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Case management: The magic bullet for labour integration?

An international comparative study

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Summary

Individual case management lies at the heart of preventive strategies to reduce unemployment. This is achieved by identifying appropriate tailor-made intervention measures and by determining the targeted assistance needs of each respective client. The session will look specifically into the policy lessons that may be drawn from national experiences. The policy lessons to be examined mainly come from an inquiry undertaken during the triennium among countries which have acquired some experience with case management or have recently implemented such an approach.

Development of case management

After proving clearly successful in a number of different policy areas, case management has also become an increasingly accepted method in employment promotion in recent decades, where it is both innovative and, at the same time, "old hat".

As an instrument of employment promotion case management is innovative in that it focuses on resources rather than deficiencies, even with people who were and are traditionally difficult to reach using "conventional" integration instruments as part of employment promotion. This is not just true of individual countries, but is a recognizable trend internationally. Politically and economically the bar is set high: does it increase the proportion of the population who are in active employment, even if the people concerned face severe problems in becoming integrated into the labour market?

The approach is not new, however: it can be traced back to the settler movement in the United States, where a "case manager" was responsible for introducing new inhabitants to local customs. In the early to mid-20th century case managers were introduced in the health systems to act as a central contact point, both advising patients and coordinating and directing the care and assistance they received. What was new with the "institution" of case manager here was that they had budgetary control and could therefore take financial responsibility. They were so successful that the approach was soon extended to other areas, and by the 1990s many countries had case managers in employment promotion.

As the table below shows, the tradition and therefore experience of case management varies in length in each country. Some already have considerable experience of using this instrument, while others have only introduced it in employment promotion a few years ago or are, like Spain, for instance, in the process of rolling out a network throughout the country following a pilot phase.¹

¹ The development of a case management system was also piloted in the United Kingdom in the run-up to the New Deal legislation. If this is taken as the yardstick, case management has been in operation there since the early 1990s.

Table 1. Transfer of case management to employment promotion

Spain	2007
France	2006
Germany	2005
Belgium	2004
Denmark	2004
Netherlands	2002
Ireland	1998
United Kingdom	1997
New Zealand	1995
Sweden²	1935

Although it is still too early to be drawing definite conclusions or evaluating case management in employment promotion as such, a comparison of the different approaches used in a number of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries is long overdue. The present comparative study summarizes the results of a survey conducted in spring 2006 in the follow-up to an ISSA (International Social Security Association) workshop in Brussels, using a number of different criteria.

The annex shows the questions asked and the countries - from Sweden to New Zealand - that took part in the study.

Definition of case management and what it involves

The more practical the level, the greater the differences are between the countries here: while everyone agrees on the objectives, views vary enormously on what case management is exactly, in terms of a detailed job description or the specific measures and services involved.

As regards objectives, society as a whole increasingly expects employment promotion - including in the European context of the Lisbon Strategy³ - to boost the proportion of the population that is genuinely in active employment. Depending on the labour market situation in individual countries this means that they can no longer concentrate on merely placing the (long-term) unemployed in employment, but must instead extend their integration efforts to (previously) economically inactive marginal groups of the population. The United Kingdom has a good example here of a policy that is specifically designed to integrate ethnic minorities in the labour market, even if they have not previously been receiving benefit or covered by the social security system. For the public employment service it means that its task now goes beyond mere placement in employment, and it must open itself up to social groups long regarded as impossible to integrate on the labour market.

² Sweden is shown here because the introduction of targeted integration work is classified as case management. There are no records of case management being applied separately.

³ The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Employment was adopted by the European Council in 2000. The aim is to achieve 70 per cent employment by 2010. In 2005 the objectives were reconfirmed, albeit without quantitative targets.

