Investigating the *Outcome* Performance of a WISE Delivering Employability Programmes to the Unemployed

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A General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale is used to measure the 'outcome' performance of a WISE that delivers three Employment Enhancement Programmes (EEPs) to unemployed individuals; namely unemployed young people aged 16-24 years (NEETs); unemployed university graduates and unemployed executives over the age of 40 years. The GSE scales were administered to the participants on each programme both before commencement on the programme (Time 1) and following completion of the programme (Time 2). Analysis of the data revealed that the programmes had a positive effect on participant GSE for the NEETs and graduates, but not for the unemployed executives.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluating the benefits that work-integration social enterprises (WISE) have upon their beneficiaries has long been a research aim of the academic community and the suitability of different measures of performance has been debated. However, academic research that actually measures WISE performance and tests different research tools has been limited (Paton, 2003) and in its place have arisen more business-like evaluation tools that have been designed by practitioners with little or no basis in social science theory, for example, 'Balance' (Bull, 2007) and 'Prove and Improve' (New Economics Foundation, 2008). Securing robust, valid and reliable tools for the evaluation of WISEs can be problematic, depending upon whether the focus of the evaluation is on *output*, *outcome* or *impact* (McLoughlin et al., 2009). *Output* can be defined as the relationship between the number of unemployed individuals accessing the programme and the number who subsequently gain employment. However, if *output* is employed as a singular measure, the evaluation will not include important longer-term participant benefits, i.e. *outcome*. An o*utcome* represents psychological benefits experienced by participants that will enhance their future employability. *Impact* is an even longer-term benefit and is the *impact* on society resulting from the reduction of unemployment, for example, reduced unemployment benefits, lower impact on the health service and higher income tax receipts. When focusing on *outcome* as a measure of performance, the researcher has to consider a suitable measure that is based in relevant social science theory. These outcomes should be derived from social science knowledge and theory

pertaining to the social problem in question (Chen and Rossi, 1980), in this case unemployment and should be accepted as relevant criteria by the WISE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research into the psychological effects of unemployment in the social sciences has established the negative effects that unemployment has upon an individual's psychological state and well-being. Such negative effects consist of elevated levels of depression (Feather and O'Brien, 1986), lower self-esteem and confidence (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1997) and poorer psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005). Research by Paul and Moser (2009) has shown that there are several moderators to be considered when examining the impact of unemployment, such as gender, the level of skill/education of the individual and the length of time that an individual spends unemployed. Thomsen (2009) showed that the longer an individual was unemployed, the more negative the effect of unemployment became on the individual, with the long-term unemployed (longer than one year) being over three times less likely to get a job. Equally, Colledge *et al.* (1978) showed that young people are particularly vulnerable to unemployment, especially those who are poorly educated, female or from an ethic minority (Smith, 1975; Colledge *et al.*, 1978). However, whilst the above research outlines the psychological impact of unemployment and the various demographics that moderate its effects, the psychological constructs outlined are indicators of well-being rather than being predictors of behaviour. Therefore, a different approach is required to allow researchers to capture general improvement trends that will be predictive of reemployment chances. These relationships can be revealed through the application of robust, valid and reliable evaluation tools validated in prior research.

An individual's motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment are strongly associated with their efficacy beliefs, which influence their choices and resultant actions (Pajares, 1996). Individuals base their assessment of the achievability of specific goals in perceived self-efficacy related to past experience and anticipation of future obstacles (Gist and Mitchell, 1992). In the context of WISE performance, it is critical to address issues of self-efficacy because highly efficacious individuals will have more confidence in their abilities to succeed in gaining future employment (Lucas and Cooper, 2005). The Bandurian concept of self-efficacy is related to task-centeredness and is domain specific but other self-efficacy concepts are more general and relate to an individual's level of confidence in performing everyday tasks (Sherer *et al.*, 1982). General self-efficacy (GSE) has been shown to be a reliable predictor of performance in educational and vocational activities (Locke *et al.*, 1998).

Prior research provides evidence of predictive relationships between increased self-efficacy, job searching and job procurement (Creed *et al.*, 2001; Eden and Aviram, 1993; Meyers and Houssemand, 2010). According to Eden and Aviram (1993) there is a reciprocal relationship between GSE and employment status, which can lead to entrapment in a vicious cycle of job loss, reduced GSE, lack of job seeking effort and prolonged unemployment. Eden and Aviram (1993) propose that an intervention designed to boost self-efficacy can result in intensification of job search activities and subsequent reemployment. This relationship has also been shown to be relevant across a wide variety of unemployed individuals, ranging from unemployed graduates (Feather and Bond, 1983; Cassidy and Wright, 2008) through to unemployed young people aged 16-24 years who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) (Denny *et al.,* 2011).

