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A Futures Study on Volunteer Work: Presenting a New Solution for Solving the Unemployment Problem of Society

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Abstract

The employment rate of a place is considered to be one of the most important criteria for calculating the development degree of that place. A society that wants to be more developed should encourage its people to choose new and modern jobs. Jobs these days don't last for a long time. Thus, looking for a better job or opportunity should be a concern even for those who are already employed. People should ask themselves constantly: what kind of job would serve future needs of people? What kind of skills would future jobs require? What procedures should a person go through to land his or her dream job? What procedures should a society go through in order to solve the unemployment problem? Finding the answers to those questions requires a thorough and comprehensive research on the jobs of the future to find out how we can create jobs based on personal characteristics of workers, needs of the future and technological progress. In Iran's society most young people are either don't have sufficient skills for work or don't have a clue about what job might suit them best. Thus trying different jobs through internship or volunteering programs might give these people an idea of what job might suit them best in the future. This study follows the analytical-descriptive method and provides some insights for skilled unemployed people, and also accentuates the importance of volunteering and volunteer work in choosing the best career. Finally we analyzed the challenges and opportunities of volunteer work and some insights for avoiding and responding to the mentioned challenges have been provided for the concerned managers of this sector.

Key Words: Employment, Volunteer Work, Futures Study

Introduction

Youth unemployment has always been a big concern for families and policy makers. Government officials constantly talk about this issue and accentuate its importance, thus young people and newly graduates are worried about choosing the right career, and wonder if they can land their dream job or how much of an income that would provide for them. We believe that if policy makers don't find an effective solution for this issue it can create additional issues and problems for the society as a whole.

The phenomenon of unemployed university graduates makes this issuer even more critical. These people went through lots of trouble and hardships to get a decent education with the hope of finding their dream job but became gravely disappointed. We hope that our futures study would provide useful insights to decrease the unemployment rate of our society.

The purpose of this study is to specify the efficiency of futures studies (futurology) in identifying the right opportunities in order to solve the issue of unemployment. A futures study can be defined as an insight or science which warns the organization about the challenges and hardships of the future; decreases the amounts of doubts and confusion and helps the organization in making intelligent choices. In other words futures studies are the best tools for the process of "Intelligent Engineering of the Future"

The inability to predict the future and its consequences encouraged scholars to use the newly emerged method of futures study in order to draw a clearer picture of the future (Rahimi et al. 2013). This certain method of study involves a virtual journey to the future, analyzes a certain time in the future and identifies the best ways to build an ideal future.(Kasaie , 2013). Futuristic researches prove that people and the society have a certain plan for every moment in time and that the society is unconsciously aware of the reasons why it prefers some certain attitudes and condemns the others.

This paper analyzes the challenges brought on by unemployment and carries out a thorough futures study on the subject of volunteer work and also explores the advantage and disadvantages of this branch of work. Our goal is to encourage charity and volunteer work amongst youth in order to build a society in which young people are fully aware of their social responsibilities and are familiar with volunteering jobs of different charitable foundations and organizations. By considering and analyzing different strategies for building a future in which young people are drawn to volunteer work, we might be able to reach our goal.

Theoretical basis of research:

The Pathology of Unemployment from a Different Point of View

Unemployment is considered to be one of the biggest concerns for young people. Lots of these young people are university graduates who weren't able to find decent jobs.

The mentioned issue is partly due to a significant gap between the universities and the labor market. Because of theoretical nature of most university courses, most students are not able to acquire sufficient skills. Society's attitude toward universities is also pretty dangerous; people look at these places as degree

publishing factories. As a matter of fact students spend 4 years of their lives in these places just to add to the population of unemployed university graduates afterwards.

And because no one wants to be labeled as unemployed, these graduates continue to study in fields that are absolutely unrelated to the needs of the labor market. Having the highest degrees without acquiring sufficient skills for work is not only useless but can create additional problems for individuals and the society. These highly educated individuals are the pickiest people when it comes to choosing a decent job. Thus, not only can the labour market find job for them due to their lack of skill, but they also except to have the best jobs right away just because they have a high university degree. This issue adds to the population of unemployed people. In consequent sections we have proposed some strategies to train university graduates and to build a strong relationship between universities and the labor market.

