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Who are Employment Consultants? Characteristics of the workforce that connects job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities to employment (Bringing Employment First to Scale, Issue No. 7)

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BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

Who are Employment Consultants? Characteristics of the workforce that connects job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities to employment

By Oliver Lyons, Alberto Migliore, Kelly Nye-Lengerman, Derek Nord & John Butterworth

Key Findings from the RRTC on Advancing Employment

Introduction

In 1987, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston began a series of surveys aimed at providing a longitudinal description of the characteristics and service delivery provided by Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) (Domin & Butterworth, 2012). Despite direct support staff comprising one of the nation's largest labor market segments, there has been very little research into the wages and stability of that workforce (Bogenschutz, Hewitt, Nord, & Hepperlen, 2014). Additionally, most of the literature regarding employment consultants has focused on service outcomes of the individuals served. However, according to Luecking, Fabian, and Tilson (2004), "...Regardless of the job seeker's level of motivation, skill, experience, attitude, and support system, his or her ability to get a job will often depend on the effectiveness of employment specialists..."

The 2014 National Survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers sought to gather information on the roles of and investment in employment consultants within the CRPs (see sidebar.) Employment consultants are direct support staff who assist job seekers with disabilities with finding paid individual integrated employment. This includes professionals with titles such as employment specialist, job developer, rehabilitation counselor, and employment support professional.

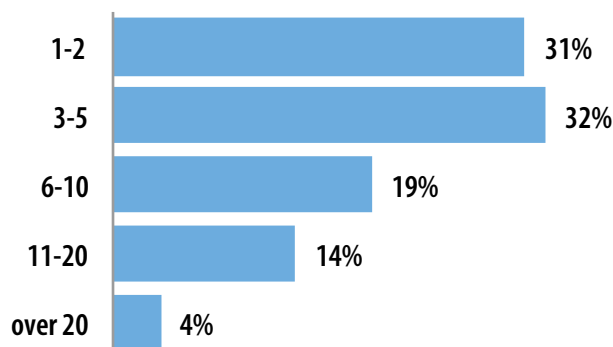
This brief will present findings related to staffing, working hours, turnover, and salary of employment consultants within the surveyed CRPs, along with an overview of the tools used by employment consultants to track data.

Findings

Most (63%) of CRPs surveyed who provide job development services employ one to five employment consultants. A total of 887 employment consultants were employed across all 139 providers.

Figure 1: Number of ECs per CRP

(N=139 CRPs)



Who Are the Community Rehabilitation Providers?

The 2014 National Survey of CRPs was sent to a randomly selected sample of 414 eligible organizations that provide employment and day supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This sample was drawn from a nation-wide list of 3,551 CRPs created for ICI. Employment services provided by the CRPs include job development, on-the-job training, career planning, work supervision, and job coaching.

CRPs received a letter asking for their participation and directing them to a secure website to complete the survey. The final N of respondents was 190 (46% response rate.) For the purposes of this brief, the data examined comes from the 139 CRPs who responded that they have direct service staff providing job development services.

The CRPs reported on in this brief represent 40 states, with the highest concentration being from New York (9%, N=12). Most of the CRPs identified as private nonprofits (84%), with a geographic scope at the county or regional level (53%). 36% operate locally (in a community or specific cluster of towns), and only 11% operate statewide or in multiple states.

Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series

The Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series shares research from ICI's ThinkWork projects, which focus on increasing employment for individuals with IDD. The goal of this series is to identify and share findings that support state agencies, providers, advocates, individuals and families to make the philosophy of Employment First a reality.

