

Training & Employment

A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

ANALYSIS OF WORK: DESCRIBING COMPETENCES THROUGH A DYNAMIC APPROACH TO JOBS

Increasing numbers of players in the various areas of human resources management (HRM) are "going back" to the analysis of jobs, competences and changes to arrive at what is generally called the "shift to the logic of competences". Such a development may reflect current trends affecting the production system and thus calling for a review of different approaches to it. Placing the work activity at the heart of these movements clearly opens new perspectives but also requires an in-depth analysis of methodology.

Work flexibility, a challenge to the analysis of jobs and competences

If we take a rapid look at recent changes in the production system, the period from the 1960s to the end of the 1970s may be contrasted to the trend that got underway in the 1980s and has continued to the present day. The key stages are the beginning of the crisis around 1975 and the movement of forward-looking job management (*gestion prévisionnelle des emplois, GPE*) that emerged in the early 1980s; while the term 'competence' was rarely used in the 1970s, it became inescapable in the 1980s. During the first phase, change was most often perceived as a break between periods of stability, with technology constituting the main factor behind such developments. This perspective gave rise to questions about what changes in jobs and what training were necessary to adapt the workforce in the face of the new technologies and techniques. The idea was to forecast and adapt, with the expectation of changing professions several times in the course of working life. At that point, the essential role of HRM on the one hand or the educational system on the other was carrying out the forecasts and furthering the adaptation of the labour force. Career counselling, meanwhile, was based on a stock of reliable information about different occupations.

By the end of the 1970s, however, this deterministic vision was coming up against reactions from the field. New technologies, and particularly information technologies,

were generally associated with (and a medium for) other changes leading to new products or services, for example, or new organisation. Furthermore, these technologies inherently opened up various choices of technical solutions. This intrinsic quality related to their "user-friendliness" led users to "demand more from the machine", to "look for other solutions". This period was particularly favourable, in sectors where the work was relatively less predefined than in industrial production, to the revelation of the weight that job-holders might exert on their own job and, collectively, on the development of an occupation (Mandon and Rannou 1984, Mandon 1988).

The resulting changes—new goods and services, changing technical possibilities and new ways of applying them, new principles of organisation such as company networks, decompartmentalisation of departments, flexibility-led to relative instability within the companies, and more generally on the labour market (via unemployment, restructuring, etc.). Rather than forecasting and adapting, as had been the case in the past, it was necessary to anticipate and mobilise the means to face these changing situations.

The players were thus in search of other frames of reference. The growing instability of work situations led observers of industrial relations to signal the perturbation of existing systems. A decade ago, Jean-Daniel Reynaud concluded that forms of workforce management would become increasingly individualised, departing from a single model. He predicted the growing recourse to individual

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negotiation on the one hand and outside certifications on the other; in his view, the diploma was an increasingly important point of reference because it seemed to be the only solid, stable one (Reynaud 1988).

Among researchers, the main findings about these transformations led to renewed emphasis on concepts and methodology concerning the analysis of jobs and the changes they undergo. The recurrent problems of HRM encouraged the development of an approach capable of grasping work situations that were more complex, less defined, and above all in a state of flux. This perspective, combining sociological research and detailed analysis of jobs, gave rise to the approach known as ETED (Emploi Type Étudié dans sa Dynamique, typical job studied in its dynamic). The name ETED reflects both the goal of generating descriptions of "typical jobs" (grouping work situations) and the need to take the dynamic, fluid context of work situations into account.

Placing competences in context: the analysis of jobs beyond the work station

While an activity generally remains defined by its "technical" production, the rapid succession of products and the related idea of service (personalisation, closer ties with the client) and the decompartmentalisation of company functions, as well as management constraints (rigor and analytical follow-up), require all jobs to integrate new dimensions into their technical aspect per se. In particular, the totality of the data related to the necessary collaborations and exchanges with others, information gathering and renewed appeals for some precludes reducing an individual's working area to the sphere of the group or department to which he or she is administratively attached. In addition, it is necessary to take into account data on deadlines, for example, which determine the way that each person plans and organises his or her work.

