

Occupational Mobility

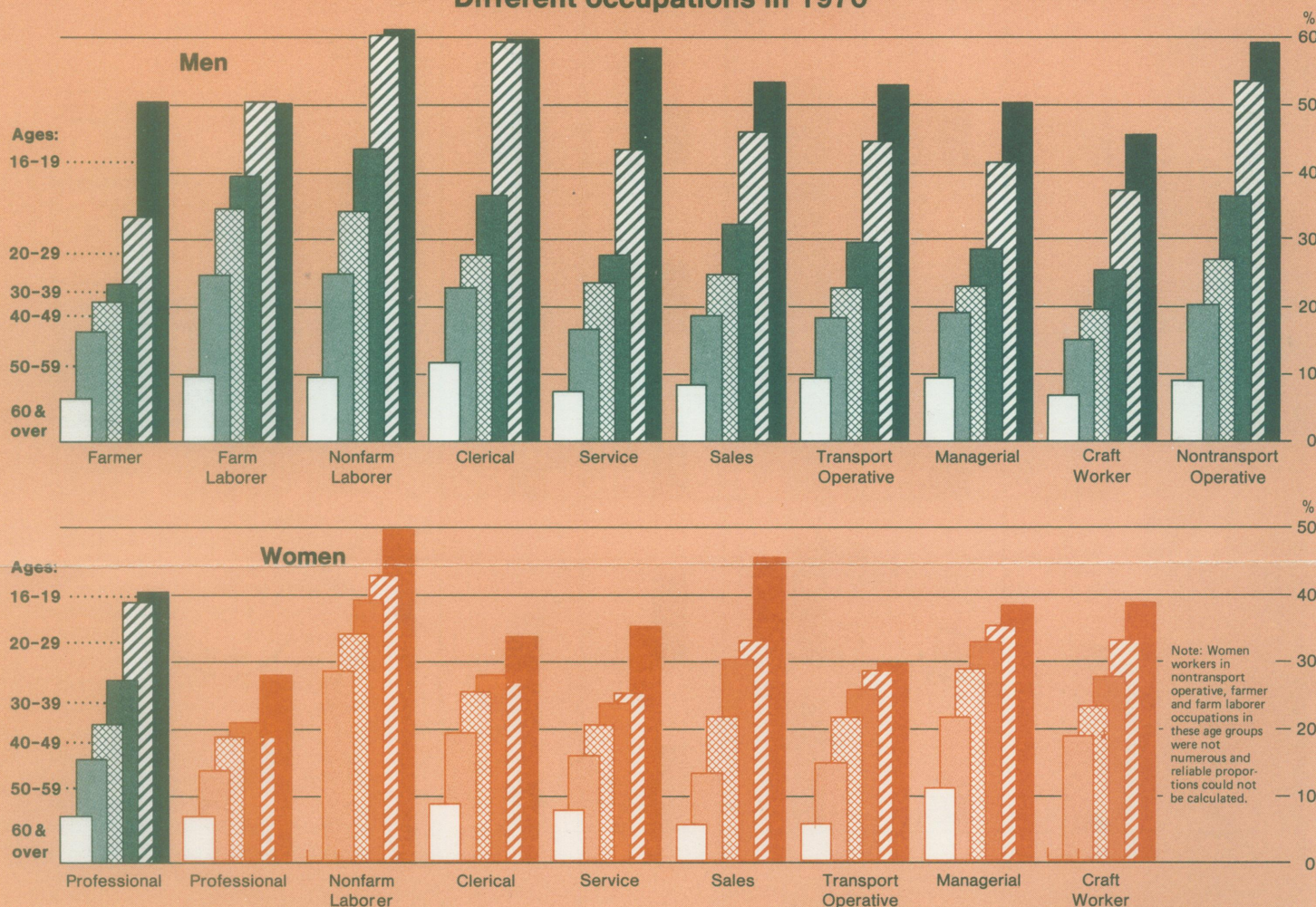
Road Maps of Industry
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In the United States, most men do not work in the same trades that their fathers did, and women are participating in the labor force in greater numbers than their mothers. Furthermore, a high proportion of both men and women will change occupations at least once in their working lives, either by desire or necessity. Some will be attracted by a chance to increase earnings, to obtain better working conditions, or to get involved in more interesting work. Others, encountering a lack of opportunities to continue in their present line of work, will be forced to change occupational fields. Estimating future needs for new workers and planning adequate training for them requires an understanding of how occupational mobility affects labor market conditions.

Proportions of Workers in 1965 Who Were Employed in Different occupations in 1970



Data from the 1970 Census of Population reveal that, in the five-year period between 1965 and 1970, almost one-third of the work force had changed occupations. That is, one worker in three transferred from a job in one broad occupational category to a job in a different field, within the same category, or to a different field in another occupational category altogether. If a college professor left teaching to become a consultant in private industry, for example, such a move was considered an occupational change, even though both positions were within the same broad field of specialty. Likewise, a drill press operator who became a lathe operator was counted as a change in occupation, even

though both jobs are included in the broad category of nontransport operatives.

Most occupational changes tend to occur within related fields of work. Job skill, attained either by formal training or by on-the-job experience, is the main credential workers possess to gain access to new opportunities. By gaining skill and experience, workers become qualified for the better paying and more interesting work.

While any change in work requires some readjustment, transferring to an entirely different type of occupation — such as a switch from a clerical job to one in sales — may be especially difficult. Knowledge and

Workers Who Changed Occupation in 1972

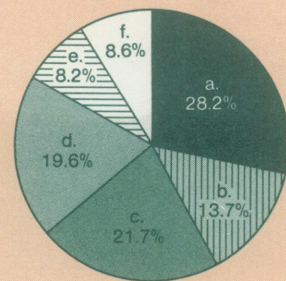
By Broad Category



Work Force, 1972

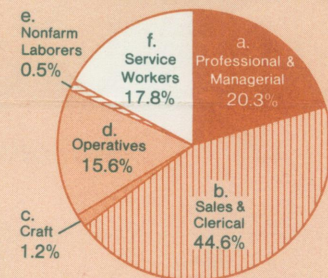
MALE

48.0 Million = 100%



FEMALE

27.6 Million = 100%



Note: A transfer from one occupation to another within the same broad category is counted as an occupational change. Rows do not total to 100%; farm and private household workers not included.

ability developed while working at one trade may not be easily and effectively adapted for use in an entirely different field of endeavor, and, for that reason, they may act as a barrier to this kind of transfer.

The obstacle of nontransferability of skill increases as a worker gains experience; also, the higher level of skill tends to be compensated with a higher level of pay. These are two of the reasons why older, more experienced workers are less occupationally mobile than younger workers. In many cases, they stand to lose more than they could gain by occupation switching; older workers who attempt to change may be inclined to do so more from a lack of available alternatives than from the prospect of improving their position.

Younger, and relatively inexperienced, workers are more likely to be near the bottom rungs of career ladders and consequently have little to lose — and potentially much to gain — by trying their talents at different tasks. Surveys indicate that almost two of every three persons switching occupations are under thirty-five years of age; in fact, one in three is under twenty-five.

Ken Goldstein

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics; The Conference Board.

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ROAD MAPS OF INDUSTRY

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