When it comes to the practical application of case management, however, unlike the objectives, there are in some cases considerable differences internationally in how this is done, with some countries still describing as "normal" job placement what others now call "case management". Because there is no uniform definition among the participants in this study, an internationally recognized definition of case management should be taken as the reference. The Case Management Society in the USA was the first institution to produce a universal definition of case management, which, although it applies to the health sector, can be transferred to integration work in employment promotion: "Case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's health needs through communication and available resources to promote quality cost-effective outcomes."⁴

Judging by this, the different countries have a lot in common:

The aim is always to integrate people in the formal labour market no matter how remote they are from it. In other words, the case-management approach is applied strictly in order to try to improve people's suitability for active employment, so that there comes a point when they are actually ready to enter the formal labour market. Only a few countries specifically accept subsidized employment in the longer term here.

- All countries without exception attach importance to the production of a personal support plan, based on a detailed profile/assessment.
- Regardless of the organizational structure the case manager's job is to get an exact picture of the client's individual situation and needs during the assessment.
- In every country the subsequent course of action is set out in writing in an integration agreement or plan, which is signed like a contract by both the client and the case manager. Both parties thus have a record of their reciprocal rights and obligations: the services to be provided by the public employment service in this specific case, and what the client is to contribute to the process over a particular period.
- The case manager is seen as a systems expert who is able to generate support for specific individual cases: he is familiar with the social system, knows about interconnections and - dependencies, and can implement and coordinate the provision of various services as well as encouraging his client to take responsibility for himself. This is particularly important in three countries taking part in the study. The Netherlands puts its clients through a "gatekeeper test", in which it is emphasized right from the initial assessment that the client is responsible for his own integration in the labour market. In Denmark and Spain too, emphasis is placed on self-responsibility very early in the process of supporting jobseekers, with clients required to enter and update their own data in an IT system.
- Case managers operate in close networks. At local level these involve the employment service and the local authorities, which usually provide social integration services.

⁴ Available at: <http://www.cmsa.org/ABOUTUS/DefinitionofCaseManagement/tabid/104/Default.aspx> (as at 2 April 2007).

Other network partners include further training providers, private service-providers and businesses. Businesses are particularly important in countries specifically applying a "work first" approach in which they try to (re)integrate people directly into work. Skills improvement and further training are only rarely offered in advance of job placement with this approach, and concrete employment is preferred to any sort of training course. Examples here include the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden.

There is an equally wide range of differences in how case management is applied in practice. Examples of some of these - such as the case manager's job description and the organizational conditions - are identified and described in the following sections.

Job description of a case manager

The key figure in case management is the case manager himself. Regardless of how case management is defined, his job is a complex one, since he works right at the interface between various service-providers and is responsible for ensuring that everything done as part of the integration work is always strictly targeted at employment integration.

If we compare the different countries, case managers tend to have very different skills. The job profile requirements and qualifications structure in case management are often not set in stone, but are still developing. However, the information provided by the various countries suggests a trend towards university education as the basic requirement for case managers.⁵ There is also emphasis on moderation techniques, conducting of interviews, conflict resolution and guidance methods, with a number of countries even making these a basic requirement for case managers.

Case management and its institutional framework

Case management basically comes under the public employment services. In all the countries studied case management is run through the employment promotion system. Alternatives - such as being run by the local authorities and therefore by the social services - hardly ever exist when the focus is on the formal labour market.⁶

Responsibilities in case management

Because of its close networking, case management tends to occur at the interface between various actors involved with the clients.⁷ From the employment promotion and public

⁵ Table 5 (see last page) contains a table of the qualifications and skills required, showing a precise comparison between the various countries.

⁶ The exception here is the close cooperation between the Agentur für Arbeit (Employment Agency) and local authorities in Germany. In most districts the processes involved in case management are run through this cooperation, which is why the local authorities also have considerable influence on how case management is organised.

⁷ Networking activities in case management which are designed to provide a coordinated, integrated service are not covered in the rest of this report, which only looks at the structure of case management from the state/local authority employment administration point of view.

employment service point of view, however, there may already be a number of actors "working on the client", and as a result internal interfaces may also occur within the employment service in dealing with a case management client, and must be sorted out if there is any doubt. These internal interfaces usually relate to three different technical areas:

- Benefits administration: Is the client entitled to unemployment or special assistance benefits? Are entitlements suspended because of penalties?
- Support as part of integration work.
- Social integration services provided by the local authorities, such as child care, advisory services, etc.

