TRAINING CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Workers who entered the construction industry between 1946 and 1965 acquired their skills in a variety of ways. Workers whose skills are not unique to the construction industry, such as accountants, draftsmen, bookkeepers, office machine workers, and secretaries received their training in much the same way as these workers in other industries; for example, through training in high schools, colleges, business schools, correspondence schools, and on-the-job instruction. Although construction craftsmen are employed in nearly every industry, more than 70 percent are employed in the construction industry and their training is more specifically oriented to that industry than the training of the workers referred to above.

Table 8, based on a BLS survey for the Office of Manpower Training and Automation,[5] shows the ways in which construction craftsmen (as of April 1963) learned their skills and what ways they thought most helpful. Formal methods included technical school training, apprenticeship, and training in the Armed Forces. On-the-job learning included instruction by supervisors and fellow workers. Casual methods included learning from friends or relatives or "just picking it up." The study showed that construction craftsmen believed casual methods most important in learning their skills, on-the-job training next important, and formal methods least important. About one in nine construction craftsmen believed that apprenticeship was the most helpful way. However, the contribution of apprenticeship is probably more significant than indicated by this ratio. Most training authorities recommend formal apprenticeship training as the best way to acquire the all-round proficiency of craftsmen in the building trades. This type of training provides the apprentice with a balanced knowledge of his field of work and enables him to perform his operations completely. In large part, apprenticeship provides the highest skilled workers (who provide guidance to others) and a significant proportion of future foremen. A study of apprentices who completed their programs in 1950 found that by 1956 about 20 percent were employed as supervisors, and another 10 percent as contractors.[6] Table 9 shows the average number of apprentices per 100 active journeymen during the 1950–64 period, and provides some indication of the extent of apprenticeship training in the construction trades between 1950 and 1964.

Table 10 shows the number of apprentice registrations,completions, and cancellations for construction craftsmen in Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training registered programs; however, not all apprentices are covered in these data.[7]

Cancellations represent a loss of potentially highly trained workers, but this loss is not as significant as it appears since many apprentice dropouts secure some training and eventually become skilled journeymen through less formal means. Indeed, many apprentices may drop their apprenticeship because of opportunity for employment at the journeyman level. The proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship varies significantly by occupation. (See table 10.)

[5] U.S. Department of Labor, Formal Occupational Training of Adult Workers, Manpower/Automation Research Monograph No. 2, December 1964. Table 11, p. 43.
[6] Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, Career Patterns of Former Apprentices, Bulletin T–147, 1959.
[7] "Training of Workers in American Industry," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training.