RRTC on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A project of

ThinkWork!
at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston

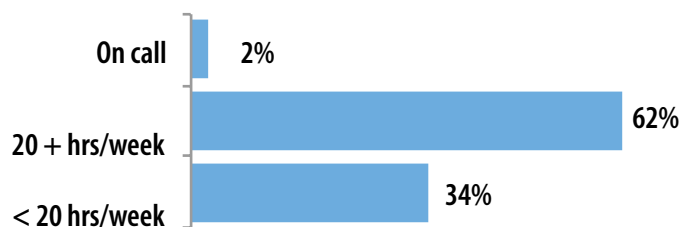


CRPs report that a majority of their employment consultants (62%) dedicate 20 or more hours a week towards job development.

Assuming the employment consultants work a typical, 40-hour week, these data are consistent with similar studies of employment consultants that report an average of

Figure 2: Hours per week spent in job development

(N= 796 ECs from 129 CRPs)

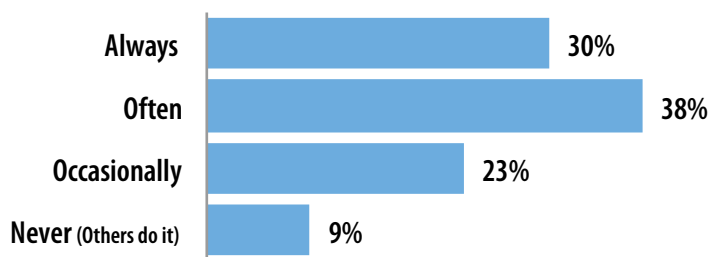


50% to 75% of time spent on job development activities (Butterworth, Migliore, Nord, & Gelb, 2012; Migliore, Hall, Butterworth, & Winsor, 2010).

Most (68%) of the CRPs reported that their employment consultants either often or always provide on-the-job supports for job seekers two or more weeks after hire, suggesting that they support multiple stages of the employment process.

Figure 3: To what extent do staff members provide on-the-job supports two or more weeks after a job seeker has been hired?

(N=133 CRPs)

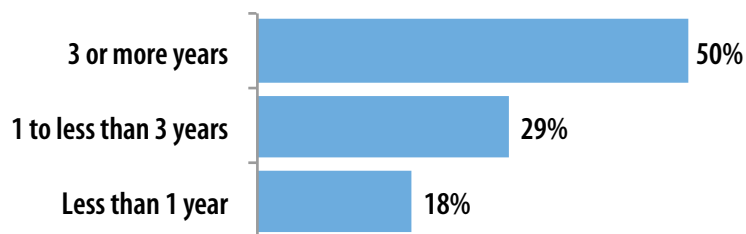


This figure is much greater than the 23% of employment specialists who job-coach after hire as reported by Migliore et al. (2010). This may be due to the National Survey not asking what specific on-the-job supports were provided after hire, whereas the article by Migliore et al. asked specifically about job coaching.

CRPs report that half (50%) of their employment consultants have provided job development services for them for three or more years.

Figure 4: Percentage of staff members providing job development

(N=796 EC's from 129 CRPs)

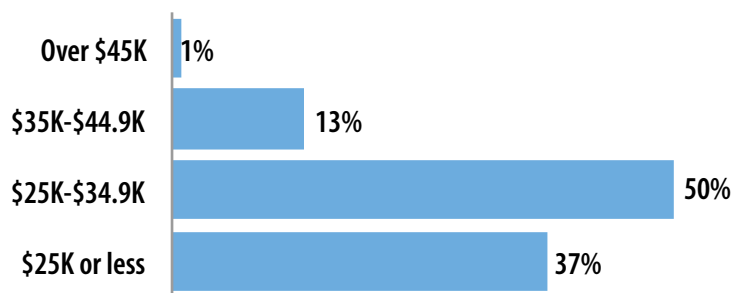


This figure is consistent with a similar study of employment consultants that reports the mean years working with their current employer as 7.2 (Butterworth et al., 2012). While years providing job development services is not necessarily indicative of total tenure, this data implies that a majority of employment consultants have worked for their current employer for three or more years.

For employment consultants working full-time with at least two years' tenure in a non-supervisory role, 87% of CRPs reported that their annual gross salary was \$35,000 or less.

