



Impact of personal competencies and market value of type of occupation over objective employability and perceived career opportunities of young professionals

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ABSTRACT

The research of employability shows tension in the social field of career, where variables such as market value, gender, and personal skills are important. The aim of this study was to identify the predicted weight of market value of type of occupation, sex, and career competences (self-efficacy, pro-activity, and locus of control) over objective employability and perceived opportunities for a future career and satisfaction of young professionals. In this study, 294 graduates from 27 different undergraduate degree programs participated, describing their labor situation, satisfaction with career opportunities, and their level in the studied competences. Each type of occupation has a specific market value score, according to national and international criteria. It was possible to identify that the market value of their occupations had significant effects on objective employability ($p < .000$, $f = .48$). Also, self-efficacy and locus of control were significant predictors of perceived employability opportunities ($p < .000$, $f = .26$). This predictive value of personal variables was different between males ($p = .011$, $f = .82$), and females ($p < .000$, $f = .34$), and between occupations with low market value ($p = .016$, $f = .45$), medium market value ($p < .000$, $f = .34$), and high market value ($p = .006$, $f = .21$), which allows the development of specific intervention strategies to promote equality in labor opportunities and job placement.

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El impacto de las competencias personales y del valor de mercado de la profesión en la empleabilidad objetiva y la percepción de oportunidades de carrera en profesionales jóvenes

RESUMEN

La investigación sobre la empleabilidad permite advertir la tensión en el campo social de las carreras laborales, donde son importantes variables como el valor de mercado, el género y las habilidades personales. El objetivo de este estudio fue identificar el valor predictivo de competencias de carrera profesional (autoeficacia, proactividad y locus de control), el sexo y el valor dado por el mercado a las profesiones, tanto sobre la empleabilidad objetiva, como sobre las oportunidades percibidas de empleabilidad y desarrollo de carrera de jóvenes profesionales. Participaron 294 graduados de 27 titulaciones diferentes, quienes respondieron un cuestionario respecto de su situación laboral, satisfacción con las oportunidades de carrera y las competencias personales estudiadas. Cada profesión obtuvo un valor de mercado de acuerdo a criterios de nacionales e internacionales ampliamente usados. Fue posible identificar que el valor de mercado dado a las profesiones tiene efecto significativo sobre la empleabilidad objetiva ($p < .000$, $f = .48$). Además, autoeficacia y locus de control fueron predictores significativos de las oportunidades de empleabilidad percibidas ($p < .000$, $f = .26$). Este valor predictivo de las competencias personales fue diferente en hombres ($p = .011$, $f = .82$) y mujeres ($p < .000$, $f = .34$) y en profesiones con valor de mercado bajo ($p = .016$, $f = .45$), medio ($p < .000$, $f = .34$) y alto ($p = .006$, $f = .21$). Estos resultados permiten desarrollar

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estrategias de intervención específicas para promover la igualdad en las oportunidades laborales.

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To study employability it is important to analyse the substantive changes in labor environment, especially in work relationships, and the protagonist role of persons in their own career. There is no doubt that the effects of globalisation are many and complex, and that capital moves freely around the global village. It increases economic fragility through the impact of mobility, technology, and the interdependence between markets. Therefore, nations' competitiveness grows as a function of the abilities and knowledge of their workforce (Santos, Guillén, & Montalbán, 2012).

Also, work market and labor force have changed. At a demographic level, population is getting older as a consequence of a lower birth rate and a higher life expectancy (Fouad, 2007). In addition, there is more migration from less stable countries, with cultural and social implications that demand clarity of policies to integrate immigrants.

Regarding the workforce's composition, there are, at least, four particular situations to be aware of. First, people have more qualification (though in some countries there is a deficit of qualified workers in the productive process). Second, a higher number of women are entering the workforce in increasingly diverse roles. Third, there are a higher proportion of families or couples with both members working while maintaining family responsibilities. And fourth, the active population is older, as people are leaving work life after retirement for economic or social needs (Potgieter, 2012).

