

Recurrent Administrative Load in Temporary Employment

Compliance recurrence, onboarding friction, and early attrition in Canadian light industrial staffing

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Abstract

Onboarding in temporary staffing is treated as a threshold: a set of forms completed once, after which the worker is available. We argue that the framing is wrong in both directions. We ask, first, what share of early attrition in temporary light industrial placement is attributable to administrative and documentation friction rather than to job content, pay or working conditions; and second, what share of ongoing administrative load is recurrent rather than novel. On the first we report a negative result: no peer-reviewed or government study performs the decomposition, and the figures in circulation trace to surveys whose methodology is not published. What the literature does contain points elsewhere. In the strongest available meta-analytic test the only significant pathway from a realistic job preview to voluntary turnover runs through perceived organisational honesty, a property of process rather than of job content, while the met-expectations pathway is indistinguishable from zero. We also show that administrative burden theory, built to analyse exactly these costs, has never been transferred to employment onboarding. On the second question we build a model from primary regulatory sources: under a central parameterisation about two thirds of worker-level document events belong to types that repeat, driven by a per-assignment statutory disclosure and by a record of employment triggered by any seven-day earnings gap.

Keywords: administrative burden; onboarding; organisational socialization; early turnover; temporary help agencies; credential expiry; employment standards; record of employment; Ontario; British Columbia; Alberta

JEL classification: H83, J41, J63, K31, M12

1 Introduction

A temporary staffing agency does two kinds of paperwork. The first kind gets a new worker into the system: identity, tax forms, policy acknowledgements, a safety training record. The second kind keeps that worker placeable: an assignment disclosure, a record of employment, a certificate that has to be renewed before it lapses. Almost all industry attention, and almost all software, addresses the first kind. This paper is about the fact that the second kind is larger, and about what the administrative encounter does to whether the worker stays at all.

The two questions we ask look separate and share a mechanism.

Research question 1. In temporary and light industrial employment, what share of early attrition, from the first shift through the first thirty days, is attributable to administrative and documentation friction, as distinct from job-content mismatch, pay, or working conditions?

Research question 2. Because temporary workforce compliance rests on credentials and disclosures that recur on fixed cycles and on per-assignment triggers, what share of ongoing administrative load is recurrent rather than novel?

The shared mechanism is that in this employment structure the administrative process is not a gate the worker passes once. It is a recurring feature of the job. Under Ontario law the worker is an assignment employee whose relationship with the agency persists between assignments, and the statute attaches a fresh written disclosure obligation to every assignment offered (Ontario ESA Policy and Interpretation Manual n.d.). A gap of seven consecutive calendar days without work and without insurable earnings is an interruption of earnings, which starts a five-day clock on a record of employment (ESDC n.d.). A worker who takes five assignments in a year with gaps between them does not experience onboarding once. They experience it, in attenuated form, five times. If administrative friction affects retention, this structure applies it repeatedly, and it applies it to a workforce that is already the second most short-tenured in the Canadian economy.

