detailed descriptions of all occupations in the industry, see the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The *Handbook* provides detail about the job duties, employment, wages, outlook, training, and more for occupations in consulting services—as well as for hundreds of other occupations. This resource is available in many career centers and public libraries and online at [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh).

Information about career opportunities in management consulting is available here:

Association of Management  
Consulting Firms  
370 Lexington Ave.  
Suite 2209  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 262-3055  
[info@amcf.org](mailto:info@amcf.org)  
[www.amcf.org](http://www.amcf.org)

To learn about careers and certification in market research, contact the following:

Marketing Research Association  
110 National Dr., 2nd Floor  
Glastonbury, CT 06033  
(860) 682-1000  
[email@mra-net.org](mailto:email@mra-net.org)  
[www.mra-net.org](http://www.mra-net.org)

Information about training and career opportunities for environmental scientists and specialists is available here:

American Geological Institute  
4220 King St.  
Alexandria, VA 22302  
(703) 379-2480  
[www.agiweb.org](http://www.agiweb.org)