The picture among those taking part in the study was split almost 50/50: in some cases the employment service is responsible for all three areas, while in others there is a strict division of responsibilities between employment promotion actors and local authorities.

In most countries benefits administration and integration work are divided in organizational terms, so that the integration work has nothing to do with State financial assistance. The split means that different organizations are responsible for deciding on penalties if the client fails to cooperate.⁸ It also produces interfaces that have to be "bridged" to prevent clients from falling through the net. This particularly applies in cases where the interface involves not just two actors in the integration field, but also a third actor in the shape of local authority service-providers.

The approach in the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark is to have one single authority as the contact point for both guidance and integration work, but which also monitors the payment of benefits.

⁸ See also on this subject Section 1.6 Value of penalties.

Table 2. Public institutions involved in the case management process

	Employment agency	Payment of benefits	Local authority services	Other actors
Spain ⁹	X			X
France ¹⁰	X	X		X
Germany ¹¹	X		X	
Belgium	X	X		
Denmark ¹²	X		X	
Netherlands	X	X	X	
Ireland	X	X		
United Kingdom	X			
Sweden	X	X		

"He who pays the piper calls the tune" - budgetary control in case management

It is clear that individual case management is highly cost-intensive when the clients in question have in some cases not worked for a long time or have not previously had any incentive to enter the labour market themselves and live independently of State support. It often requires staying power since progress can be slow. The costs for society can be spread in different ways: one possibility is to make the whole of society contribute by funding case management from taxes, or else the costs can be restricted to particular sections of the population if case management is funded from contributory social security schemes.

In Europe, for example, there appears to be a discernible trend towards using tax revenue: only Belgium, France and Denmark say that most of the funding for their programmes comes from social security, with only some of the expenditure being covered by taxes. The other countries regard case management as a problem for society as a whole and make the taxpayer pay. However, in this preliminary assessment we have not identified a causal link between the decision to develop case management and funding.

Case management as the product of reforms - political conditions for implementing case management

Regardless of how it is financed, the introduction of case management tends to go hand in hand internationally with reforms to the social system or the public employment service. There are very different levels of acceptance of case management as a new service among the public:

⁹ Spain applies its labour market policy on the basis of the autonomous regions, so other actors involved in case management depend on the region.

¹⁰ France not just draws a distinction organisationally between guidance and the payment of benefits, but also has a separate body which monitors clients' cooperation and is then responsible for penalties.

¹¹ Germany exceptionally has three different parallel organisations: the Employment Agency operates both in cooperation with the local authorities, as a separate body with its own responsibility and as a stand-alone organisation for the local authorities. Cooperation is the form used in most districts.

¹² In Denmark local job centres have been combined with local authority service providers since the beginning of 2007.

Table 3. Social acceptance of the use of case management

	Society as a whole	Employers	Trade unions	Population concerned
Spain		No information		Agree
France	No information		Mostly agree	No information
Germany	Recognized need	Agree	Conditional agreement with statutory basis	Some rejection because of reduced entitlement to benefits
Belgium	Initially critical, then agreed	Critical of too much interference in labour market	Little agreement	Skeptical, but agree
Denmark	No information	Those actively involved: positive	Skeptical	Those actively involved: positive
Netherlands	Agreed with emphasis on self-responsibility		Moderate agreement	Appropriate way to adapt support
Ireland		Agree		No information
United Kingdom		No information because of lack of evaluation		
Sweden				

Case management - only for target groups?

Case management clients are traditionally a very heterogeneous group consisting of people who have been remote from the labour market, in some cases for many years. The reasons for this may be to do with lack of skills, or deprofessionalisation through long-term unemployment, or addiction or debt problems. Within this heterogeneous circle of case management clients individual target groups can often be identified. When applying case management, however, it is practically a philosophical question whether to target specific groups or to use a universal approach.¹³

The purpose of targeting efforts on individual groups is clear: by helping people with similar problems, a degree of professionalism can be developed in dealing with individual difficulties that limit integration in employment. This means that the needs of the target groups are more successfully met and services are better "tailored". For instance, if we take single parents as a target group, integration work will often primarily involve organizing appropriate child care. With former prisoners and the homeless, on the other hand, the focus is on completely different aspects.