Eden and Aviram (1993) examined the impact of training, specifically designed to boost general self-efficacy (GSE), on unemployed participants' job search activities and subsequent reemployment. Participants were 88 unemployed individuals from urban Tel Aviv, who responded to an invitation to take part in a reemployment workshop. The participants were randomly assigned to experimental (n=43) and control groups (n=45) with the experimental group only undertaking the intervention training. A 17 item GSE scale (Sherer *et al.*, 1982) was employed to measure GSE in both groups at two points in time. For the experimental group, questionnaires were completed prior to and after the intervention training. For the control group, questionnaires were completed at an interval of two months with no intervention training taking place during the two month period. After completing the first questionnaire, the control group were

informed that the course was full but that they could be included in future training programmes. Eden and Aviram (1993) reported that participants with higher levels of GSE, occurring naturally or resulting from the intervention, were more likely to become reemployed.

Creed, Bloxsome and Johnson (2001) conducted a study with 161 unemployed individuals, 109 allocated to an 'experimental' group and 53 to a 'control' group. Creed *et* al. (2001) reported immediate and long term increases in 'well-being' and 'confidence' for unemployed individuals after engaging in 'community-based occupational skills/personal development training courses' that ran for a period of 4-6 weeks. Employing the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) and the Job-procurement Self-efficacy Scale (JPSE) in a pre and post intervention study Creed *et* al. (2001) found increases in 'self-esteem' and 'job-search self-efficacy' when comparing experimental and control groups in an quasi-experimental intervention study. The training course intervention consisted of generic occupational skills training (e.g. computer and keyboard skills), specific occupational skills training (e.g. warehousing, retail), and preparation for interview (e.g. grooming and self-confidence). The relationships between the content of the training courses, the evaluation tools employed (RSE and JPSE) and the reported outcomes ('well-being' and 'confidence') appear somewhat tenuous and exemplify the need for provider and evaluator to agree common outcomes (Chen and Rossi, 1980).

Meyers and Houssemand (2010) and Wenzel (1993) also reported a relationship between higher levels of self-efficacy and job-procurement. Meyers and Houssemand (2010) employed the GSE scale (a modified version of Sherer *et al.*, 1982) in their research and reported that psychological dimensions, such as GSE, can predict successful job seeking outcomes but only for people who have difficulty finding employment. They speculated that higher GSE was more advantageous to those applicants who reached the interview stage than those at the beginning of the application process and that greater levels of persistence in job-seeking were displayed by participants with higher levels of GSE. Wenzel (1993) stressed the importance of 'locus of control', suggesting that individuals who believe outcomes are not under personal control may not engage in activities designed to improve self-efficacy. This means that perceived personal control maybe an antecedent to the development of self-efficacy (Wenzel, 1993).

Eden and Aviram (1993) also highlighted the importance of behavioural plasticity in the evaluation of work-integration programmes. Eden and Aviram (1993) reported that participants with low initial levels of GSE had statistically significant increases in GSE after training when compared with participants with high initial levels. Interpretation of this result indicated higher levels of behavioural plasticity in the participants who displayed lower initial levels of GSE. Behavioural plasticity refers to the tendency of individuals who display relatively low levels of the concept being measured prior to an intervention, scoring significantly higher levels of the same concept after the intervention, when compared to individuals who displayed high levels of the concept to begin with (Brockner, 1988). Later research (Creed, *et* al., 2001) found that participants with lower initial self-esteem and job-search self-efficacy benefited more from the intervention training than their higher initial level counterparts.

THE CURRENT RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESES

The prior research reviewed above suggests a relationship between unemployment and negative psychological effects, and that the impact of unemployment is moderated by demographic differences such as gender, age and time spent unemployed (Paul and Moser, 2009; Thomsen, 2009). Prior research also reports a relationship between enhanced employability and self-efficacy and that the relationship between the two concepts is reciprocal (Eden and Aviram, 1993). In addition, a substantial body of research advocates the use of general self-efficacy (GSE) as an appropriate tool to measure increased mastery in new situations (Eden, 1988; Eden and Kinnar, 1991; Sherer *et al.*, 1982). Based upon the research reviewed above, we propose that any evaluation of *outcome* of a programme designed to enhance an unemployed individual's employability, can be based on a measure of GSE. The current research investigated the application of a GSE scale, as a potential measure of the psychological benefits experienced by clients after engagement in employment enhancement programmes provided by a WISE located in the UK. The WISE involved in the research study, delivered separate employment

enhancement programmes to three groups of unemployed individuals based on age, prior education and employment experience. The sample consisted of three different groups: Group One comprised of NEETs; Group Two comprised of unemployed graduates/post-graduates and Group Three comprised of unemployed professionals over 40 years of age. The employment enhancement programmes delivered by the WISE were specifically designed to address the range of requirements of each of the three groups. The research tested the following hypotheses, which are based in the research reviewed above:

