

Book Reviews

The book cannot be recommended as a good introduction for beginners, although it does not assume any previous knowledge of computers. It would be of most interest to those who deal with computers and would like to compare the development of computers in Russia with that in the West. They should not expect to learn anything new from it, apart from some rather dull historical facts.

V. E. PRICE

Human Judgements and Optimality.

MAYNARD W. SHELLY II and GLENN L. BRYAN.

Wiley, 1964. 436 + xiii pp. 68s.

The introduction of many formal decision-taking techniques over the last two decades has modified, but certainly not eliminated, the need for human judgements. For instance, such judgements are still required in recognizing and defining the decision problem in the first place, in setting up the criteria that describe the desirability of different outcomes, in translating attributes of the situation under study into the formal decision language to be used, and in deciding the degree of sub-optimization that can be allowed. This book is concerned with the whole of this broad field.

Altogether some 18 authors (most of whom are well known) contribute a chapter each. They cover topics such as the relation of judgements to optimal decisions, individual and collective judgements, applications of Bayes's Theorem, optimal judgements based on preferences, the effects of learning, and so on. Some are essentially theoretical and others practical; some are written in familiar language, but others are extremely abstruse; all are in different styles and assume different backgrounds. Unless the reader is well versed in psychological work on decision-making in particular, he is going to find that he requires great steadfastness of purpose to read this book from beginning to end. I cannot recommend it as a primer.

Nevertheless, the operational research worker who does persevere will be rewarded and stimulated, and if this is his first excursion into this area of decision-making he will want to know more. Why are so few of the theories put forward supported by experimental data? And why do decision-making experiments always seem to represent situations so simplified that all realism has disappeared? He will certainly be tempted to think that more operational research workers should enter this field, and perhaps wonder whether he should join them himself. How is he to judge?

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