¹³ Germany, Spain, France and Denmark have specifically said that they do not target particular groups. There, access to case management is determined by the case manager himself, or else the case management concept determines who can use it as a service.

Young people are an immediate focus as a target group - they were singled out in all the countries surveyed. Examples here include the United Kingdom with its "New Deal for young people" and the Netherlands with its task force on youth unemployment. Most of the countries have special programmes dealing with young people's problems. Other target groups include:

Single parents/job returnees¹⁴ - these are a particular focus in the United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand.

- Former prisoners - the United Kingdom has developed a support scheme under the New Deal programme for those released from prison.
- Ethnic minorities/those with a migrant background - Sweden has specifically identified people with a migrant background as a target group for support.
- People with disabilities or health problems - these are a focus in the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Since the aim is to use case management to increase the proportion of the population in active employment, a further target group is unemployed people not previously covered by any State support schemes and not dependent on State benefits. This is another area in which the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have specialized.

Comparing rates of contact: how often does a case manager see his clients?

Trust and close cooperation are vital in case management. In order to lay solid foundations for successful integration work, case managers and clients must establish and maintain the closest possible contact. All the countries studied offer various ways of doing this: telephone calls, internet contacts and face-to-face conversations, the last of these being by far the most common.

However, the necessary rate of contact, in other words the minimum frequency with which a case manager should invite his client for an interview, is interpreted very differently. Only three countries, Germany, Ireland and Denmark, leave it entirely up to their case managers and the clients to decide how often they feel they want to have contact. All the others make it a more or less formal requirement that clients should be seen at least every three months. The "leader" here is the United Kingdom, where the rate of contact - depending on the client group - is as often as once a week.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ireland in particular focuses care on those returning to work.

¹⁵ The duration of the interviews always depends on the individual, but ranges from 45 to 90 minutes in all the countries studied.

Table 4. Rate of contact: how often do the case manager and client meet?

Germany	Individually tailored - the case manager decides how often he should see each client individually.
Denmark	
Ireland	
France	Contact every two weeks or at least once a quarter
Spain	Monthly
Belgium	Regionally- every month (minimum of 1-3 times per year)
United Kingdom	Tailored to the target group - weekly visits/interviews, minimum of one interview every three months
Netherlands	Every three months
Sweden	

Penalties in case management - help or hindrance?

The guidance provided as part of case management has to tread an extremely fine line between completely voluntary participation and enforced cooperation:

- Voluntary participation in case management promotes motivation to cooperate, the assumption being that a voluntary decision to undergo case management means that client and case manager develop a productive working relationship more quickly. If a client takes part entirely voluntarily, it is hoped that the relationship will be more durable.
- However, there is also an element of compulsion with case management. Society has a legitimate interest in the client's cooperation if he is receiving public social security benefits. He is required to cooperate in being (re)-integrated in employment, and if he refuses, penalties are applied which temporarily reduce or even completely suspend his benefits. This places constructive cooperation between case manager and client within narrow margins.

Because of the close link with the payment of State benefits in all the countries studied, all of them see it as a legitimate step to reduce these benefits (even down to zero). Clients must actively cooperate in case management in order to be able to claim unemployment benefit.¹⁶

The only differences are in the extent to which penalties are applied. A distinction is often drawn between penalties for young people and young adults and penalties for adults,¹⁷ with stricter penalties in the age group up to 25 if the person concerned does not cooperate or completely refuses the guidance offered. The countries which place greater weight on job-seekers' self-responsibility tend to apply penalties and cut benefits more often. The Netherlands and Sweden, for example, state that up to 30 per cent of clients are regularly

¹⁶ No penalties were applied during the pilot phase in Spain, but as case management is rolled out across the country rules are to come in introducing penalties for those who do not cooperate.

¹⁷ The young people/young adults target group is defined in all the countries as up to the age of 25.

penalized, while in other countries the percentage is in low single figures, or else they cannot provide any valid data because of their limited experience.