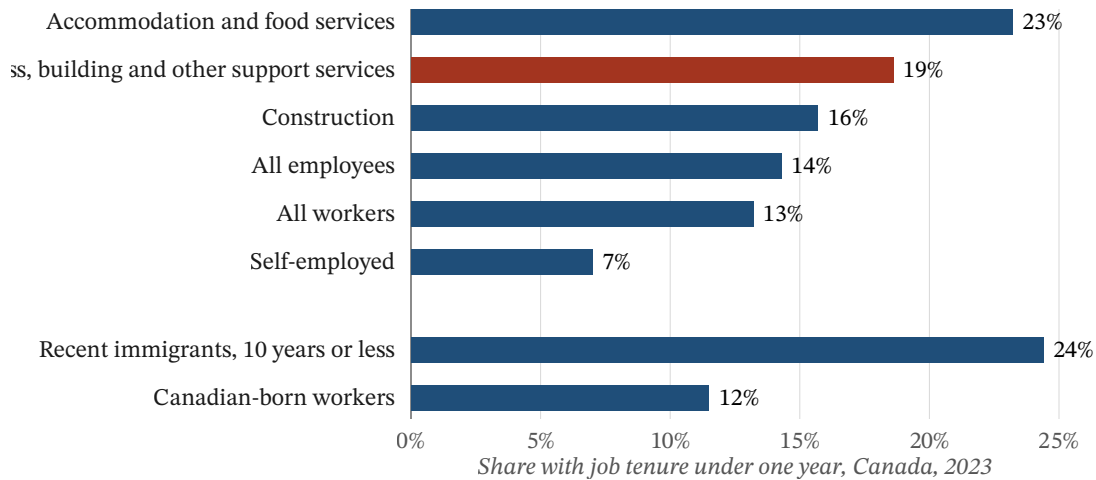


Figure 1. Where short tenure concentrates in Canada. The industry aggregate that contains employment services, and therefore temporary help agencies, has the second highest incidence of tenure under one year of any industry grouping, behind only accommodation and food services. The lower pair shows the same measure by immigration status, a division that matters because the population most exposed to short tenure is also the population for whom the learning cost of an unfamiliar administrative process is highest.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Quality of Employment in Canada: Job tenure, 2023* (Catalogue 14-28-0001). National statistical agency. “Business, building and other support services” is the North American Industry Classification System sector 56 aggregate that contains employment services (5613). Statistics Canada does not publish the sub-industry separately in this release.

2 Evidence base and review protocol

This paper is a structured evidence review. It is not a systematic review in the PRISMA sense, and it is not a statistical meta-analysis: we do not pool effect sizes into a summary estimate, because the studies bearing on the question measure different constructs on different populations and a pooled estimate would be uninterpretable. Where several studies report an estimate of the same parameter we tabulate them side by side with the number of independent samples and the total participants, and we let the reader see the dispersion rather than average it away. The protocol is set out here so that the review can be audited and repeated.

2.1 Scope and inclusion

The scope is the organisational socialization and newcomer adjustment literature, the employee turnover literature, the public administration literature on administrative burden, the published text of the employment standards and consumer protection instruments governing staffing agencies in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, the occupational health and safety credential regimes of those provinces, and official Canadian and United States labour statistics. A source was included if it bore directly on one of the constructs in the research question, or if it established the absence of evidence on one of them. Recency was not an inclusion criterion: the foundational results in several of these literatures are decades old and remain the best available, and where a newer estimate supersedes an older one we report both and say which is current.

2.2 Search

The search was iterative rather than a single indexed query. It proceeded from the constructs in the research question outwards, through citation chains, through the reference lists of the meta-analyses and reviews retrieved, and through the publication lists of the statistical agencies and regulators with jurisdiction over the setting. Because the search was iterative, we do not report a records-screened count; a screening count implies a single reproducible query, and reporting one here would overstate the formality of the method. This is the principal respect in which the review falls short of a systematic review, and it is stated rather than concealed. Searching concluded in July 2026.

2.3 Verification

Every source cited was retrieved and read at the address given in the reference list. No figure, effect size, quotation, statutory provision or interval appears anywhere in this paper unless it was read in a retrieved document. Where a publisher platform refused access, we substituted an institutional repository, an author-hosted manuscript, or a bibliographic index record, and where only an abstract could be reached we report the design without reporting quantities that the abstract does not carry. Sources we expected to exist and could not verify were omitted rather than cited from memory, and the substantive omissions are named in the limitations section. Statutory provisions, renewal intervals and filing deadlines were taken from the regulator’s or programme authority’s own published text rather than from any secondary summary, and the relevant wording is quoted at the point of use.

2.4 Classification

Sources are classified by publication type on retrieval, and the class travels with the source: it is stated in the note to any figure or table that draws on it, and the full assignment is tabulated in the appendix. The distinction that matters most here is between evidence produced by parties with a commercial interest in the answer and evidence produced by parties without one. Of the 45 sources in this paper, 12 are peer-reviewed or peer-reviewed-adjacent, 26 are from statistical agencies, government departments or regulators, and 7 are from industry bodies, research centres, or vendor and practitioner publications.

Table 1. Composition of the evidence base, by source class.

Source class	Sources	Share (%)
Peer-reviewed	11	24
Working paper	1	2
National statistical agency	5	11
Government department or agency	4	9
Regulator or statute	17	38
Research centre	3	7
Industry body	3	7

Source class	Sources	Share (%)
Author's own research programme	1	2
Total	45	100

Notes: Classification is by publication type, assigned on retrieval and not revised afterwards. “Peer-reviewed” covers journal articles and peer-reviewed volume chapters; working papers, dissertations and open courseware are counted separately because they carry a different evidential weight. “Regulator or statute” covers a regulator’s own published guidance and the text of a regulation. “Vendor or practitioner publication” covers material published by firms selling into the market under study, and by practitioner magazines; every figure taken from that class is identified as such at the point of use, in the figure or table note as well as in this appendix.

2.5 Negative findings

This review reports four findings of the form “this has not been measured.” Such a claim is weaker than a claim about the world and we mark the difference throughout: what we assert is that we searched a stated body of literature by a stated method and did not find the result, not that the result does not exist. Where a retrieved document was examined specifically to confirm that it does not contain a quantity, that is recorded as a verified negative and the document is cited for the absence.

