University graduate's job hunting: what helps to get the good one?

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1 Introduction

The rate of graduates' entry in the labour market is the most direct indicator of the external efficacy of university education. More attention, though, has been recently payed to the adequacy of their job with respect to the intensity of use of the human capital accumulated at university and to the role in determining the educational effectiveness (Fabbris et al., 2010). So far, indicators of job quality have been typicallyexpressed in terms of wage and other aspects, mainly defined by outside observers only rather than as experienced by workers themselves (Clark, 2004). Nine hundred and sixty one graduates in 2007, employed at the moment of the survey, were interviewed twelve months after graduation on the characteristics of the present occupation by STELLA (an acronym of Statistiche sul Tema Laureati e Lavoro in Archivio on line). They were asked both objective and subjective aspects of their present job and of their future labour market behaviour. Taking into account aspects often neglected allowed to reshape the overriding role of wage in a more comprehensive setting and to set graduates' transition to the job market in a wider spectrum of 'good' outcomes.

2 Main results

Several aspects of graduates' job were asked, both on the contract and on the adequacy of the job, the latter on a 4 point ordinal scale. A section was devoted to satisfaction for different aspects, scores on a 1-10 range. Lastly, planned behaviour,like the intention of looking for another job, was inquired. Optimal scaling analysis, namely Nonlinear Categorical Principal Component Analysis (CATPCA), was applied to obtain optimal assignment of quantitative values to qualitative data and to reduce dimensionality. Results showed three clearly distinct underling dimensions (Fig.1). The first one concerned objective characteristics of the work: wages, full or part-time, responsibility over other employees, permanent contract or other types of contract, chances of gain in free time and in reconciliation with family bounds. The second dimension, self-realization, played a vital role on its own and it implies job content, like independence as the degree of decisional and organizational autonomy; the extent self fulfillment and expression of one's skills are permitted; future prospects, in terms of promotion and security. The third dimension clearly involved the coherence between graduates' university educational path and the present profession: questionnaire items that

constitute this latent variable asked explicitly whether a degree was necessary for the job and, in case of a positive answer, to what extent. Different perspectives were inquired: adequacy of salary and of competencies to the education level, respondence of university training to work requirements.

Table 1 Latent dimensions resulting from the CATPCA analysis

Dimension	Item
Objective features	salary, full or part-time, permanent or temporary contract, free time and reconciliation with family duties
Coherence	necessity of a degree, need for the specific degree, coherence between education and work, adequacy of wage, adequacy of university training to competencies required, future planned behaviour, global satisfaction
Self realization	decisional autonomy, self fulfillment, career prospects, security

An emphasis on only wages and hours of work is likely to give a misleading picture of what makes a good job and hence of graduates' behaviour. Overall measures of job satisfaction should reveal information about rarely measured job content. In the first place, a taxonomy can be build, observing what makes and who has the good jobs. Moreover, determinant of good jobs can be investigated, so as to provide university students with better and better educational paths.

References

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