Therefore, organizations require more specialization and more technological, social, and knowledge management skills from their workers (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010). Even more, new jobs are generated in more qualified positions, with a requirement of greater mobility but less stability.

From Work Stability to Employability

There is also an important shift in the way people mean their jobs, thus, how they develop their career. In that sense, career cannot be understood only as a sequence of jobs and responsibilities in one organization in an ascendant path. Changes of jobs, organizations and even of work field are common in careers (Misra & Mishra, 2011). According to this, experts have noted that a person will have 7 or 10 different jobs in their lifetime, and their work relations will last, on average, 2.7 years (Greenhaus et al., 2010). In Chile, for example, it is estimated that more than 40% of the workforce will lose or change their work within twelve months, and just 17.4% can be considered as an old worker, with more than 10 years working for the same organization (Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Chile - INE, 2011). All this information enlightens a significant lack of job security or stability.

This has an impact on employer-employee relationships. The idea of loyalty and organizational commitment decreases. Nowadays, organizations value performance and abilities, both anchored in lifespan learning, the development of employability and self-efficacy, instead of centering their attention on job security and paternalism (De Vos, De Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2011). Today, workers tend to be strongly engaged with their own projects and, when they change jobs or organizations, they prioritize the nature of work, an open communication, and the effects on their personal lives more than economic benefits (Greenhaus et al., 2010). So, it is possible to note that the prime aspects to evaluate a job as positive are intrinsic work aspects, development opportunities, income and, in a lower position, job security and work schedule.

Employability

The word employability is not new in organizational and vocational psychology. However, it is still unknown in several fields (Rentería & Malvezzi, 2008). When reviewing the origin and uses of this concept, it is possible to see that there are at least three different, but not exclusionary, views about it. The first came from a clinical context, referring to labor re-insertion of patients with physical or mental disease. The second one alludes to a quality indicator of higher education. Regarding this, Harvey (2001) pointed out that it is too limited to reduce employability to the proportion of graduates getting a job after school. The author suggested adopting a perspective that includes considering information about how graduates got these jobs, with some long-term indicators and a broader definition of employability.

The third perspective to understand employability is closely related to career concept changes. Regarding this, Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) pointed out that the concept of employability could be extended to a proactive management of one's own career. In this way, employability is conceived as a multidimensional form to adapt, actively and specifically, to the work environment. This allows workers to identify and get career opportunities. It is an integrative concept that not only includes maintaining a job, but also implies job satisfaction and long-term career success with objective and subjective indicators of this employability (Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte, 2011; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Fugate et al. (2004) defined employability as a construct centred in personal factors: career identity, personal adaptability, and human and social capital. There are two meta-skills: proactivity and career identity. The first, as a general attitude, is the key for adaptation and career management and the second one, career identity, will be crucial to orient employability, driving toward an active adaptation and integrating human and social capital (Nazar & Van Der Heijden, 2012). In this sense, in the psychological literature, it is possible to see that employability in understood as a complex psychosocial phenomenon.

However, in governmental spaces, employability is studied as work or labor insertion (named also as work placement). Every year education ministries, statistics centres, and other entities of several countries analyse and publish occupations rankings according to the probability of obtaining a job in six months or a year after graduation, and the expected income. It is possible to see this approach in Latin America ("Graduate Follow up and labor insertion, CINDA, 2012), Spain ("Labor insertion survey of university graduates", INE, Spain, 2014), and USA ("50 Highest paying career for college graduates"; see www.collegechoice.com). In Europe, Australia, and OECD-ILO there is a wider approach. They stimulate actions to improve employability by developing more technical and professional skills. For example, Graduate Employability, a centre commissioned by the Australian Government Office for Learning, defines graduate employability (based on Kinash, Crane, Judd, & Knight, 2016) as the possibility that higher education alumni had developed the capacity to obtain or create work, but also the knowledge, skills, attributes, and identity to succeed in workforce.

According to this point of view, employability is not just as a probability to get a job and some expected income and, on the other hand, seeing employability only from a personal perspective may mislead us. As Rentería and Malvezzi (2008) analysed, it is

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