3 The attrition question

3.1 What the tenure data shows, and what it cannot show

In 2023, 13.2 per cent of Canadian workers had job tenure of under one year, a rate higher among employees (14.3 per cent) than among the self-employed (7.0 per cent). By industry the incidence was highest in accommodation and food services at 23.2 per cent and second highest in business, building and other support services at 18.6 per cent, the sector aggregate that contains employment services. Among immigrants who had been in Canada ten years or less the rate was 24.4 per cent, against 11.5 per cent for Canadian-born workers (Statistics Canada 2024). US figures are broadly similar in shape: median tenure of 3.9 years overall, 22 per cent of wage and salary workers with a year or less, and the lowest medians in leisure and hospitality (2.1 years) and service occupations (2.7 years) (BLS 2024).

Two things about these figures matter for the question. First, they measure a stock rather than a hazard: they tell us how many people currently hold a job they started within the year, not when in tenure separations occur. Second, neither statistical agency isolates agency-assigned work. For temporary staffing the only tenure figure we could verify is from an industry body, which reports that “the average tenure of temporary and contract employees is just under three months” on the basis of a survey now more than a decade old (ASA n.d.).¹

1. The same body publishes two figures that independently corroborate the magnitude: about 11 million temporary and contract employees worked for US staffing companies during 2024, against nearly 2.2 million during an average week (ASA) n.d.. The ratio implies roughly five engagement spells per average-week position per year, and therefore a mean spell close to ten weeks. We use this in the model in section 5.3 and flag the derivation there.

The absence of a hazard function here is not a gap in our search. The field's own centenary review of turnover theory states that employers "should also pay special attention to on-boarding practices...as longstanding research has shown that most turnover occurs among new hires who face difficulty adjusting," and cites earlier work advocating survival and hazard function methods, without presenting hazard rates or a peak-risk period (Hom et al. 2017). The claim that early turnover dominates is asserted rather than quantified in the review that surveys a century of the literature. We could not locate hazard estimates for early tenure in warehousing or in agency work; the nearest verified evidence that employment hazards decline sharply with tenure comes from cross-country development economics (Donovan et al. 2020), and the one large study of temporary help agency use and low earners reports no assignment-duration or turnover figures at all (Andersson et al. 2009).

What we searched for and did not find. We searched specifically for a peer-reviewed or government study that decomposes early attrition in temporary or light industrial work into administrative friction, job-content mismatch, pay, and working conditions. We found none. Searches on this question return content marketing from human capital software vendors, and the widely circulated statistics of the form "X per cent of new hires leave because of poor onboarding" trace to surveys whose methodology is not published. We cite none of them. The first research question currently has no empirical answer.

3.2 What the socialization literature can and cannot tell us

The organisational socialization literature is large, careful, and mostly about attitudes. The current state of the art synthesises 256 studies, 183 with sufficient data for meta-analysis, and reports that role clarity, social acceptance, task mastery and perceived fit all correlate meaningfully with turnover intentions and considerably less with turnover itself (Bauer et al. 2025). Perceived fit correlates $-.31$ with intentions and $-.16$ with behaviour; social acceptance $-.27$ and $-.12$; role clarity $-.25$ and $-.09$.

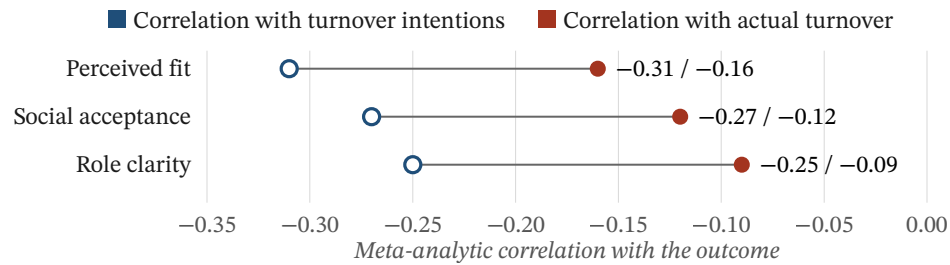


Figure 2. The gap between what newcomers say and what they do. Each of the three adjustment constructs for which both outcomes are reported correlates two to three times more strongly with *intention* to leave than with leaving. The intention estimates rest on ten to twenty-eight independent samples and thousands of participants; the behavioural estimates rest on five samples each. This is the central measurement problem in the onboarding literature, and it is why claims that better onboarding reduces turnover are weaker than their circulation implies.

