

Graduates' Job Quality Dimensions According to a Delphi-Shang Experiment

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Summary. In this paper, we discuss the salient information drawn from a Delphi experiment (Shang version) on some Italian job market issues realised by an email interview of a panel of experts. We define firstly the job quality dimensions of newly hired graduates and then compare it with the possible situation of graduates at the end of their careers. The dimensions are compared with a multivariate statistical analysis on the relationships between the satisfaction perceived by the Paduan graduates for their own job, and some personal and job characteristics. Such an evaluation may suggest new criteria for a future survey on “external effectiveness” of university education based on graduates’ reports. The dimensions of initial and end-of-career quality of graduates are correlated to the experts’ concepts through a semantic differential analysis.

Keywords: Job quality; External effectiveness of teaching; Delphi method; Shang method; Semantic differential analysis; Multiple regression analysis; University of Padua.

1. Aims and methodology of Delphi experiment

«This way, it will be required to have a university degree to work as a street-sweeper». This sentence was typical in the Sixties when, interrupting the long-lasting elite access to university, masses of youngsters entered the Italian university. The apparently sceptical motto meant that Italy was starting a process of liberalisation of the tertiary educational level, and individual educational

¹ The two authors jointly designed and realised the work described in this paper. However, M.C. Martini has edited Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the paper and L. Fabbris the others.

choices were going to be determined by the job market more than by family wealth.

So many things have changed since then. The birth rate almost halved, the educational level increased rapidly, and about three quarters of young people have a high school degree. After the Italian educational reform, determined by Decree no. 509 of 1999, the enrolment in university steeply increased, so that in the academic year 2004/05, the ratio between the number of university re-freshers and the number of people in the age of 19 was 60%.

It is likely that in a few years about half the young people entering the Italian job market will possess a university degree. Right now, the proportion of graduates searching for a job exceeds the proportion of technicians, intermediate, executive and professional workers in the Italian private and public economic sectors. Cappa & Fabbris (2004) showed that several graduates already accepted general clerical and other positions that before were rejected as initial jobs.

Hence, the quality of initial jobs is the key issue to define an acceptable job for a graduate.

A job is of good quality if it satisfies both the worker's and the employer's requirements. Job quality is a multidimensional concept that varies in time, space and among clusters of people.

In the following, we will represent the job quality at the insertion stage and privilege the viewpoint of graduates. In fact, we compare the experts' perceptions collected through a Delphi survey – Shang version, with the graduates' ones collected by means of a specific survey.

We selected the 12 experts among people who covered top positions in various cultural and professional Italian bodies specialised in labour market issues (academy, employers' and workers' associations, operators for guidance and job matching). Three sets of questions progressively focusing on job quality aspects were administered to the experts by email.

The first set of questions focused on the selection of quality dimensions. The experts were asked to define the three most important dimensions of job quality at graduate's recruitment-stage. The second set of questions related to the assignment of percentages of importance (with a 100 sum) to the five selected dimensions (see Section 2). The third to the importance of job quality dimensions at the top-of-career stage (Section 3). Then, the experts were made aware of the mean parameters of the obtained distribution and asked, if they wanted, to change their importance grades. This procedure can be considered a Delphi method, Shang version (Ford, 1975).

After the request of the last set of opinions, the experts were asked, through 20 dichotomous items, to state their knowledge and their perception of the characteristics of job market for the new graduates. We applied a semantic differential method on the obtained answers (Section 4).

The distribution of the obtained answers was compared with the analysis of data independently obtained from employed graduates of the University of