To address competences, the ETED analysis sheds light on a given work situation as it is experienced and structured by the person holding the job. In particular, it explores his or her overall objective and desired results, which determine the action undertaken. It does not, however, study problem-solving mechanisms—what happens in the "black box" of mental processes. This definition of competences is consistent with the basic conception of the ETED approach: the nature of change and the role of the individual in the production structure. Competences are understood as "knowing how to draw on one's knowledge, abilities and qualities to deal with a problem at hand", or, in other words, as knowledge, abilities and qualities **in action**. They involve a "reactive encounter" between an individual's past experience—and his or her potential—and the situation that mobilises them and thus reveals this potential.

In this approach, the notion of competence basically serves an heuristic function. The competences understood in this way can certainly be "subject" to management, but never as autonomous units that could be separated from their context through the application of quantitative rules of management.

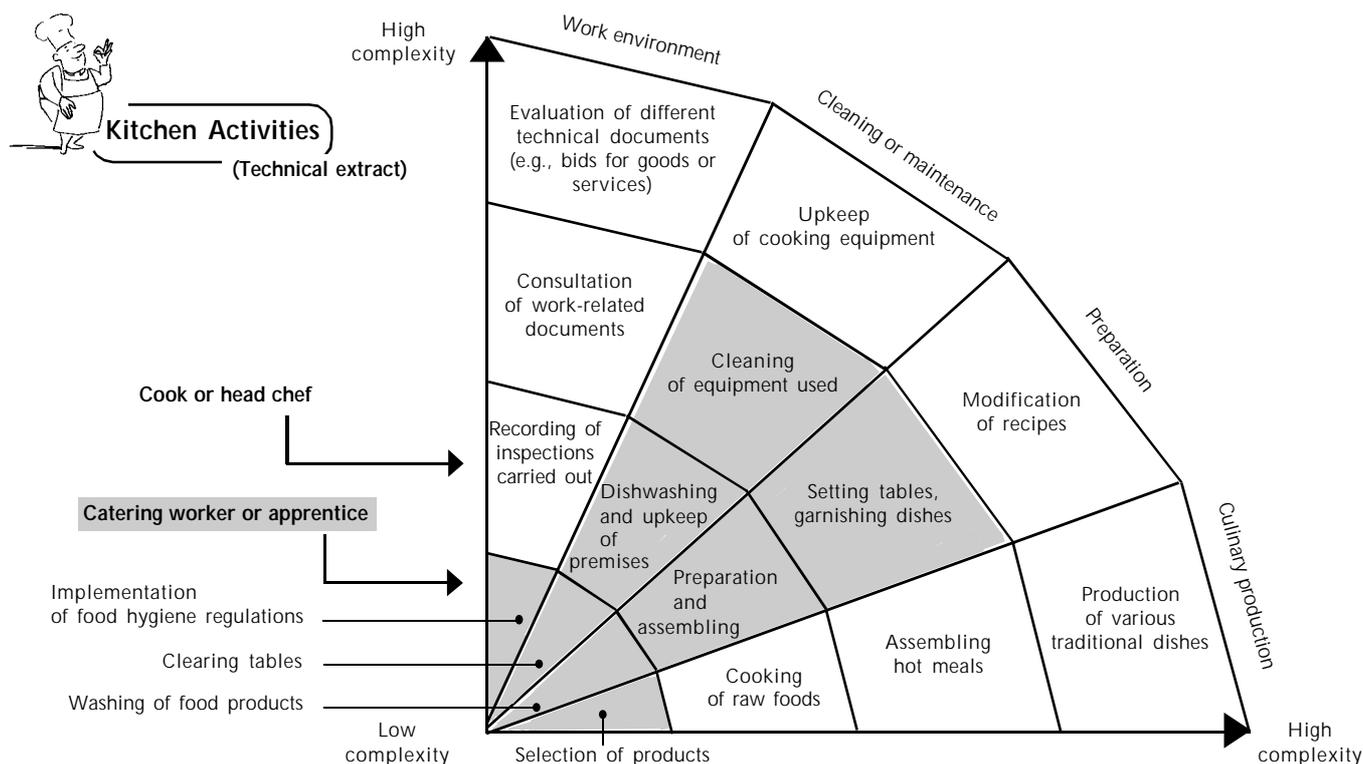
Competences emerge in a work situation, and they become meaningful in three different perspectives: the productive function of the situation, career development, or a diploma-granting training programme. Competences thus assume their full meaning in relation to broader, aggregate units that constitute collective points of reference developed by the players involved.