Source: Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady and Bodner (2025), *Journal of Management* 51(1). Peer reviewed. Synthesis of 256 studies, 183 with sufficient data. Task mastery is omitted from the plot because the synthesis reports it against actual turnover ($-.10$, $k = 4$) but we could not verify a corresponding turnover-intentions estimate; the value we can verify appears in Table 2. See Table 2 for the sample counts behind each plotted estimate.

The asymmetry is not just in the coefficients, it is in the evidence base. The intention estimates rest on ten to twenty-eight independent samples and thousands of participants. The behavioural estimates rest on four or five samples each. In the earlier review in the same research programme, the direct path from socialization tactics to actual turnover rested on four samples, and the path from newcomer information seeking to turnover was not statistically significant (Bauer et al. 2007).

Table 2. What the socialization meta-analyses actually report. The behavioural estimates rest on far fewer samples than the attitudinal ones.

Construct and outcome	r	k	N	Source
<i>Correlations with turnover intentions</i>				
Perceived fit	-.31	10	3,072	Bauer 2025
Social acceptance	-.27	28	7,040	Bauer 2025
Role clarity	-.25	28	6,842	Bauer 2025
<i>Correlations with actual turnover</i>				
Perceived fit	-.16	5	1,253	Bauer 2025
Social acceptance	-.12	5	1,415	Bauer 2025
Task mastery	-.10	4	1,051	Bauer 2025
Role clarity	-.09	5	1,472	Bauer 2025
<i>Earlier estimates in the same programme</i>				
Role clarity to turnover	-.11	4	315	Bauer 2007
Social acceptance to turnover	-.16	4	626	Bauer 2007
Self-efficacy to turnover	-.16	2	272	Bauer 2007
Socialization tactics to turnover	-.14	4	1,466	Bauer 2007

Construct and outcome	r	k	N	Source
Information seeking to turnover	-.08, not significant	3	369	Bauer 2007
Role clarity to intentions to remain	.23	14	2,239	Bauer 2007
Socialization tactics to intentions to remain	.34	5	809	Bauer 2007

Notes: k is the number of independent samples and N the total participants. The 2025 synthesis covers 256 studies, 183 with sufficient data for meta-analysis, and supersedes the 2007 review of 70 samples. Note that the direct tactics-to-actual-turnover estimate in the earlier review rests on four samples, and that information seeking to turnover is not statistically significant. The 2025 review also reports that even before pandemic-era turnover, “over one-third of new hires left their organizations within the first year.”

None of this makes the literature unreliable. It makes it a literature about intentions, and it means that the practitioner inference from “onboarding improves adjustment” to “onboarding reduces turnover” is carrying more weight than the behavioural evidence can bear. Related syntheses reach the same qualitative conclusion in the same qualitative terms: socialization strategies are “modestly associated with job performance and turnover” and “moderately associated” with fit perceptions, satisfaction, commitment and intentions to quit (Hall and Paul 2020). The institutionalised-tactics literature reports the same directional pattern (Saks et al. 2007), and the mechanism study most often cited for the relational pathway follows more than 500 employees across a first year (Allen and Shanock 2013).²

3.3 *The met-expectations null, and why it reframes the question*

The most useful result for RQ1 arrives from an unexpected direction, and it cuts against the job-content account rather than for it.

Realistic job previews are the classic intervention against early attrition, and the theory behind them is a job-content theory: tell people what the work is really like, their expectations will be met, and they will stay. A meta-analytic path analysis across 52 studies, roughly 17,000 participants and 75 unique effects tested that mechanism directly. The preview’s own effect on turnover was small ($r = -.04$ overall, $-.07$ on voluntary turnover). Decomposed, the direct path from perceived organisational honesty to voluntary turnover was $-.38$, from met expectations $-.15$, and from role clarity $-.11$. The indirect effect of the preview through honesty was $-.052$ and significant. Through met expectations it was $.002$. Through role clarity it was $.015$ (Earnest et al. 2011).

2. For both of those we were able to verify the citation and design but not the effect sizes, because the publisher platforms were inaccessible. We therefore report no numbers from them.

