

OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY IN GERMANY AND BRITAIN

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Why do people change occupations? The literature on this is sparse in comparison with research on related concepts such as inter-generational mobility or job mobility. Career progression is one obvious explanation, suggesting job upgrading over time. But there are also downwards and sideways moves. While we can assume that some of these must be the result of preferences, it also seems likely, because skills are not always easily transferable across occupations, that such movements entail a cost. Contextual factors are likely to influence both the costs and the decisions. To take this into account, we compare results using the German and British household panels. First, we note the degree of flux in each country by occupational level. Then we model some of the transitions we observe using event history analysis. The results shows that the core contributory factors are unsatisfactory or uncertain work, denoted by fixed-term contracts, casual work, being overqualified, or having relatively low job satisfaction. These are more important and consistent in their effects than demographic factors or the occupation or the industry in which the respondent works. These transitions represent not career progression (much of which is in fact within the same occupation) but a sort of negative occupational flux, which, although Germany is unsurprisingly far more stable than Britain, is similar in both countries. Finally, to test the relative roles of upwards and sideways movements we analyse specific occupations such as IT. To what extent are careers in this sector 'boundaryless', based on an ability to move in and out of different types of work? Here we observe substantial national differences.