

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Work Integration Enterprises at the crossroads: An agenda to address the cruxes of accompanying and training processes

Work integration social enterprises (WISEs) are a type of social enterprise aimed at facilitating access to the ordinary labour market to people at risk of social exclusion. They are transitional structures (SIIS, 2011; Gregg, 2008) given that they attempt to be bridges between the at-risk situation before the labour market and access to employment in an ordinary company. In order to do so, they provide employment in a supported environment, hence giving additional opportunities to develop competencies as well as providing social accompaniment.

The very heart of activities in WISEs, where qualification, production and social accompaniment processes have interplay mutually, turns them into labour contexts featured by hybrid rationales, a mix of productive and social organizations (Campi, Defourny & Grégoire, 2006; Quintão, 2007; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014; Adam et al., 2017). This, together with the importance of local contexts (Glémain, 2018) contribute to a strong idiosyncratic character of every WISE.

Even if research has identified positive impact of WISEs in terms of access to employment, retaining employment and improving support networks as well as professional competencies, less attention has been paid to the processes through which these results are achieved (Hui-Kwan Chui, Y Shum, & S Lum, 2019). Nevertheless, literature points to an interdependence among the different levels and dimensions of the dynamics of WISEs (Adam et al., 2017; Martínez-Rueda, Galarreta, & Arostegui, 2018). It is therefore relevant to identify the dimensions and factors that influence work processes, foster learning and support, contribute to improve employability and facilitate transition into the ordinary labour market.

Aims

This article attempts to identify and describe the key dimensions and practices that WISEs develop in their effort to improve employability of their workers with insertion contracts. In order to do so, the article has the following aims:

- Identifying dimensions or key factors around which accompanying and training processes are arranged.
- Describing organizational practices that WISEs develop in their attempt to foster employability.
- Featuring training and accompanying processes in these hybrid and transitional structures.

- Suggesting in the shape of an agenda the key issues that WISEs have to address in the coming years.

Methodology

This paper is framed within the literature around case studies that analyze in qualitative ways success factors behind WISEs (Adam et al., 2017). We have performed content analysis of the research reports prepared by couples of researchers after their observations in WISEs, adapting the model of learning trajectories (Eraut, 2009, Marhuenda, 2018). We also conducted interviews to workers with integration contracts as well as to their support workers, as well as two questionnaires of employability, CUFEE (Martínez-Rueda, Aróstegui & Galarreta, 2018) and CEMI (Llinares, Zacarés & Córdoba, 2016).

Results

We have grouped results in three sections. First, as a consequence of describing WISEs as hybrid organizations, we have identified several organizational factors that have an impact upon the development of accompanying and qualification processes: type of relation between the WISE and its promoting institution, the kind of relations with the companies in the same occupational sector, the different kinds of organization of productive activities as well as the features of the workers with integration contracts and the support staff.

Second, we describe the features of the accompanying processes upon analysis of their structuration levels and the stages around which it is developed. We have not only shown the diversity of shapes that accompanying takes in a variety of WISEs, but we have also provided evidence of the links between the levels of structuration and the degree of awareness of workers in integration processes. In relation to the stages, we have found a better definition of access and transition phases rather than the longer developmental phase in-between.

Third, training processes are described in their variety of types and after the factors affecting them. As an example, work-based learning is strongly conditioned by the training potential of the job and the availability of training support. Furthermore, we have identified the participation in processes of formal learning and accreditation as a key element to improve employability. Finally, we have analyzed the influence of the awareness and role of integration workers.

Our paper provides a multidimensional analytical framework to address productive, training and accompanying processes of WISEs in an integrated way, identifying some key factors that may increase the employability of integration workers.

Conclusions, cautions and contributions of the article

According to our findings, we dare to give some conclusions and implications both for professionals as well as for researchers that can be considered in order to improve the results of WISEs:

- Need of multidimensional approaches in the analysis of accompanying and qualification practices.
- Relevance of networks and cooperation mechanisms of promoting institutions and ordinary companies with training resources, as key determinants of accompanying and qualification processes.
- Considering the productive organization as a matrix to design accompanying and qualification processes.
- The main variables with an impact upon the training ability of WISEs are the following: reference to a qualification within the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications, processes of cooperative and teamwork, levels of required production (with a role that can be either facilitating or hindering), and diversity of job positions and spaces.
- Need to develop a reliable and valid system to assess employability that contributes to standardize the process of selection, as well as the evaluation and impact of WISEs.
- Need to design an educational model of its own that, relying upon reference to the job, is able to develop a variety of strategies to assure a qualification matching the existing ones in the ordinary labour market.
- Such an educational model needs to include to key references: occupational profiles linked to jobs and systematization of support upon training routines associated to the professional staff development.
- The educational model needs to be supplemented by training processes on-the-job with participation in formal accreditation processes, to enhance training in the workplace.

The limitations of our research are related to the size of the sample. Despite the variety of productive sectors portrayed, the fact that one of them -recycling- is overrepresented (as so it is among Spanish WISEs), invites us to confirm our results in other sectors.

Summarizing, the article has presented a comprehensive model of the management, accompanying and training processes in WISEs that, taking into account their complexity and diversity, allows us to articulate and relate their different dimensions as the necessary basis to consider a future that is becoming more demanding.

KEYWORDS: Employability, work integration social Enterprise, training, accompanying.