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CANADIAN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR COUNSELLING
INSTITUT CANADIEN D'ÉDUCATION ET DE RECHERCHE EN ORIENTATION

2015

Survey of Career Service Professionals

HIGHLIGHTS REPORT



Highlights Report

The Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) plays a part in generating primary data about the career counselling and career development field. CERIC also tracks how Canadians feel about their place of work, career planning and training. The findings from these research activities are presented in information documents which apprise stakeholders about sector conditions and attitudes about the workplace. CERIC also uses this material to customize its programs to meet practitioner needs and to reflect sector realities.

This report provides highlights from the CERIC 2015 Survey of Career Service Professionals, conducted between October 19 and November 20, 2015 (CERIC undertook a similar national survey in 2011). The online survey was completed by 1,004 respondents from the field. Participants were recruited via an open call across CERIC's email lists. Supporting organizations also forwarded the survey notification to broaden representation. The survey delved into research and education issues as well as career competency and mobility. The results offer a snapshot of the composition of the career services community including some of its interests and challenges, along with professional development and training needs.

Demographic Information Highlights: *Females are disproportionately overrepresented in the career services community. This significant gender-based disparity is not expected to change in the coming years. Those in the field are employed in workplaces of various sizes with a relatively even split of "new arrivals" as well as "veterans" in the career counselling and career development workforce. A strong majority of those in the field offer both career counselling/coaching as well as employment advising/job coaching.*

Demographic Breakdown. The field has a much higher ratio of females (82%) compared to males (18%). This significant gender-based disparity is likely to increase in the next decades as 38 percent of females are in the 25 to 44 year-old age group compared to six percent of males.

Educational Profile. Just over one-third have a Bachelor's Degree as their highest level of educational attainment while another 41 percent possess a Master's Degree. Just over one-fifth of respondents noted Counselling or Educational Psychology was their main areas of focus in post-secondary studies applicable to the career services field. Career Development (17%) and Education (15%) were the second and third most common areas of educational focus.

Workplace Characteristics. Slightly less than 30 percent work in the post-secondary sector while 35 percent are in a job at a non-profit organization

including charities. The private sector, which includes career management/transition firms, independent career professionals as well as the corporate sector, employs almost one-fifth of the career service practitioner workforce while 13 percent work in government. The share of the workforce by organization size (including departments and satellites) is relatively equal: 10 percent of those in the field are single proprietors; 14 percent are in an organization with up to five employees; 17 percent are part of a team with five to 10 staff; one-quarter work at an organization with 11 to 25 employees; 15 percent are at a firm with 26 to 50 workers; and almost one-fifth find themselves in the largest organizations (51 employees or more).

Employment Details. Reported gross (before deductions) annual salary or income reveals that many career service professionals earn a relatively modest living. While 15 percent stated that they make less than \$40,000 per year, about one-third earn between \$40,001 and \$55,000 annually. Furthermore, 21 percent receive between \$55,001 and \$70,000, while just under 16 percent have a yearly salary or income of \$70,001 to \$85,000. The same proportion earn more than \$85,001. The career service community's workforce includes a relatively even distribution of "newcomers" to seasoned "veterans". Slightly less than half have worked fewer than 10 years in career development while just about the same proportion have been in the field for over a decade. Providing services in a

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one-on-one setting (30%) was the most common answer to the question about job function. Offering career services divided between one-on-one and group setting (28%) was the second most common response followed by managing or supervising those who deliver career services (13%), and job development (5%). This section closed by asking “are the services you offer most likely to be career counselling/coaching or employment advising/job coaching?” Whereas 58 percent of practitioners said “both”, just under one-third mentioned the former while 11 percent noted the latter.

Sector Pulse Highlights: *Many are of the opinion that much more needs to be done to better inform Canadians about the services career professionals provide and, most importantly, the benefits of seeking career-related support from these practitioners. That being said, a healthy proportion of those in the field believe that, in the past few years, an increasing segment of the public has grown to understand and appreciate the value of career professional interventions.*

Perspectives. The survey included several questions to surface the perception of career service practitioners about their own field. For instance, one question asked “What keeps you up at night about the field?”. Almost 30 percent of respondents answered that they are troubled by the fact that the public does not truly understand career development or, for that matter, the value of career practitioner interventions. Concerns about funding shortfalls or cuts was noted by one-fifth of respondents followed by 14 percent who mentioned that they are concerned about their less than optimal working conditions (i.e. few professional development opportunities, little room for advancement, unmanageable workload...). A follow-up question about how the general population perceives career service professionals elicited positive feedback. While close to 60 percent noted that the perceived value of career practitioners has improved in the past few years, only 11 percent mentioned that it has gotten worse in that time.