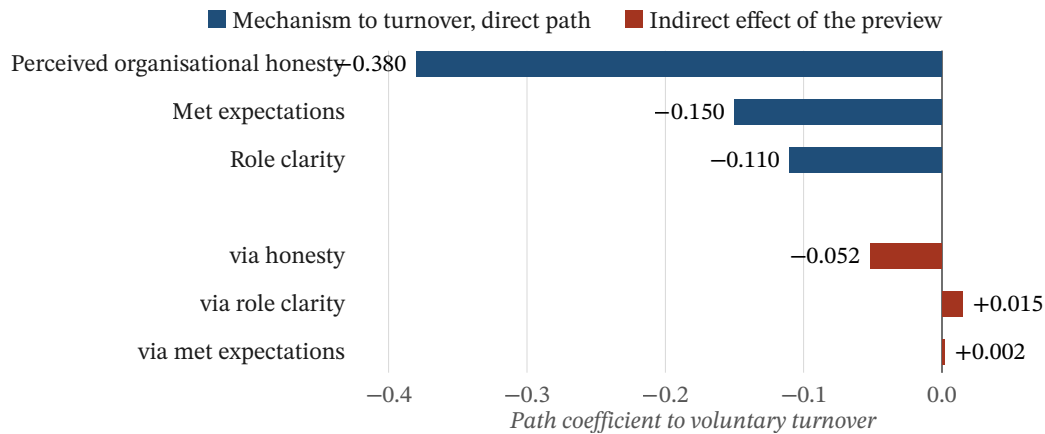


Figure 3. What actually carries the effect of a realistic job preview on turnover. The upper group shows each mechanism's direct path to voluntary turnover; the lower group shows the indirect effect of the preview transmitted through that mechanism. Only the honesty pathway is significant. The met-expectations pathway, which is the mechanism the entire “set realistic expectations” prescription assumes, is effectively zero. What predicts staying is not that the job matched the description. It is that the employer's process read as honest, which is a property of administration rather than of job content.

Source: Earnest, Allen and Landis (2011), *Personnel Psychology* 64. Peer reviewed. Meta-analytic path analysis, $k = 52$ studies, roughly 17,000 participants, 75 unique effects. Reported direct effects of the preview itself were small: $r = -.04$ on turnover overall and $-.07$ on voluntary turnover.

Read that carefully. The mechanism the entire prescription assumes, expectations being met by the job, transmits essentially none of the effect. What carries it is whether the employer's process read as honest. And perceived honesty is not a property of the work. It is a property of the administrative encounter: whether what the worker was told matched what happened, whether the forms asked for what was actually needed, whether the pay arrived as described. The onboarding literature's own strongest causal test points at administration rather than at job content.³

This does not answer RQ1. It relocates it. If perceived honesty of process is the operative variable, then the right decomposition is not “administration versus job content” but rather which specific features of the administrative encounter generate or destroy the impression that the employer is dealing straight. That is a question about burden, and there is a literature about burden that nobody has pointed at employment.

4 Administrative burden as the missing construct

4.1 The concept

Public administration has spent a decade building exactly the analytical apparatus this problem needs. The founding statement develops administrative burden as a variable in how citizens experience the state, conceptualised “as a function of learning, psychological, and

3. The independent research-centre summary of the realistic job preview literature reaches a compatible and deflationary conclusion, reporting that previews “result in small improvements in job retention under certain conditions” and that they also reduce perceived organisational attractiveness (Graef, 2020).

compliance costs” (Moynihan et al. 2015).⁴ The leading reconceptualisation reframes burden around “onerous experiences” and proposes a framework “focused on time, money, effort, and psychological costs,” taking as its point of departure the definition of burden as an individual’s experience of policy implementation as onerous (Daigneault 2024).

The four-cost reframing transfers to onboarding more cleanly than the original three, because a worker asked to produce documents faces a genuine time cost, sometimes a money cost, an effort cost, and a psychological cost, and these are separable in a way that is operationally actionable.

4.2 The boundary, and the transfer we propose

The literature has a hard boundary and it is explicit about it. A systematic review of 119 articles and working papers finds the field concentrated on means-tested welfare benefits, with 82 per cent of studies conducted in the United States, Europe or Australia, and notes that only five studies examine how experiences of burden translate into actual outcomes (Halling and Baekgaard 2024). The reconceptualisation confines its scope explicitly to citizen-state interactions (Daigneault 2024). Across 119 studies, none is about onboarding into employment.

We propose the transfer, and state what it predicts in a form that could be tested.

Proposed transfer to the worker-employer onboarding encounter

- *Learning cost.* What the worker must figure out: which documents are required, in what form, by when, and what happens if they are late. Prediction: learning cost falls hardest on workers with the least prior exposure to Canadian employment administration, which is the population with the highest incidence of short tenure (Statistics Canada 2024).
- *Compliance cost.* Time, travel, fees and document acquisition. In temporary work this recurs per assignment rather than per hire, which is the subject of section 5.
- *Psychological cost.* Stigma, loss of autonomy, and the sense of being processed. This is the channel that plausibly connects burden to the perceived honesty variable that carries the whole realistic-preview effect (Earnest et al. 2011).
- *Time cost.* Elapsed delay between completing an obligation and becoming placeable. In a workforce paid by the shift, an administrative delay is a direct earnings loss, which has no analogue in the welfare setting where the concept was developed.

