

**Using Operational Research—A Practical Introduction to Quantitative Methods in Management**

RICHARD TAFFLER (Edited by BRIAN PLATT)

*Prentice Hall International, U.K./U.S.A.*, 1979. 240 pp. £4.95

This book is carefully designed as a self-instruction text for managers, accountants and business students. The object is to demonstrate the practical application of certain techniques and to give enough knowledge for a manager to recognise where they might be used, to apply them himself to simple problems, and to communicate with a specialist in more complex studies. The techniques chosen for inclusion are well-used and require only elementary mathematical knowledge and calculation.

The first, introductory, chapter contains a brief description of the model-building approach and its limitations, together with an exposition of the objectives of the book. The remaining 8 chapters deal with the various techniques; there are three on Investment Appraisal methods, two on Linear Programming (LP and Transportation Problem) and one each on Replacement, Stock Control and Critical Path Analysis.

Given the nature of this book, then, the professional analyst must cast his mind back to assess its teaching value. The text is lucid, and there are numerous worked examples with exercises for each section. There are full solutions to these exercises and all the necessary discount tables are included, so the book is truly self-contained. There is a sense of progress throughout each chapter (most of which may be studied independently of the others), that the techniques are useful and the reader is learning quickly about them.

But is it O.R.? It is a truism to practitioners that O.R. is multi-disciplinary and much more than a collection of techniques, but not necessarily to the intended audience of this book. Half the chapters (Investment Appraisal and CPA) are on topics which are not primarily "O.R. Techniques". While these subjects satisfy the criteria of applicability and simplicity, and widen the appeal of the book, the feeling remains that O.R. is approached in only a limited way. Possibly a longer introduction and some discussion of further methods, for example, simulation, would redress this apparent imbalance.

Richard Taffler and Brian Platt have succeeded in producing an excellent teaching text for the topics covered, some of which are more readily useable than others. The book's subtitle, *A Practical Introduction to Quantitative Methods in Management*, is perhaps more apposite than its pithier title proper, because of the balance of subjects. There is always the danger in O.R., as anywhere, that by stating what it is one unwittingly but falsely implies things it isn't.

ANDREW YOUNG

**The Future Indefinite**

P. W. HOUSE and R. G. RYAN

*Lexington Books, Farnborough*, 1980. 175 pp. £11.50

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The most crucial rule that all forecasters need to remember is that "all forecasts are wrong" whatever the methodology or degree of sophistication of the model employed. Underlying such work is the basic tenet that knowledge of the past assists in predicting the future. This book puts forward a series of well-thought-out arguments, through examples, to support the author's claim that at present American society is within a cultural transition period as great as the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century. It has introduced a new and complex factor into the problem of forecasting and as such has made policy decision-making more intangible. In such circumstances there is a need to redress the fundamental philosophy of the decision process. This is in sharp contrast