The notion of the typical job in a dynamic situation

One of the features of the ETED approach thus stems from the level of job analysis that it favours, which might be described as a "meso" level situated between approaches focussing on the individual (cognitive psychology, human engineering) and those focussing on the organisation (labour economics, organisational sociology). More specifically, it sets itself apart from both a vision of jobs determined by the organisation where they exist (or, in the extreme, by economic determinants) and an ontological representation of competences as natural abilities proper to the individual. For the ETED approach, jobs represent the meeting point of these two levels, and it only analyses them in the double context of this encounter and the characteristics of the job-holders. Once again, such a procedure is perfectly consistent with the definition of competences that it proposes.

The results of the investigation are presented under a series of headings. An introductory section situates the major currents represented by the jobs studied. Specific employment situations are grouped together by precise criteria, and in particular, according to their socioproductive role. This is defined on the basis of 1) their relative impact on the overall objective of the production process/service (i.e., the job's productive output); 2) its position as between internal (or internal and external) participants; 3) the particular nature of the situations addressed in terms of data taken into account by the job-holder (indication of complexity). The singularity of the cases is not effaced but, on the contrary, utilised to develop descriptions of typical jobs, also known as "occupational" jobs (emplois métiers). Relative to these jobs, the concrete forms of particular work situations tend to vary, on the one hand depending on choices or local circumstances (make-up of the work group, management "style", client environment, etc.), which will be termed variability, and on the other hand, according to the way that the job-holder fills his or her job, extending it and giving it a particular "colour" or not, which will be characterised as elasticity. In other words, the typical (or occupational) job constitutes a cumulative image of different concrete situations in this space where individuals are not always interchangeable. This cumulative space then permits the articulation of collective and individual management while recognising both variability and elasticity.

The two notions of variability and elasticity thus reflect the two kinds of dynamics that the ETED approach seeks to bring out: individual advances in the mastery of the



The study of catering jobs (community catering, restaurants and food-processing industries) confirms the presence of posts relating to culinary production and assembly in all three activity sectors. However, only the production jobs--those held by the cooks--allow career advancement towards supervisory and managerial activities.

The ETED method allows us to analyse the competences involved in these different jobs and the various possibilities for advancement among the activities involved. These activities have been defined in terms of technical skills, organisation/ management and interpersonal relations/communications. The case of technical activities is detailed above. Apprentice chefs and catering workers carry out overlapping activities, such as the choice and preparation of products (with quality controls and definition of quantities to be used). Access to the positions of cook or head chef follows responsibilities for the cooking of raw food products, then those that are combined, and finally a diversity of dishes. The division in the handling of the jobs, which hinders the advancement of assembly personnel to the preparation of hot dishes, largely reflects a traditional form of management that is not insurmountable. This observation is confirmed by the fact that the French educational system has agreed to a revamping of its diplomas on the basis of this study, while the community catering professionals have accepted it as a reference for the creation of branch titles validating the work experience of their personnel.