4. We were able to reach only the abstract of this article, so we do not quote its definitions of the three cost categories. The tripartite framing is quoted from the abstract itself.

4.3 Calibration: how large should we expect the effect to be?

One verified result gives a sense of scale, and it argues for modesty. A two-phase study of an active labour market programme, combining qualitative interviews with a quasi-experiment across 75,451 unique users exposed to advertisements, found that reducing informational burden raised engagement: an intervention clarifying programme specifics produced an odds ratio of 1.16 ($p = .021$), and one clarifying eligibility 1.18 ($p = .009$) (Nagtegaal et al. 2026).

These are real, replicable, and small. They are useful precisely because they are small: they set an upper bound on what a purely informational fix to administrative burden should be expected to achieve, and that bound is far below the effects claimed in vendor material. An honest version of the administrative burden argument in staffing predicts single-digit percentage improvements from process changes, not the transformations that are advertised.

5 The recurrence question

5.1 Why the paperwork scales with assignments, not headcount

RQ2 has a determinate answer in a way RQ1 does not, because the triggers are written into statute and can be read off.

Ontario's Part XVIII.1 imposes on a temporary help agency a written disclosure for *each work assignment offered*, covering the client's legal and operating names, the client's contact information, the wage rate or commission and benefits, the hours of work, a general description of the work, the pay period and pay day, and the estimated term of the assignment where that information is available. If the information is given orally the agency "shall also provide the information...in writing, as soon as possible after offering the work assignment" (Ontario ESA Policy and Interpretation Manual n.d., s. 74.6). This is a per-assignment obligation with seven required fields. It is not an onboarding form.

The federal side works the same way. An interruption of earnings occurs after "7 consecutive calendar days with no work and no insurable earnings from the employer." A second trigger applies where earnings fall below 60 per cent of regular weekly earnings, but only where the reason is illness, injury, quarantine, pregnancy, parental leave, or compassionate care or family caregiver leave. A record of employment is then due within five calendar days for paper, or five calendar days after the end of the pay period for most electronic filings (ESDC n.d.). In temporary staffing, where assignments end and gaps open routinely, record of employment volume is a function of assignment intermittency, not of hiring.

One commonly assumed annual obligation turns out not to be one. Individuals "do not have to fill out a new TD1 form every year unless there is a change"; the form is required when someone has a new employer or payer, and within seven days of a change to their situation (Canada Revenue Agency n.d.). An operation running an annual TD1 refresh is doing work the Canada Revenue Agency does not ask for. The counter-observation matters for temp staffing though: a worker with a new employer needs a fresh TD1, so re-registration after a lapse still triggers it.

Table 3. Statutory documentation events in a temporary help agency, and what triggers each one. The trigger column is the whole argument: most of these are keyed to an assignment or an earnings gap, not to a hire.

Obligation	Trigger	Deadline	Repeats?
Agency identity in writing: legal and operating name, address, telephone number, contact names	Becoming an assignment employee	“As soon as possible” after	Once per worker
Assignment particulars in writing: client legal and operating names, client contact information, wage rate or commission and benefits, hours of work, general description of the work, pay period and pay day, estimated term	Each work assignment offered	On offering; if given orally, in writing “as soon as possible” after	Every assignment
Copy of the most recent document published by the Director, and an inquiry as to whether a translation exists	Becoming an assignment employee	On becoming an assignment employee	When the Director republishes
Record of employment	Interruption of earnings: seven consecutive calendar days with no work and no insurable earnings. A separate 60 per cent of regular weekly earnings trigger applies only where the reason is illness, injury, quarantine, pregnancy, parental leave, or compassionate care or family caregiver leave	Five calendar days, with variants by pay frequency	Every qualifying gap
Federal and provincial TD1 forms	A new employer, or a change to personal tax credit entitlements	On starting work; within seven days of a change	On change only, not annually
Hours worked per assignment employee per client per day and per week	Ongoing, and separately imposed on the client as well as the agency	Retain three years	Continuous
Written notice of assignment termination	Termination of an assignment	Retain three years	Every termination

Notes: Provisions as verified: agency information under s. 74.5(1); assignment particulars under s. 74.6(1) and 74.6(2); the Director’s document and translation inquiry under s. 74.7(3) and 74.7(4); the prohibition on charging assignment employees a fee under s. 74.8(1) (Ontario ESA Policy and Interpretation Manual n.d.). Record retention periods from Ontario, Record keeping n.d.: three years for most items, five years for vacation entitlement. Record of employment triggers and deadlines from Employment and Social Development Canada n.d., TD1 from Canada Revenue Agency n.d..

