

The Effect of Participation within an Active Labour Market Programme (Tús) on an Individual's Perceived Employability.

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Abstract

The Tús programme was established by the Irish Government in 2011 to re-engage long term unemployed individuals with the labour market and improve work readiness. The aim of the present study was to empirically examine the effect, if any, of placement on this programme on the perceived employability of participants using the psycho-social construct as advanced by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004).

The research explored employability in relation to: (1) increased employability owing to placement on Tús; (2) increased job search activities owing to placement on Tús; and (3) increased self-esteem owing to placement on Tús. Overall the hypotheses were not supported by the study apart from a significant difference in relation to increased self-esteem evident in participants on Tús.

Introduction

During the late 1990's and early 2000's the Irish economy underwent a dramatic transformation. In 1998 the number of people in employment was approximately 1.4million, however by 2007 this figure had almost doubled to just over 2.114 million (Barrett & McGuinness, 2012). Since 2007 however the unemployment rate in Ireland has risen from the annual average of 4.5% to 14.8% or 324,500 in August 2012 with the rate of those long termed unemployed (LTU) now comprising 59.5% of the overall figure.

The adverse effects of unemployment include ill health, higher risks of poverty, social exclusion, an increased likelihood of remaining unemployed even after improvements in the labour market and the deterioration of skills and employability (Kelly, McGuinness & O'Connell, 2011) In an effort to combat these know negative consequences, the Irish Government has established a new active labour market programme (Tús) to re-engage LTU with the labour market and prevent further skill degradation and loss of human capital.

Employability

Employability as a theoretical premise has gained much attention in recent years. In essence it can be defined as ability to gain and maintain new employment while also having the ability to move between roles within the same organisation if required (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

A theoretical framework to measure employability was proposed by (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004). Within this employability is comprised of independent but interrelated constructs of career identity, adaptability and human and social capital. It is through this framework that the effectiveness of the Tús programme was examined.

Method

A Quasi-experimental non-random survey design was used to empirically test for differences in employability between Tús participants and a LTU control group. Selected at random from Local Development Companies and Local Employment Services Centres, each participant was asked to complete a short booklet of questionnaires.

The questionnaires sought to ascertain the adaptability, career identity and human and social capital of participants. Scales used to establish the employability of individuals include:

Identity Awareness - Stumpf, Colarelli and Hartmann (1983)

Career Self-Efficacy - Kossek, Roberts and Demarr (1998)

Proactive Personality - Bateman and Crant (1993)

Boundaryless Mind-Set - Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006)

Results

H1: Participation on the Tús Programme increases Employability – **Rejected**

H2: Participation on the Tús Programme increases job search activities - **Rejected**

H3: Participation on the Tús Programme increases self-esteem - **Accepted**

Discussion

In line with previous studies, the impact on employability derived from participating on the Tús programme was not found to be significant. While the mean score for employability was higher for participants' on the Tús programme as opposed to the LTU sample, the first hypothesis could not be supported. As such the widespread criticism leveled at public sector job creation schemes would seem to be supported in this study.

Tús participants were shown to have a significantly higher career identity than LTU. This in turn may allow for Tús participants to recognise and pursue career opportunities. This may suggest that participants are more flexible in their approach to careers and as such may increase the likely of employment however further research is required.

No significant difference was observed in job search activities and the locking in effect of where participants on ALMPs do not increase their job search activities could be proposed as an explanation. Alternatively, owing to higher career identity, participants may be engaging in more refined job search techniques however further investigation is needed.

A significant difference was observed in the self-esteem between the two groups with Tús participants exhibiting higher self-esteem. Given the worrying correlation between mental health, suicide and long term unemployment, Tús must be seen in the wider context of societal health and well-being while also being assessed for it's economic and labour market impacts.

References

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