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Article:

This book presents nine papers from a 1992 conference of labor market research institutes from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. The conference was held to commemorate the founding of the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt, RAO) and examined the employment forecasting methods and actual country-specific forecasts of the participating institutes. The director of the RAO, Professor J.A.M. Heijke, edits the volume and contributes several chapters.

The book provides an introduction which discusses some basic issues in labor market forecasting and outlines the goals of the symposium and volume — namely, to gain an understanding of the approaches used by the participating centers and to facilitate an 'exchange of ideas, insights and concrete labor market information' across interested professionals. The subsequent substantive chapters are logically structured into three sections containing three chapters each. In the first section, each of the three research centers provides a chapter describing the data, models, and methods underlying its forecasts. The second section contains actual labor market forecasts from the three centers. In the final section, directors and research staff members from the institutes reflect on conceptual and operational issues associated with forecasts from their particular centers and outline areas where improvements are being or might be made. To assist the reader, the book also contains lists of all tables and figures as well as short biographies of the contributing authors. The book does not include an index.

The volume meets its first goal by providing a good snapshot of the practice of manpower forecasting in the three countries. The detail in the initial methodology chapters is sufficient to inform the reader of basic data, assumptions, and modelling approaches used by the three centers without overwhelming him or her with statistical detail. For researchers who might need more information about the underlying econometric specifications, references to complete technical documents are provided. Particular strengths in this section are the discussion in the chapter by researchers at the Institute for Employment Research (IER) of the UK of how they model technological innovation and trade competitiveness (issues which are clearly important in incorporating the effects of European integration into occupational forecasts) and the discussion in the chapter by researchers at the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung (IAB) of forecasting problems brought about by German reunification.

Three very different types of forecasts are presented in the second section. For the U.K., straight predictions are presented of trends in broad occupational areas through the year 2000. To illustrate some of the other capabilities of their model, the researchers from the IER also summarize results from special studies of the job outlook for highly educated workers in the U.K., the outlook for older workers, and the effects of European integration on women's employment. The forecasts from the IAB for Germany extend through 2010 and also

cover relatively broad occupation and education categories. However, unlike the chapters by the other centers, the paper by the IAB contains figures under several alternative macroeconomic scenarios. The final set of forecasts by the ROA for the Netherlands is made over a fairly short time horizon (the predictions, which extend only through 1994, were actually outdated by the time of publication) but addresses occupations and educational categories in much finer detail than the figures from the other two centers.

In the final section, researchers from the centers describe how they have balanced the trade-offs involved in making accurate but timely and useful forecasts with limited data. Especially important in these discussions are descriptions of who the centers see as their primary constituencies and how information regarding their forecasts is disseminated. While the data produced by all three centers are helpful to a wide range of groups, the institutes from Germany and the U.K. emphasize the usefulness of their forecasts for policy makers, while the institute from the Netherlands emphasizes the usefulness of its forecasts for students evaluating alternative courses of study.

Because of the structure of the volume and the clear descriptions provided by each center of its activities, the book should attract readers with general interests in either alternative approaches to manpower forecasting or cross-country comparisons of forecasts. Such readers will, however, have to draw their own comparisons as neither the introduction nor the substantive chapters provide any discussion relating material and findings across the three centers. In this respect, the book does not communicate the symposium's accomplishments toward its second goal regarding the exchange of insights across experienced researchers, an exchange which presumably worked to the betterment of forecasting operations at each institute.