5.2 Credentials that expire, and credentials that do not

The second recurrence driver is credential expiry, and here the honest picture is more mixed than industry practice assumes. Some mandatory requirements have a fixed statutory or program cycle. Working at heights training in Ontario is “valid for 3 years after the successful completion of an approved program” (Ontario n.d.), though its scope is construction projects rather than warehousing. Joint health and safety committee certification, which does apply at warehouses and food plants with twenty or more workers, requires a refresher “within 3 years of the date of certification” (Ontario n.d.). Food handler certificates in Ontario are valid for five years under the framework of O. Reg. 493/17 (York Region Public Health n.d.; City of Toronto n.d.), and British Columbia’s FOODSAFE Level 1 certificates are “valid for 5 years,” while Level 2 has no expiry (FOODSAFE n.d.).

Others do not. Ontario’s basic awareness training under O. Reg. 297/13 is mandatory for every worker and every supervisor, and neither the regulator’s guide nor its records page states an expiry or a repetition requirement (Ontario n.d.). WHMIS guidance says an employer “should review their overall WHMIS education and training program at least annually,” which is advice rather than a statutory interval (CCOHS n.d.).

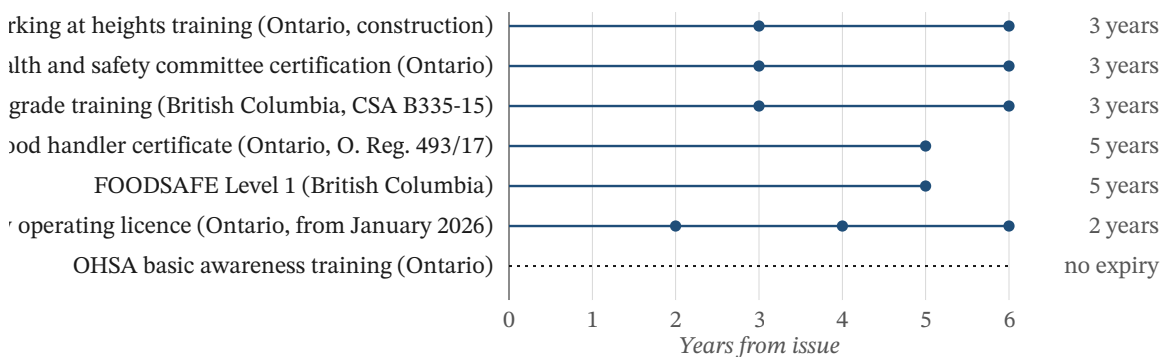


Figure 4. Verified statutory and program renewal cycles relevant to Canadian warehouse and food processing work. Each marker is a compliance event that will recur for as long as the worker remains eligible for that class of assignment. The final row is the contrast case and is essential to reading the rest honestly: basic awareness training is mandatory for every worker and every supervisor in Ontario, and the regulation states no expiry and no repetition requirement. Not all mandatory paperwork recurs, and a model that assumes it all does will overstate the recurrent share.

Source: Renewal intervals as stated by each regulator or program authority; see Table 4 for the exact provision and wording. Regulator publications. The lift truck interval is verified for British Columbia only. We searched for an Ontario statutory equivalent and did not find one: the three-year figure originates in CSA Standard B335-15 rather than in Ontario law, and only training-provider pages assert it as an Ontario requirement.

Table 4. Verified renewal intervals. Each row was read in the regulator’s or program authority’s own published text.

Requirement	Interval	Jurisdiction	Instrument and verified wording
<i>Credentials with a stated expiry</i>			