> *Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference between the GSE levels of the 3 groups at T1.*

> *Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant relationship between demographics and GSE levels at*
T1.

> *Hypothesis 3: Participants will display an increase in their levels of GSE from T1 to T2 across all three programmes.*

> *Hypothesis 4: Participants with lower initial levels of GSE will display greater plasticity across all three programmes.*

METHOD

Design

The research utilised a quasi-experimental, longitudinal approach employing an intervention methodology to examine the relationship between the psychological effects of joblessness on the three client groups and the impact of their involvement in a work-integration programme.

Sample

A total of 386 unemployed individuals completed a GSE questionnaire at T1 and of these 194 also completed a GSE questionnaire at T2. Analysis of the sample revealed four outliers and these were removed from the data set, leaving 382 and 190 participants at T1 and T2 respectively. A breakdown of the sample is provided below in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE BREAKDOWN

Group	Status	N (T1)	N (T2)	Male	Female	Age Range (yrs.)	Mean Age (yrs.)
1	NEETs	49	25	32	17	16-24	19.24
2	Graduates	211	106	125	86	20-40	24.68
3	Executives	122	59	86	36	40-64	49.16
Total		**382**	**190**	**243**	**139**	**16-64**	**31.84**

Measures

All 382 participants completed a questionnaire at T1 and 190 participants completed a questionnaire at T2. The questionnaire employed at T1 and T2 was identical (except for biographical details which were

elicited at T1 only) and was designed to measure GSE. The GSE scale employed was Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) GSE scale. Prior research has shown this to be a reliable measure of GSE with reported Cronbach's α of between .75 and .91 (Scherbaum, 2006). Additionally, it has been used in research involving over a hundred thousand participants across 23 different countries (Schwarzer, 2012). The GSE scale used is freely available on the internet for use in research subject to the proper accreditation.

Intervention

Although there were variations between the employability programmes, they all aimed to increase the employability of participants through confidence building classes, team-working exercises, as well as career counselling. In the case of the unemployed graduates and executives (Groups Two and Three), participation in a post-graduate qualification was also undertaken alongside a work-placement. All three interventions were delivered by a WISE based in the United Kingdom that had received funding from the European Social Fund to deliver the three work-integration programmes.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the work-integration programmes (T1) the participants completed the questionnaire. Upon completion of the work-integration programme (T2) the participants were sent a web-link by email to an online version of the questionnaire, so that their Time 2 data could be collected.

Analysis

All questionnaire data was inputted into SPSS version 17.0 and all analyses were conducted using this software. The data was checked for normality and found to be normally distributed. The relationships between demographic data and GSE were explored using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs. Changes in participant self-efficacy between Time 1 and Time 2 were analysed using paired-sample t-tests.

RESULTS

Cronbach's α for the GSE scale used in the research were run for each group at T1 and T2. The GSE scale performed reliably, achieving Cronbach's α ranging between .72 and .86 (T1) and .75 and .86 (T2), which is over the minimum limit of .70 required for psychological research (Kline, 1999).

> *Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference between the GSE levels of the three groups at T1.*

One-way ANOVAs were employed to analyse the differences in GSE levels of participants from the three groups at T1. The results are displayed below in Table 2.

TABLE 2
PARTICIPANT DIFFERENCES IN GSE BY PROGRAMME AT T1

Group	N	Mean GSE at T1 (%)	F
NEETs (G1)	49	73.47	
Graduates (G2)	211	81.47	27.35***
Executives (G3)	122	84.51	

NB. * = $p<.05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant.

The results showed a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) between the T1 GSE scores of the three groups, with the unemployed executives having the highest average GSE levels and the NEETs having the lowest. *Hypothesis 1 confirmed.*

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant relationship between demographics and GSE levels at T1.