Source: Sylvie-Anne Mériot, *La restauration collective : analyse des besoins de formation pour une rénovation des diplômes* [Community Catering: Analysis of Training Needs for Revising Diplomas], Céreq Document no. 129 (January 1998), 150 pp.

job and emerging structural movements that may be significant for the development of the occupations. In order to facilitate their conceptualisation, the method identifies them under two headings: "development trends" and "job bracket".

The **development trends** category singles out the factors of change that influence the jobs studied: these are economic and technical, but also have to do with work organisation, recruitment sources, legislation, and so on. It indicates the sensitive areas or aspects of the activity that are likely to be modified. These are all "signals" that call for special attention.

The **job bracket** will be structured around a basic core that corresponds to the activity common to experienced job-holders in this post (generally at the end of the period of time deemed necessary to "feel at ease"), and the possible or observed extensions that exceed this hard core. The different ways of occupying this space or advancing in it may distinguish different career paths linking this typical (or occupational) job or trade to others (i.e., to define a career plan).

An approach that deals with several levels of information

The identification of typical jobs requires a large quantity of contextual information, which is acquired through-out the analytical approach. These so-called "framing" data are intended to allow understanding of the present context, the trends or issues confronting the jobs studied, and their role in day-to-day operations. They permit the definition of the field of observation and the identification of a sampling of specific situations to be investigated, and they are indispensable for understanding and interpreting the situations observed. The framing data also allow the identification of the players who will be called upon in the course of the study, for purposes of comparison and validation of results (organisation of follow-up groups).

The jobs to be studied are approached gradually, step by step. These steps provide a series of "zooms" through which information is gathered at several levels in order to choose the specific work situations in the most relevant

possible way; the principle of "sampling" used is different from the notion of representativeness in the statistical sense. The involvement of the players is an inseparable part of the method.

Information gathering on the jobs themselves is carried out in two stages. The first consists of an interview with the immediate supervisor of the selected job-holders. It provides information about the way work groups function and the "expectations" relative to the job studied (its "attributions"). Subsequently, the job-holders, interviewed individually, are invited to describe their work as precisely as possible, and this description constitutes the raw material for the analysis per se of the work.

This analysis involves first of all a reorganisation of the job-holders' discourse in order to bring out the data that the individual takes into account and the goals he or she sets. By combining the analyses of individual situations, it becomes possible to construct a representation of the occupational space (the job bracket mentioned above) by indicating the paths of advancement and the different steps along the way. (See inset for an application of this method to the community catering sector.) The typical job specifications are then validated and possibly refined by reviewing them with the job-holders involved.

Specific advantages of such an approach to jobs and competences

Where Taylorism sought to standardise work, notably through the preparation that was entrusted to the methods departments and through mechanisation, today's production system places greater reliance on human intelligence and develops complex work situations. At the same time, the training apparatus seeks to take into account the uncertainties of the labour market on the one hand and new forms of training (such as alternating training and "life-long" continuing training) on the other.

Thus, when work is to be analysed, either to create guidelines for trainers or to develop specifications for human resources managers, it is important to take into account the many factors, both individual and organisational, that weigh on job content. The ETED analysis allows the work situations described to be placed in context while emphasising their complexity, and it brings out collective reference units through the groupings of typical (or occupational) jobs that it proposes. Indeed, it is probably the level of analysis offered that explains its utilisation in the field of training as well as in human resources management.

Nicole Mandon and Emmanuel Sulzer

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briefing

▼ Updates

Céreq's News

The appointment of Céreq's new director, Hugues Bertrand [see Training and Employment 32, summer 1998], reaffirms Céreq's original mission as a public-sector source of expertise at the service of actors in the training and employment field. Céreq's activity programme will devote particular effort to the following issues:

- the role of training in the economic performance at the country and company levels (the effects of quality investments in initial training, new forms of management and evaluation of the training system and adaptation of individuals in the course of working life);
- changes in employment and work and questions about the conceptual relevance of a linear progression going from initial training to unlimited-term employment;
- the results of educational-system reforms over the past twenty years, the fact of having the majority of a generation in higher education and subsequently on the labour market, the respective effects of diplomas and training on social and occupational mobility;
- demographic changes (fewer exits from initial training, larger numbers of retirements) and the increased role of continuing training, a trend that places greater demand on adult competences;
- with the new areas of authority attributed to the regions and the expansion of those of the European Union, Céreq will be called upon to respond to demands from more varied origins and to provide greater assistance in decision making and international comparisons.