Career Plans. Those who are considering leaving the career services community in the near future offered several reasons why they are considering

moving on. “Personal growth/new challenge” was the most prevalent reason, followed by “poor salary/income”, “lack of advancement opportunities”, and “burn out”. “Too much competition” was the least mentioned motivation. Succession planning by career service firms appears to be relatively low as 43 percent of survey participants mentioned that their organization has a plan in place to ensure they have the required specialized workforce to offer a continuity of service.

Professional Development and Competencies

Highlights: *Numerous topics are of interest to career service professionals intent on enhancing their job skills in the short-term. While in-person professional development is a preferred learning approach, the Internet proves to be the favoured resource these practitioners turn to when seeking career-related information.*

Client-Focused Competencies. Those in the career service community have very broad professional development interests regarding practices and techniques to employ with clients. Just about the same proportion (62%) are interested in enhancing their “essential skills needs assessment” approaches as exploring and mastering “career assessment tools” (61%). A somewhat lower proportion are interested in delving into theories about career. Slightly over 40 percent combined stated that doing so is a High Priority or Essential Priority. Interest in gaining insight into “self-employment and operating a business” is by far the least important professional development priority (31 percent combined Not a Priority and Low Priority). Survey participants were then asked whether they are interested in enhancing their client practice competencies specifically related to client relationship management. Learning more about “diverse populations”—e.g. new Canadians, Aboriginal peoples, rural Canadians, persons with disabilities, etc.—was the most popular response followed closely by “individual counselling skills related to the provision of career development services”—e.g. listening, reflecting, summarizing. “Customer service orientation” and “cyber/online counselling” are the next two most important professional development priorities of those in the career services community.

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Meeting Employer Needs. Those in the field share similar opinions regarding learning about proposal writing and project reporting practices. While 30 percent noted that the former is quite important, 28 percent view the latter in the same manner. A smaller share is interested in delving into research-related practices in the next year. Only six percent mentioned that learning about “investigative design” is an Essential Priority followed by just over seven percent who feel the same way about expanding their grasp of “research methodology”. Learning about various personal/network development practices is more attractive to career practitioners. For instance, 45 percent noted that they are quite interested in gaining knowledge about “individual leadership & initiative approaches” followed closely by “stress management” (43%) and “community capacity-building” (40%).

Preferred Learning Approaches. In-person training methods are favoured over accessing learning remotely. In-person workshops/seminars (55%) are the top-rated formal training approach followed by conferences (43%). More than one-third mentioned they favour online (webinar) workshops/seminar and one-quarter stated they prefer courses via web delivery. Using the web is by far the preferred informal learning method career service professionals use to find research and information on tips, trends and techniques they can use. Over two-thirds explore websites and use internet searches to uncover this type of information followed by online magazines or newsletters (47%), and social media (29%).

Budgetary Allowance. Those in the field receive modest amounts of financial support from their employers to undertake professional development. Almost one-third have no professional development budget. Of those that are given some funds for professional development, fewer than half receive an allocation of up to \$1,000 per year.

Research and Evaluation Highlights: *Those in the career services community are involved in a myriad of research activities yet evaluating the impact of their work is less pervasive. Many would like to see research which compares different career development practices, techniques and*

tools as the findings could inform them about which is best for their clients.

Research Participation and Approach. This section of the survey began by asking respondents whether they are involved in various career development research activities. While 38 percent stated that they take part in quantitative or qualitative data gathering, one-third are involved in report writing and just under one-fifth participate in proposal writing. Meanwhile, a relatively small share undertakes research leading to publication (eight percent for peer-review vs. six percent for non peer-review). Participants were then asked about the type of data gathering their organization typically undertakes. Compiling program administrative data is the most prevalent practice (45%) followed by exit surveys (42%) and intake surveys (38%). Only slightly more than one-fifth gather information via follow-up studies.

Evaluating Interventions. A significant minority of career counselling/career development programs or services do not evaluate the impact of their work. Nearly 40 percent of survey respondents stated that they do not have procedures in place to gauge the influence of their career-related interventions.

Topics of Interest. Career service professionals are interested in seeing more research on a number of career development-related topics. Asking the question “what three topics would you most like to see career development-related research focus upon?” yielded over two dozen thematic investigative categories. “Practices, Approaches, Techniques or Tools in career development” is by far the most common area of proposed research attention. Some specific examples in this category include: pre-counselling assessment and materials; resilience in career development; as well as how social exclusion impacts career development strategies or tools. Career service professionals are also quite interested in seeing more research into the impact/value of a career counselling practices, approaches, techniques or tools including: what type of information/engagement is most effective with high school students; which interest inventory tests work best with mid-career adults in career transition; and what are the comparative benefits of group counselling vs. one-on-one interventions.