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Specificity of occupational training and occupational mobility: an empirical study based on Lazear's skill-weights approach

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Abstract

According to standard human capital theory, firm-financed training cannot be explained if the skills obtained are general in nature. Nevertheless, in German-speaking countries, firms invest heavily in apprenticeship training although the skills are assumed to be general. In our paper, we study the extent to which apprenticeship training is general at all and how specificity of training may be defined based on Lazear's skill-weights approach. We build occupation-specific skill-weights and find that the more specific the skill portfolio in an occupation, the higher the net costs firms have to bear for these apprenticeship training occupations and, at the same time, the smaller the probability of an occupational change during an employee's entire career. Due to the new definition of occupational specificity, we thus find that apprenticeship training – previously assessed as general training – is very heterogeneous in its specificity.

Keywords:

mobility

skill-weights

occupational specificity

apprenticeship training

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Notes

Since the number of occupations in these cost evaluations is limited, we have to concentrate the empirical analysis in this paper on these particular occupations.

The cost evaluation 1991 includes only training firms from West Germany, while the newest study also includes East Germany. Not only were the labour market structures (and thus mobility) of the two parts of the country quite different, but also training compensation and therefore training costs differ considerably.

To homogenise our sample, we exclude female employees as they show a different behaviour towards mobility than their male counterparts. We cannot control for any interruption in working life, e.g. pregnancy or maternity leave.

A complete list of skills in the data-sets can be found in Appendix [1](#), [Table A2](#).

A complete list of all analysed apprenticeship training occupations in this paper can be found in Appendix [1](#), [Table A3](#).

We use ranks instead of relative frequencies to normalise our explanatory variable. The specificity degree must not be distorted by the number of acquired skills in an occupation. If this were the case, we would replicate the (low or high) skill level of an education, instead of the specificity of a skill combination.

We are able to perfectly match 28 training occupations in the 1980s, 11 training occupations in the early 1990s, and 35 occupations in the late 1999s. Overall, this makes 74 cases with different degrees of occupational specificity.

As we use broad classification codes, an employee is in case of upward career mobility (e.g. promotion) nonetheless still classified in the same occupation and therefore no horizontal occupational change occurred despite this career move.

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