Co-operation with Argentina

For several years, Céreq has maintained regular ties with Argentina through a co-operation agreement with the Programme for Economic Research on Technology, Labour and Employment (Programme de recherches économiques sur la technologie, le travail et l'emploi, PIETTE), which comes under the direction of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research. This laboratory, located in Buenos Aires, is directed by Julio Neffa, an associate researcher at the CNRS. Irène Brousse, of PIETTE, is responsible for the Spanish translation of Training and Employment, Calificaciones y Empleo, which, like the English version, is available on Céreq's Website (www.cereq.fr).

In 1997, Céreq's Olivier Liaroutzos led a seminar on labour analysis. In June 1998, Edith Kirsch addressed the creation of guidelines for diplomas and the certification of competences. This presentation was requested by the National Institute for Technological Education (INET), which is responsible for setting up a national method for developing guidelines in Argentina so that each province can subsequently adapt the training programmes to its needs.

Meetings

▼ Foundations, Impact and Limits of Category-Based Social Policies

The eighteenth annual meeting of the Association d'économie sociale (Social Economics Association, AES), organised by Céreq and its associated regional centre in Aix, the Laboratoire d'économie et de sociologie du travail (Laboratory for Labour Economics and Sociology, LEST), was held in Marseilles on 10-11 September 1998. For nearly twenty years, AES conferences have provided a major forum for exchange and analysis. This year, more than fifty papers were presented during the two-day gathering, which featured six workshops and two plenary sessions each day. The central theme of "Foundations, Impact and Limitations of Category-Based Social Policies" gave rise to fourteen sub-themes to be addressed and developed, including, among others, educational policies, patterns of integration, urban policy, housing policy, the labour market, social security and employment policy. Presentations were aimed at "better understanding the foundations and mechanisms of social policies, which are based on the principle of providing services to a certain category of beneficiaries". At issue were the coherence and principles of a policy for the redistribution of wealth, and in particular, the necessity of favouring certain categories of the population or continuing to ensure equal access to services for all (republican egalitarianism).

A volume containing all the papers presented at the conference is now available (see New Publications). ▲

▼ New Publications

La formation professionnelle continue. Tendances et perspectives

[Continuing Vocational Training Trends and Prospects]

✍ Edited by Bernadette Clasquin and Hervé Lhotel, Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation et l'emploi (GREE)

This volume contains the papers presented during the seminar for Céreq's network of associated centres organised by the Research Group on Education and Employment (Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation et l'emploi, GREE) and held in Nancy on 30-31 May 1996. Divided into five thematic sections, it features twenty-one articles developing particular aspects of the field of continuing vocational training. What is the composition of this field? What are the main factors structuring the rationales of the training players? At a time when the field of training is undergoing significant changes, what practices and trends can be identified? Can different national systems of continuing training be compared? Are there policies for developing training? Where and how does regulation occur within the continuing training field? Is there transformation and recomposition? The authors, researchers at Céreq and its associated centres, but also other national and international research bodies, attempt to describe trends and prospects within a field that is undergoing, but also producing, numerous tensions and perturbations in the processes of labour-market reconfiguration.

Document no. 138, "Séminaires" series, Céreq, September 1998, 320 pp., 170 F., 25.92 €.