A: World Strategies for Training Young People

1- Creating Trades and Skill Training Fields

Trades schools and their related fields were founded in our country in order to fill the wide gap between universities and the labor market. But this policy wasn't able to achieve its goal. These schools could be successful if only 2 basic and costly procedures were carried out from the beginning:

1. Accepting students through tests and interviews , which can be very costly.
2. Training students according to needs of the labor market

Schools and universities of the world analyze the student's abilities and skills and then propose a list of suitable jobs for them, so they won't feel confused about choosing a career. Volunteer work is our second strategy for solving this issue.

B: Volunteer Work

This strategy has been successful used and tested in many countries of the world. Volunteer work provides a chance for young people to observe a work environment first hand and also helps them to gain skill and experience and might be effective to in filling the gap between universities and the labor market.

Volunteer work refers to the set of activities that one agrees to take part in without excepting to be paid; Individuals might take part in these activities while they are still in university or until they find a suitable job afterwards.

Volunteer work belongs to the charitable and philanthropic class of work. It can make people feel good about themselves thus it builds their self esteem. Some people volunteer in order to build new relationships and find job opportunities for themselves. It is pretty much like an internship program especially for such fields as: medicine, education, ER, engineering, teaching etc (Piane et al, 2013).

Volunteering is the best way to meet new people and finding good job opportunities. Volunteers not only help the organization that they are volunteering for, but they also gain a good reputation especially if they prove themselves to be capable and useful.

It is worth mentioning that volunteer work is not restrained to university students, high school and middle school students of many countries are also allowed to take part in these activities.

This strategy provides a win-win situation for both the student and the organization or the society as a whole. This is because students learn new skills and are also able to give their energy, commitment and time to fulfill the needs of their fellow human beings. The combination of logic and emotion in this line of work makes for a better learning process.

In European countries, volunteer work is mostly considered to be an activity for young people. Young European people enter these programs in order to learn new skill and also help out the related organization. These individuals dedicate their free time to volunteer work. In other words they choose charitable organizations for their internship and the organization will be able to use this valuable free work force. These interns can gain priceless knowledge (sometimes interns have to travel to other countries) and it might save lots of money on human resources. (Qolami, Abedi , 2015).

As we know Iran's society has a serious unemployment problem and this is partly to the enormous number of unskilled potential workers. Therefore, volunteer programs can help university graduates to gain proper skills and also build a strong connection with the society through helping the underprivileged class of society such as: disabled people, people who are out of work and single Mothers.

It is worth mentioning that the amount of effort one person is prepared to put on these activities is also crucial. The more effort you put on any task, the higher the chance that you end up mastering it. Many strategies can be used in order to popularize volunteer work in society. In the consequent sections we use futures study method in order to analyze the opportunities, challenges and advantages of this line of work.

Analyzing the Concept of Futures Study

Futures study (futurology) refers to an organized and systematic effort for drawing a clear picture of the distance future of fields such as: science and technology, Economy, environment, business, etc... .The main purpose of futures study is to recognize the opportunities of the future (Malekifar, 2006).

Futures study belongs to the category of strategic sciences and has been considered a soft technology. It is a science that warns people about the risks of the futures, increases their ability of making intelligent decisions and identifies the points that every person may reach in the future (future exploration), which path they should follow (normative futures), and which path facilitates their progress toward an ideal future (future building strategies) (Aalizadeh , 2009).

The uncertain nature of the future and the constant changes of the environment has made futurologists to consider several scenarios for the future. Thus futurologist take the following 3 steps:

1. First they make a list of all the possible futures for an organization.
2. Secondly they choose the most probable to happen
3. Lastly , they choose the ideal future that is in accordance with the values and ideals of the organization

Finally the scenario for the ideal future will be presented to the mangers of the organization, so they will be able to plan their strategies accordingly. Therefore the possible, the probable and the ideal future are formed (Akbarian and Iranmehr , 2014).

One of the most efficient features of futures study is the chance it provides for the organizations , people and the societies to consider the consequences of a certain action and gives them enough time to have the best response to a future problem (Babaqeybi and Azghandi 2010).

It is worth mentioning that even though futures study can predict a future event or problem but they don't guarantee the most effective response to it. Thus it is necessary to identify the values, needs and wants of an idividual in order to recognize their ideal future.

Futures studies are designed to help human beings and to remind them that even though we are not able to change the past but we can get an idea of dos and don'ts of the future from it. The amount of attention that this field receives is proves the inefficiency of current strategies. (Malekifar et al, 2006).

