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Why education matters to employers: a vignette study in Italy, England and the Netherlands

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WHY EDUCATION MATTERS TO EMPLOYERS

A vignette study in Italy, England and the Netherlands

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This book presents a comparative study of school-to-work transitions in Italy, England and the Netherlands, with a focus on why education matters to employers during the hiring process. Three possible explanations are discussed: education is a provider of productivity-enhancing skills; education is a signal of expected trainability; education is a legitimized closure practice. These theories are related to various features of educational attainment: level of education, field of study, grades, study duration, credentials, internships. Through a web-based vignette study, 131 employers took part in a simulation of a hiring process. Findings show that Dutch employers are more likely to reward education because it provides job-specific skills. In the Netherlands, educational credentials serve as a closure practice within a labour market strongly segmented by qualifications. Employers in England expect new hires to learn skills on the job and rely on grades to identify the applicants with the lower training costs. Results are less straightforward in Italy, where employers seem to simultaneously reward skills and trainability; closure, by degrees or by networks, is nearly absent. The book also proposes a theoretical model that relates organizational factors (e.g. recruitment practices, training investment and job type) to a continuum between open and closed employment relationships. Results indicate that while moving from open to closed relationships, employers are less likely to reward job-specific skills and more likely to associate education with expected trainability.

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