Les politiques sociales catégorielles. Fondement, portée, limites. XVIIIe journées de l'Association d'économie sociale (AES)

[Category-Based Social Policies. Foundations, Impact, Limits. Papers of the 18th Annual Meeting of the Social Economics Association (AES)]

✍ Edited by Philippe Méhaut and Philippe Mosse

In France, the minimum social benefits are defined separately for each category of recipients (the unemployed, the handicapped, the elderly, etc.). For some, these differentiated social policies form a heterogeneous or even disorganized whole. For others, they are part of a vast, rational plan. In either case, the question of the foundations, impact, and limits of such category-based social policies remains to be addressed, and this was the objective of the Eighteenth Annual Social Economics Meeting held in Marseille in September 1998. The conference papers, now available in these volumes, deal with three main themes. The first concerns the theoretical bases and the question of whether a strictly disciplinary economic approach should be maintained or, alternately, include other disciplines. The second raises the problem, for France as well as other countries, of linkage between category-based and more general social policies and whether there is complementarity of substitution. The last theme concerns the analysis of the logic and coherence of certain social policies on two levels: internally, through comparison of objectives and results, and externally by evaluation of consequences for other social policies, whether these are general or category based.

Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998. "Logiques économiques" series. 2 vols. (566 and 554 pp.): 480 F., 73.84 €.

On sale at L'Harmattan, 7 rue de l'école polytechnique, 75005 Paris.

De nouveaux intervenants à l'écoles : nouveau service, nouvel emploi ? Evaluation du dispositif expérimental de l'aménagement des rythmes scolaires

[New Personnel in the Schools: New Service, New Jobs? Evaluation of the Experimental Scheme for Reorganising School Hours]

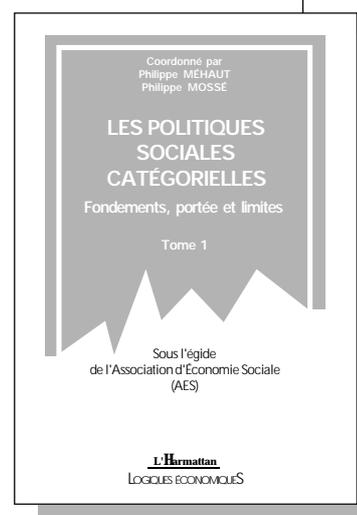
✍ Jean-Christophe Pétrone, Chantal Labruyère, Jean-Marc Grando, Jean-Paul Cadet, Agnès Legay

Since 1996, primary and middle schools throughout France have been testing the policy for the reorganisation of the school day (aménagement des rythmes scolaires, ARS) implemented in partnership with the Ministry for Youth and Sports and the municipal

governments. One of the principles of the scheme is to create the time to offer children extracurricular activities supervised by individuals outside the school, mainly specialised in sports, culture or group leadership.

In 1997, Céreq undertook an evaluation of this scheme in terms of the "employment effects" (both qualitative and quantitative) produced. This publication presents the results of the investigations conducted by questionnaire among the new personnel at the twenty-two pilot sites in the Lorraine and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regions (out of the 200 such sites existing in France), as well as nine studies of individual sites.

Document no. 139, "Évaluation" series, Céreq, November 1998, 103 pp., 100 F., 15.24 €.



▼ In Focus

What the ETED Method Can Bring to the Creation of National Diplomas

In 1998, 50 percent of the uses of ETED were related to training. The text that follows gives the point of view of an educator who has been involved in updating the national guidelines for technical diplomas in collaboration with the companies.