Public Advantages of Futures Study

The real value of futures studies is usually not due to its direct out puts (even though they are pretty valuable in their own place) but it is rather due to the processes it is able to create. The advantage of futures studies covers broad individual and organizational aspects. Therefore some of them have been presented below:

- *Preparing for the possible futures*: Having a sense of possible events of the future helps us to prepare our society, organization or group for those certain events. Therefore we can face them with a well thought plan.
- *Capturing an overall glimpse of the emerging futures*: futures studies help us to identify the future events in the present time, so we can plan for them before hand and face them with self confidence.
- *Gaining the upper hand in competitions:* Future studies allow us to decide for the possible future events in the present time. Thus we might have a better chance at winning the probable competitions.
- *Creating a balance between different goals:* If we dedicate some of our present time to consider the possibilities of the future, we might stop fearing it and its outcomes. Therefore we can create a balance between our short and long term goals.
- *Establishing a Local Culture:* Having a local culture encourages people to be more positive and motivates them to follow their goals and dreams.(Babaqandi and Azqandi 2010)

Thus futures study not only identifies the challenges and opportunities of employments but encourages young people to look forward to the future and do their best to reach their goals.

Research methodology

This study follows an analytical - descriptive approach and has been carried out by an documentary-library method of research. In addition to library records we have also analyzed the information and researches that are available on different related websites,

Futures Study of Volunteer Work

The phenomenon of unemployed university graduates in our country has always been the subject of political and social discussions. Even though experts don't agree on the exact reason for the emergence of this phenomenon, but most experts believe that it is due to the lack of related skills and personal characteristic compatible with the labor market in these university graduates. Having a flexible mind, being responsible, communication skills, working hard and entrepreneurship are amongst the personal characteristics that are considered to be compatible with the labor market.

Future study might help policy makers to take on new strategies for Iran's society in order to solve its issue of unemployment. This line of study might motivate young people to be more active and to plan for their future effectively.

Futures study creates a unity between individuals, organizations and the government regardless of their differences and political preferences. Thus they welcome the future changes together and try to adapt with the new situations.

The ideal outcome of futures study on volunteer work could be the popularization of this practice in society. If this line of work would help young people to discover their potentials it would be an ideal outcome as well. Government officials can also contribute to the growth of volunteering through providing internship programs within the government,

As mentioned earlier, volunteer work refers to an activity that one takes part in without the expectation of being paid. These activities have some advantages that both the volunteer and the society can use. Because volunteers work together toward reaching a common goal, thus they can create a valuable social capital for the society and make it a better place to live in. Perrino believes that volunteers take care of their responsibilities efficiently; therefore they are very valuable for the organization that they are volunteering for.

Volunteer work force plays a key role in the success of a country. Thus developing this line of work in a broad range fields is crucial.

Below we have summarized some the advantages of volunteer work:

- *Volunteer work develops the leadership skills of the volunteers*: As a matter of fact volunteering is the basic step for reaching high level jobs. According to a recent Australian poll 1 out of 5 people in this country believes that the insights they acquired for their current job was gained through volunteer work. 26% of these people said that volunteer work built a good reputation for them and helped them to acquire useful skills.(McLennan, 1998).

- *Increases the economical productivity of countries*: Free work force adds to the economical values of countries. According to a survey Bangladesh has 16 million of volunteer workers and its economical value equals 1.66 billion dollars. Census bureau of United Kingdom also reports that volunteer workers add 47 billion dollars to the UK's economy, this amount accounts for 1.6 % of this country's national impure production.(Ironmonger, 2006)
- *It's a health booster as well*: Volunteer work is not only good for the society as a whole but can also positively affect mental and physical health of individuals. Studies show that volunteers are socially healthy and rarely feel depressed or lonely. Adults who are constantly participating in volunteer work have a lower risk of developing high blood pressure which is a key risk factor for heart attacks, strokes and premature death. (Jivovek and Hyduk , 1998).
- *Sets goals for individuals*: A person who is struggling to find the right path and goal for his or her life can benefit from volunteer work. He or she might recognizer his or her abilities and give meaning to his or her routine, ordinary life (Wilson & Musick, 1999)

Volunteer work is not only beneficial for the volunteer but has certain benefits for the governmental and economical sectors of the country. When young people choose to work as volunteers or interns in NGOs this helps these organizations and optimizes their performance. This also decreases costs of human resources greatly. Thus if we intend to use some of these volunteers in industrial and production sectors of our country we might train them via internship programs.

This formula might solve the issue of unskilled university graduate workforce partially. Therefore it might improve the economy and consequently would create new jobs.

The society sees volunteer work as an ideal pastime activity. Volunteer work increases the prosperity level of a country by improving the economy.

