Is There a Skill Gap for U.S. Entry-Level IT Positions? Evidence from a National IT Helpdesk Survey

Despite improving economic data, anxiety over the future direction of the U.S. labor market and the implications for workers remains at heightened levels. Some analysts have maintained that sluggish economic growth is a sign that a fundamental mismatch exists between employer demands and the skills of available workers. Many commentators have likewise declared that the U.S. faces a severe shortage of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills. Sorting out the type and degree of skill mismatch is a critical matter for public policy. However, past research has utilized highly aggregated data with little attention to industry characteristics or dynamics. In this research, I use a detailed nationally representative skill survey focusing on computer helpdesk technicians to shed light on these claims. The evidence indicates that the incidence of extended hiring difficulties is actually lower than among less technically demanding positions such as manufacturing production worker. Higher level math and computer programming skill demands are not predictive of prolonged hiring challenges. By contrast, some elements of job design in the IT industry appear to be associated with lower levels of hiring problems.