Conclusion: Case management as a win-win situation

We initially suggested that case management is both innovative and old-fashioned. Because of its innovative nature, the scope for evaluating the success of case management and its cost-benefit ratio still varies enormously from one country to another. In particular it is still too early to produce a comparative evaluation between countries, even if individual countries are able to say to what extent they are integrating people in employment through individual guidance. The data available gain validity the longer a country has been using case management. This might be a starting point for further studies.

At this point it is also still an open question whether, for instance, successful case management follows a particular development or operational pattern, and how far differences between countries justify or explain differences in performance. What is clear, however, is that case management is seen and used in all countries as a valuable and effective instrument in combating long-term unemployment and in integrating people who are traditionally difficult to reach, even if the individual guidance offered cannot necessarily be called case management.

It appears, then, that "old-fashioned" case management is, after all, a very effective way of "drawing" people back to the labour market, since if it is applied consistently it produces a win-win situation for everyone concerned: the client wins because he is (re)-integrated in the labour market and can thus earn a living free of State support, the employer wins because he has been able to fill a post, and "public funds" win, because the work of the case manager, whether tax- or contribution-funded, relieves some of the burden on them. In economic terms case management helps to ensure that all groups in society are appropriately involved in the labour market. And this is something that benefits the whole of society, as well as the public employment service, which is responsible for it.

Table 5. Qualifications and skills required by case managers¹⁸

	Spain	France	Germany	Belgium	Denmark	Netherlands	Ireland	United Kingdom	New Zealand
Course of study or minimum level required on leaving school	Course required	Minimum "Bac +2"	Required because of certification	Qualification in psychology or teaching	Course in social work	High level of training desirable	Degree in adult education	No special requirements	One-year training course (recognised qualification as "Case Manager")
Professional experience	–	–	At least 2 years' case work	–	Higher education enables person to work as case manager	–	Required	Required	Required to a limited extent
Legal knowledge	–	–	Required	Required	–	Basic requirement for job	Required	Required, particularly benefits law	Required to a limited extent
Knowledge of data protection	–	–	Required	–	–	–	Required	–	Required
Knowledge of labour market and job-seeker/careers guidance	–	–	Required	Required	–	–	Required	Required	Required
Mediation	–	–	–	Required	–	–	–	–	–

¹⁸ Sweden is not included in this table because it does not have any special qualification requirements. Case managers are 'simply' recruited from employment agency staff and have the most varied background possible.

	Spain	France	Germany	Belgium	Denmark	Netherlands	Ireland	United Kingdom	New Zealand
Technical moderation	Required	–	Required	Required	–	Required ¹⁹	–	Required	Required, particularly for assessment
Conducting interviews	Required	–	Required	Required	–	Required	–	Required	Required
Guidance methods	–	–	Required	Required	–	Required, with emphasis on motivating clients	–	Required	Required
Recruited mainly from internal employment service staff	Yes, professional experience in public administration required	Yes	–	No	–	–	–	Yes	Required to a limited extent
Other	Specialist knowledge of languages (e.g. Basque, French, English)	Mainly "on-the-job training" Mentor system to provide support	Focus on networking Supervision	–	–	Specialist IT knowledge required as basic Skills in conducting case conferences	Focus on networking Equal opportunities knowledge required	Specialist IT knowledge required as basic Knowledge of specific target groups	Assessment with reference to drugs problems, literacy and mental health (carried out by health experts)

¹⁹ Technical moderation, conducting interviews and guidance methods are classified together with analysis techniques for individual chance-risk profiles in the Netherlands.

Design of the study

The questionnaire on which this study is based was developed by a working group in the follow-up to an international ISSA workshop in Brussels on the subject of case management, and was sent out to the countries which took part in the workshop. It was completed by officials in the public employment service. The data reflect the situation in 2006, and the questionnaires were completed between mid-2006 and early 2007.

Participants in the study

The following countries took part in the study:

- Sweden
- Germany
- Ireland
- Netherlands
- Spain
- France
- Belgium
- United Kingdom
- Denmark
- New Zealand
- Australia