
Book reviews

The Discovery Method: An International Experiment in Retraining. Employment of Older Workers, series no. 6. By R. M. Belbin. (Pp. 86; 21s.) Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. 1969.

In 1965 the author wrote a book for O.E.C.D. entitled *Employment of Older Workers: Planning Methods*. This described the discovery method of training. The essential idea is that trainees discover for themselves how things work and, in due course, why. Tasks and problems graded in difficulty are presented according to the trainees' existing knowledge and progress. There is no formal verbal instruction or physical demonstration but the instructor gives advice if requested.

The present book presents the results of the application of a number of demonstration programmes in the discovery method in the training of older workers in four member countries of the O.E.C.D. There was some difficulty in setting up adequate experiments in different countries but demonstration cases in Austria, in Sweden, in the United Kingdom, and in the United States were successfully completed. The jobs learnt included stone masonry, scribing, conversion training on railways, machine shop work and data processing.

The results of the four projects taken together seem to justify the conclusion that with appropriate training an age higher than usual for training constitutes no serious disadvantage. The gain from using the discovery method adequately compensates the older learner for the loss of learning ability attributable to age and often produces a situation of near parity between younger and older learners.

The discovery method allows older trainees to become competitive with those younger trainees who have learnt by the traditional method. Whether or not it reaches the level of performance of those younger trainees who learnt by the discovery method depends on the gains which the younger experimental trainees make themselves. Sometimes the latter make a relatively small advance and the gap is closed or eliminated. Occasionally the younger trainees make a big advance and the gap may even widen.

The four demonstration programmes are described in detail in the second part of the book.

This is an interesting report which will be valuable to doctors working in those industries where there is redundancy among older workers and retraining programmes are being instituted.

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Wage Drift, Fringe Benefits and Manpower Distribution: A Study of Employer Practices in a Full Employment Labour Market. By Derek Robinson. (Pp. 178; 30s.) Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. 1968.

How does one get labour to where it is most needed? This is a reasonable question to consider even if one is unsure how to define 'where it is most needed', and it is an interesting question because, although labour is but one economic resource, much of it is notoriously immobile. One answer to the question is to attract labour by higher rates of pay but it is this book's starting point that that answer is a gross oversimplification – general recognition of which is long overdue. The author devotes one of the book's seven chapters to the various forms of pecuniary additions to income that can be granted on top of basic pay and, in the next chapter, he goes on to catalogue the various forms of fringe benefits. The two chapters make up an impressive list of the possible components of the package of rewards that an employer can offer to attract a prospective employee or to retain an existing employee. Later, the author also considers other courses open to an employer seeking labour.

It would be wrong to imagine that an employer has a free hand in forming his recruitment (and retention) policies. Apart from his own preferences, there are pressures generated by other firms in his own industry and by other firms in his own locality; there are pressures generated by organized labour and pressures and inducements generated by fiscal and other governmental measures. Nevertheless, one conclusion is that the typical employer has more means available than most realize. Distinctions are drawn between the measures necessary to recruit labour and the measures necessary to retain it, and between interests of the old and the young among an employee force.

The author does a service to research in this field in pointing out the heterogeneity of practices between plants and even within plants, a heterogeneity which is concealed by the aggregation of statistics and other information in most published forms. It is this heterogeneity that can be used to induce labour to move and to attract particular forms of labour to a plant. The major difficulties, however, are to convey to a prospective employee what the package of rewards offered to him really comprises and for the employee to compare two packages of very different mix.

If the book has a defect it is that the information in it has been collected for the most part from four of the