One-way ANOVAs were employed to analyse the relationship between age, gender, educational background and time spent unemployed with mean GSE scores at T1. There was no relationship found between genders or time spent unemployed and mean GSE levels across the entire sample. However, there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .001$) between age and GSE at T1, with unemployed individuals over the age of 25 years having higher initial average GSE levels than those individuals aged between 16-25 years (see Table 3), although over 25 years of age the differences in GSE were minimal. Additionally, there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .001$) found between highest educational achievement and GSE levels at T1, with GSE levels being positively related to increasing educational qualifications (see Table 4). *Hypothesis 2 partially confirmed.*

TABLE 3
EFFECT OF AGE ON GSE LEVELS AT T1

Age Groupings	*N*	Mean GSE at T1 (%)	*F*
16-25 yrs.	210	79.30	
26-35 yrs.	41	84.21	
36-45 yrs.	46	84.24	7.57***
46-55 yrs.	60	84.71	
56-65 yrs.	23	84.67	

NB. * = $p<.05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant. (Two participants didn't specify age).

TABLE 4
EFFECT OF HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT ON GSE LEVELS AT T1

Highest Educational Qualification	*N*	Mean GSE at T1 (%)	*F*
No Qualifications	14	74.29	
< 5 GCSEs or equivalent	16	72.03	
5+ GCSEs or equivalent	27	80.65	
A-Levels or equivalent	28	82.68	6.58***
Degree	196	82.07	
Masters	93	83.50	

NB. * = $p<.05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant. (Eight participants didn't specify highest educational achievement).

*Hypothesis 3: Participants will display an increase in their levels of GSE from T1 to T2
across all 3 programmes.*

Paired-sample t-tests were conducted for changes in GSE levels between T1 and T2 for each of the three groups (see Table 5). Results revealed a statistically significant increase ($p < .01$) for both the unemployed graduates and the NEETs that completed their respective WISE programmes. The executives also showed an increase in GSE between T1 and T2 but this was non-significant. *Hypothesis three partially confirmed.*

TABLE 5
PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TESTS FOR GSE CHANGE BETWEEN T1 AND T2

Group	*N*	Intervention Phase	Mean GSE (%)	+/- (%)	SD (%)
NEETs (G1)	25	Time 1	74.20	+ 4.90**	8.09
		Time 2	79.10		8.66
Graduates (G2)	106	Time 1	82.22	+ 2.33**	8.57
		Time 2	84.55		8.29
Executives (G3)	59	Time 1	84.19	+ 2.04 (NS)	9.08
		Time 2	86.23		8.97

NB. * = $p<.05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant.

*Hypothesis 4: Participants with lower initial levels of GSE will display greater plasticity
across all three programmes.*

In order to test for behavioural plasticity, the GSE scores for each group at T1 were dichotomised into two halves on the basis of a median split. The lower complement consisted of participants who scored lower than the median GSE value for each sample at T1, and the upper complement consisted of participants who were equal to or above the median. A paired-sample t-test was performed on each complement independently, to examine the effect of plasticity on each intervention's impact (see Table 6). The results revealed that behavioural plasticity had a highly statistically significant effect across the graduate and executive programmes ($p < .001$) and a statistically significant effect ($p < .05$) for the NEET programme. Interestingly, there was also a marked increase in the standard deviations between T1 and T2 for both complements, suggesting that even at complement level, the experience of participants going through the programme was not homogenous. *Hypothesis four confirmed.*

TABLE 6
PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TESTS FOR ALL GROUPS (LOWER COMPLEMENT)

Group	N	Median GSE at T1 (%)	Intervention Phase	Mean GSE (%)	+/- (%)	SD (%)
Lower Complement						
NEETs (G1)	11	72.50	Time 1 Time 2	67.05 74.77	+ 7.73*	3.84 7.62
Graduates (G2)	40	80.00	Time 1 Time 2	73.44 79.88	+ 6.44***	4.22 7.80
Executives (G3)	30	85.00	Time 1 Time 2	76.50 81.83	+ 5.33***	5.03 8.51
Upper Complement						
NEETs (G1)	14	72.50	Time 1 Time 2	79.82 82.50	+ 2.68 (NS)	5.67 8.09
Graduates (G2)	66	80.00	Time 1 Time 2	87.54 87.39	- 0.15 (NS)	5.64 7.28
Executives (G3)	29	85.00	Time 1 Time 2	92.15 90.78	- 1.37 (NS)	3.94 7.04

NB. * = $p<.05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant.