Figure 5: ECs annual gross salary

(Full-time, 2 years tenure, not a supervisor; N= 134 CRPs)



This salary range is consistent with the salary of direct support staff according to two sources (Bogenschutz et al., 2014; Migliore et al., 2010), but inconsistent with another finding showing half of the surveyed employment consultants earning over \$35,000 a year, and half earning less than \$35,000 a year (Butterworth et al., 2012).

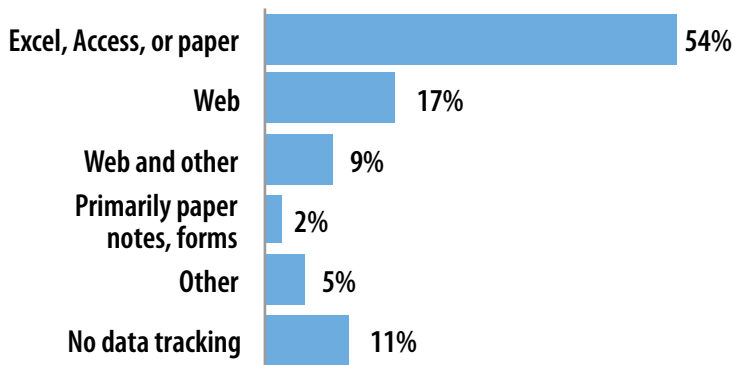
The turnover rate¹ of employment consultants was 15%. This is less than the reported turnover rate of 25.76% for direct support staff reported by Bogenschutz et al., (2014); and far less than the 45% to 70% average reported by Larson, Hewitt, and Knoblauch (2005). The reported vacancy rate is 11%, which falls between the reported rates of 6% to 17% for direct support staff (Larson et al., 2005). These rates reflect direct support staff not solely employed in job development, so making a direct comparison is difficult.

“...Regardless of the job seeker’s level of motivation, skill, experience, attitude, and support system, his or her ability to get a job will often depend on the effectiveness of employment specialists...”

54% of CRPs report using low-tech data tracking systems, such as Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, or a paper document, for documenting job development activities. Only 17% use a dedicated web application, and 9% use a combination of a web application and other tools. Eleven percent of the CRPs reported that they did not track service delivery hours.

Figure 6: Data tracking tools

(N=133 CRPs)



Conclusions

Given the lack of research focused solely on the job of employment consultant, the purpose of this brief was to contribute to the data collected about employment consultants through ICI's 2014 National Survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers.

CRPs reported that their employment consultants spend a majority of their work week in job development activities, often provide short-term supports to individuals after hire, and almost always track data related to employment. Many employment consultants often use low-tech solutions such as spreadsheets or paper for data tracking.

Consistent with existing data regarding direct support staff, the majority of these employment consultants earn approximately \$35,000 a year and have worked at their CRP for three or more years. While the vacancy rate of these employment consultants was in line with other reported figures from service providers, the CRPs who responded to the National Survey experienced significantly less turnover of their employment consultants.

While continued research on effective employment strategies for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is vital, the strategies are only as successful as the workforce delivering them. Future research should examine possible connections between the outcomes for job seekers served by CRPs and these findings. In addition, exploring employment outcomes based upon an employment consultant's level of education and experience could provide insight into the workforce needs of this group.

It is important to continue to research best practices when it comes to the hiring and retention of employment consultants, and to constantly monitor for areas of improvement, as they are the primary connectors between job seekers and employers.

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¹ Turnover rate was calculated by totaling the number of reported employment consultants and the number of reported vacant employment consultant positions (N= 896 EC positions over 129 CRPs), then dividing the responses to the question "How many staff members who provide job development services left your organization during the past fiscal year?" by that figure. The sum of responses to "How many staff members would you have to hire today to fill all funded but vacant positions in job development services?" was also divided by the sum of total job development positions to obtain the vacancy rate.

ThinkWork!

ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE
WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

This is a publication of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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