A brief analysis is necessary in order to explain the way that the methods for developing diplomas has evolved. Historically, the granting of diplomas corresponded to an inventory of knowledge in specific fields. Such "discipline-based programmes" were grouped together according to the nature of the diplomas (tertiary sector, manufacturing, vocational aptitude and vocational studies certificates, etc.). The discipline was thus the "motor", if not the reference. The main issue was: "What should the individual know?" There was no study or analysis of jobs, at most one or two phrases targeting the activity. Since that initial phase, however, job analyses have been carried out, notably with the publications of Céreq's Répertoire français des emplois (French Job Register). Over the past fifteen years, a more rigorous approach has been implemented. This includes:

- the setting up of an "outlook" register. This is an analysis of the occupational branch related to the target job. By providing data on workforce management, qualification and training, it allows the appropriateness of creating or revising a diploma to be determined;
- the development of job activities guidelines. This is an analysis of the job-holder's activities, in terms of functions, tasks, working conditions (resources, work relations, procedures, environment, etc.) and expected results;
- the creation of guidelines for certification, formerly called a diploma [Editor's note: and evaluation criteria]. This is an inventory of the competences to be evaluated and certified; they are described in terms of different kinds of knowledge, including behaviour, know-how and related knowledge.

At the time of the last two steps (development of activity and certification guidelines), the public authorities' approach to the work activity was essentially normative. By providing precise information on the real work and its context, the use of ETED has permitted the introduction of weighting factors and complementary referents.

At present, ETED may be seen as a tool for enhancing processes of creating diplomas. But other uses might be explored:

- At a time of increasing deconcentration and decentralisation, we might imagine incorporating variables reflecting local or regional contexts for the definition of diplomas (materials, products, services, procedures, etc.);
- Forms of vocational training based on alternating training raise the question of the knowledge of work situations that develop occupational competences (which ones?). This area might also be fruitful for ETED, which focusses on the links between job contents and competences;
- The accreditation of work experience also brings out the "work/competences" tandem. Indeed, the presentation of previous work situations is the basis for granting subsequent exemptions from exams or courses.

James Rault
Former deputy to the chairman Advisory Occupational Commissions

Excerpted from "L'intérêt de la méthode ETED dans l'élaboration des diplômes à l'Education nationale" in La gestion des compétences, la méthode ETED en application. Céreq Document no. 97, Séminaire series (August 1994), pp. 143-144.

▼ **Formation Emploi**

Recent articles in Céreq's quarterly journal, no. 64: October-December 1998



Progrès technique et acteurs du changement dans la soierie lyonnaise au XVIII^e siècle

[Technical Progress and Agents of Change in the Lyons Silk Trade of the Eighteenth Century]

✍ Bernard Hillau

In the eighteenth century, the Lyons silk trade experienced an unprecedented boom when leading merchants, weavers and the State agreed to found a factory. The article analyses the intersecting paths of skilled workers and businessmen who consciously positioned themselves as agents of social change.

Le renouveau de l'apprentissage en Grande-Bretagne Examen de trois secteurs

[The Revival of Apprenticeship in Great Britain A Look at Three Sectors]

✍ Howard Gospel

After several years of decline, apprenticeship in Britain has gained new momentum through the recent programme known as "Modern Apprenticeship". This article assesses the conception and functioning of this reform in the engineering construction, computer science and building sectors. Apart from certain optimistic conclusions, it identifies numerous problems related to the volume and quality of training, employer participation and the institutions' power to act.

Formation continue, recherche et développement et performance des entreprises

[Continuing Training, Research & Development and Company Performance]

✍ Gérard Ballot, Fathi Fakhfakh and Erol Taymaz

Training and R&D are non-material assets that also play a role in the company's production function. But the effects of interactions between these two factors remain uncertain. The article indicates, among other things, that certain organisational factors such as absenteeism influence the efficiency of the human capital stemming from company-funded training.

L'enseignement professionnel et la formation technique en tant qu'investissement et mobilisation des ressources humaines et financières

[Vocational Education and Technical Training as an Investment Mobilising Human and Financial Resources]

✍ Christoph F. Buechtemann

Vocational training costs are best shared through decentralised market negotiation. The State's role concerns the realisation of the institutional conditions for the proper functioning of the training market, the funding and production of good general initial training and, through diplomas, the maintaining of a selection process at the entry into vocational training.

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