DISCUSSION

The overall results of the research support the conclusions reached by Denny *et al*. (2011) that GSE provides an effective and robust evaluation measure for *outcome* performance at WISEs. The research results also show the problematic nature of measuring *outcome* performance at a WISE or any work-integration organisation, due to the heterogeneous nature of different groups of unemployed people. Analysis of the GSE data collected at T1 showed a significant difference ($p < .001$) in the GSE levels of the unemployed graduates, executives and NEETs that entered onto the WISE programme, with the NEET group having significantly lower GSE levels than the other two groups. The researchers propose that this was related to the lack of prior success that the NEETs had in their lives, compared to the unemployed graduates and in particular the unemployed executives. This lack of prior positive experience effects GSE levels and could possibly inhibit future positive action, which in this case relates to job-seeking activity (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Further research in this area would be needed to confirm such a finding and would need to focus upon participant job-search behaviour both prior to and after the intervention.

Surprisingly, no significant statistical relationship was found between the lengths of time spent unemployed and GSE levels at T1, or between GSE and gender. The research cannot therefore confirm the prior research conducted by Thomsen (2009). The results also revealed an interesting and statistically significant relationship ($p < .001$) between age, educational achievement and GSE. This offers support to prior research by Smith (1975) and Colledge *et al.* (1978) that outlined the increased vulnerability of young people to the effects of unemployment, particularly those that are poorly educated. Analysis revealed that GSE increased with highest educational qualification and also with age. However, for age the results were interesting as the significant difference found in GSE scores was between the 16-25 years old group and the rest of the sample over 25 years of age. For the 26-65 years of age participants GSE remained stable. However, caution should be applied to these results before both a more in-depth

statistical analysis has been completed exploring the mediating relationships between education achievement, age and GSE. Additionally, the researchers intend to explore this finding through semi-structured interviews with a sample of participants from the study, in order to verify causality through a process of triangulation (McLeod, 1994). This is important as the relationship between educational achievement, age and GSE needs to be established; is it the mastery experiences that come with educational success and age that have increased graduate and executive GSE, or has the lack of success in education and employment for the NEETs left them more vulnerable to the effects of unemployment? Further research that is on-going will aim to answer this and establish causality.

In relation to the evaluation of the *outcome* benefits of the WISE intervention with the three groups of unemployed individuals, the data revealed a statistically significant increase in GSE for the NEET and unemployed graduate participants ($p < .01$) but not for the unemployed executives. This confirmed prior research into the effects of work-integration and WISE interventions upon the GSE levels of programme participants (Eden and Aviram, 1993; Denny *et al.*, 2011 and 2011b). Additionally, the effect of behavioural plasticity (Brockner, 1988) was also found to be statistically significant for the NEET ($p < .05$) and the unemployed graduate and executive ($p < .001$) interventions, with only those participants from the lower complements showing increases in GSE between T1 and T2. This confirms prior research by Eden and Aviram (1993) and Creed *et* al. (2001) into the effects of plasticity in work-integration programmes. The results also highlight the potentially misleading results that can be gained from *overall* evaluations of the *outcome* benefits of WISE interventions. Indeed, for those participants from the upper complements the intervention had no effect upon GSE levels and in some cases even led to a small decrease in GSE. Finally, and in relation to this last point, the increase in standard-deviations between T1 and T2 at a complement level revealed that experiences were still heterogeneous.

SUMMARY

The overall analysis of the results revealed the suitability of GSE as an evaluation measure for WISE intervention programmes and showed that the programmes in the current study had a statistically significant effect upon the overall GSE levels of the NEETs and unemployed graduates. Additionally, the effect of behavioural plasticity was also shown to be important in exploring the *outcome* benefits that the three different interventions, delivered by the WISE in the current study had upon the different groups of participants. There were also interesting relationships found between demographic features of the sample (highest educational achievement and age) and GSE levels at T1. These results suggest that the evaluation of the *outcome* benefits of work-integration programmes is complex and problematic, and that researchers need to consider the social science theory or theories pertaining to the field of unemployment and work-integration when designing their research evaluations (Chen and Rossi, 1980). The researchers intend to undertake further research and data analysis to explore these findings in more detail. This will include both in-depth statistical analyses to explore the relationship between age, highest educational achievement and GSE levels at T1 and semi-structured interviews with a sample of participants from the three programmes to explore their perceptions of the *outcome* benefits that they experienced from the interventions. This mixed-methods approach will allow the quantitative research findings to be supported by emergent themes from the qualitative interview data through a process of triangulation (McLeod, 1994).

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