But there are certain barriers that discourage people from volunteering. Thus identifying these barriers might help us to change this situation for the better. In their studies Noble (2000) and Rogers (1998) have identified some of these barriers as: ", not receiving enough support, transportation issues, conflicts between volunteers and paid workers and lack of insurance coverage" (Babaqeibi, Azqandi, 2010).

Not having enough free time is one of the biggest barriers for volunteering. Family and job responsibilities, tough university courses are two factors that account for this problem (Nichols et al, 1998). Lack of support and encouragement from the managers of the organization is also another factor that disappoints voltmeter workers. High prices of transportation and weak overall performance of the organizations can also draw these people away. (Chelladuran, 2005).

Table 1: summarizes the opportunities and challenges of volunteer work

Challenges or Barriers	Opportunities or Advantages
Adds to Responsibilities of the volunteer	Development of Leadership Skills
Less Free Time	Increasing the economical productivity
The Increasing Pressure of Studying	Health improvement
Having to Look for Work	Goal Setting Aspect
Unpaid Expenses	Learning New Skills
Lack of Training and Support	Self esteem and Self Confidence Booster
Tranportation Problems	Optimizing Individual Social Skills
Conflicts Between Volunteers and Paid Workers	Increasing job choices
Lack of Insurance Coverage	Creating Motivation

Source: Study's Findings

Now that we have a clear picture of both challenges and opportunities of volunteering, we should not forget that they won't wait for us so the importance of futures study is absolutely tangible. We should think logically and prepare ourselves for the future, thus we should take care of urgent matters and gain valuable insight from futures studies. Therefore ignoring the future due to present problems would be the worst choice to make.

Conclusions:

From what was mentioned earlier we might be able to identify the importance of a future based point of view for youth, the government and the society. This attitude provides a road map that gives young people a head start for making intelligent choices and moving toward success. (Moslemmi , 2011) .

If young people learn how to think about their future, they might be able to plan it effectively. Because when we have no idea about what we should think about then what would be the use of thinking at all? If policy makers would use effective strategies for the employment of young people then they can have a conceptual framework of their future.

Uncertainty shouldn't stop us from moving forward, thus young people should not underestimate the effects of volunteer work on their choice of career and employment opportunities. Volunteering might also give them a sense of dos and don'ts of workplace and warns them about the consequences of certain behaviors and finally it will give them an estimation of what goals they might be able to achieve.

Solving the unemployment issue and encouraging volunteer work also requires the efforts of managers of the organizations which provide internship and volunteering programs. These managers must create more opportunities for volunteer work.

Therefore some insights have been provided for these managers at the final section of this paper. As we mentioned earlier the issue of not having enough free time won't allow young people to do volunteer

work, thus giving periodic jobs or having more flexible work hours rule for these people might destroy this barrier. Study shows that young people prefer periodic volunteer work to long time commitment (*Hollway, 2001*).

Transportation problems and its fees is also another encouraging factor for potential volunteers. Managers can solve this issue by providing means of transportation for volunteers or accepting to pay the fees of their daily commute to work.

As we mentioned earlier not receiving support and encouragement from the managers can disappoint voltmeter workers. Even though these people don't expect to be paid for their work but study shows that they like to know that they efforts are appreciated. So involving them and allowing them to use their capabilities is an important factor. Finally organization can formally show express their gratitude and appreciation by presenting volunteers with appreciation certificates.

Weak performance of an organization sometimes discourages volunteers to work for them ,Thus adding several young volunteers to the work force might also encourage paid workers to do a better job and consequently improve the performance of the organization.

Policy makers should also encourage and advocate the culture of volunteer work in society. Thus some insights to achieve this goal have been provided below:

\- Government agencies should support and encourage volunteer work and internships.

- Volunteering should be considered a social responsibility and volunteers should be labeled as responsible people,
- Volunteer work should be considered valuable work background in resumes. And companies should welcome workers who have volunteer work credentials.
- National Television should reflect the message of NGO's. This consists of informing people about the results of studies that are conducted by these organizations.
- The active organizations who offer volunteer programs should be introduced to society. Some people are not even aware of these organizations and falsely believe that volunteer work is only available at nursing homes, child laborer support organizations and environmental agencies.

We hope that the suggestions above might contribute to the process of popularizing volunteer work in society and may fill the wide gap between universities and labor market. Thus employers can be sure that they have hired competent skilled workers, consequently this will boost the economy and decreases the rate of unemployment.

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