Requirement	Interval	Jurisdiction	Instrument and verified wording
Working at heights training	3 years	Ontario	O. Reg. 213/91. “valid for 3 years after the successful completion of an approved program” (Ontario n.d.). Applies to construction projects, not warehousing.
Joint health and safety committee certification	3 years	Ontario	Occupational Health and Safety Act. Refresher required “within 3 years of the date of certification” (Ontario n.d.). Applies at 20 or more workers.
Lift truck upgrade training	At least 3 years	British Columbia	CSA Standard B335-15. “Workers must be given upgrade training at least every three years” (WorkSafeBC n.d.).
Food handler certificate	5 years	Ontario	O. Reg. 493/17 requires a certified food handler on site; certificates “valid for five years” (York Region n.d., Toronto n.d.).
FOODSAFE Level 1	5 years	British Columbia	Provincial program. “valid for 5 years and the expiry date is indicated on your certificate” (FOODSAFE n.d.). Level 2 has no expiry.
First aid station attendant certificate	Expiry exists, interval not stated	Ontario	Regulation 1101, s. 8(2) and s. 9(2) require the holder of a “valid” certificate and specify no duration (WSIB n.d.). The interval is set by certifying bodies, not by Ontario regulation.
First aid certificates	Expiry exists, interval not stated	British Columbia	Occupational Health and Safety Regulation Part 3, restructured effective 1 November 2024; certificates expire but the regulator page does not state the term in years (WorkSafeBC).
<i>Recurring obligations that are not worker credentials</i>			
First aid box inspection	Quarterly	Ontario	Regulation 1101, s. 6: inspect “at not less than quarterly intervals” (WSIB n.d.).
Agency operating licence	1 year, then 2 years from January 2026	Ontario	ESA Part XVIII.1. A licence from an application on or after 1 January 2026 “generally expires two years after the date it was issued or renewed” (Ontario n.d.).
<i>Mandatory with no stated expiry</i>			
OHSA basic awareness training	None stated	Ontario	O. Reg. 297/13. Employers must keep a record and provide written proof on request; neither the guide nor the records page states an expiry or repetition requirement (Ontario n.d.).
WHMIS education and training	Annual review advised, not a statutory interval	Federal guidance	Employers “should review their overall WHMIS education and training program at least annually” (CCOHS n.d.). Note “should,” not “must.” We could not verify a statutory annual review clause in Ontario.

Notes: Two corrections to figures that circulate widely in staffing operations. First, there does not appear to be a fixed statutory forklift renewal interval in Ontario law; the three-year figure belongs to a CSA standard and is verified as a regulatory requirement in British Columbia only. Second, the commonly stated three-year first aid validity is set by certifying bodies rather than by Ontario Regulation 1101, which requires only that the certificate be valid. Operations that treat either as an Ontario statutory interval are managing to a rule that we could not locate in the statute.

Two figures that circulate widely in Canadian staffing operations did not survive verification, and we flag them because managing to a rule that does not exist is its own administrative cost.

Two intervals we could not verify

A three-year Ontario forklift renewal. We searched for an Ontario statutory interval and found none. The three-year figure originates in CSA Standard B335-15 and is a stated regulatory requirement in British Columbia, where workers “must be given upgrade training at least every three years” (WorkSafeBC n.d.). Ontario’s requirement runs through operator competency rather than a fixed cycle, and only training-provider pages assert the interval as Ontario law.

A three-year Ontario first aid recertification. Regulation 1101 requires that the first aid station be in the charge of a worker holding a “valid” certificate and specifies no duration (WSIB n.d.). The interval is set by certifying bodies. Note that the same regulation does impose a genuinely recurring obligation that operations often miss: first aid boxes must be inspected “at not less than quarterly intervals.”

5.3 A bottom-up recurrence model

We now put the verified triggers together. The model counts worker-level document events over one year and classifies each by whether its *type* repeats. An event is repeating if a worker who stays will generate it again; one-time if it happens once per worker per agency. This is the classification an operator cares about, because it determines whether work done today is work avoided tomorrow.

$$(1) \quad R = A + (A - 1)g + k + d, \quad N = 4, \quad \text{share} = R / (R + N)$$

Here A is assignments per worker per year, g the share of inter-assignment gaps reaching seven consecutive days, k credential renewal events per worker-year, and d TD1 change events. N counts the four one-time types: agency information under s. 74.5(1), the initial TD1, the awareness training record, and initial credential verification.

Table 5. Recurrence model: parameters, sources, and arithmetic. Every value is either a verified trigger or a stated assumption, and the table says which.

Quantity	Low	Central	High	Basis
<i>Parameters</i>				

Quantity	Low	Central	High	Basis
Assignments per worker per year (<i>A</i>)	2	5	8	Central value from the ratio of annual to average-week temporary and contract employment, 11.0 million to 2.2 million, which implies about five engagement spells per average-week position per year and a mean spell near ten weeks (ASA n.d.). Corroborated by the separately reported average tenure of “just under three months” (ASA n.d.). Range is assumed.
Share of inter-assignment gaps reaching seven consecutive days (<i>g</i>)	0.30	0.50	0.80	<i>Assumed.</i> No published distribution of inter-assignment gap length exists. The seven-day threshold itself is verified (ESDC n.d.).
Credential renewal events per worker-year	0.05	0.16	0.30	Assumed credential mix applied to verified intervals: a three-year interval contributes one third of an event per year per holder and a five-year interval one fifth (Table 4). No published data gives the share of light industrial temporary workers holding each credential.
TD1 change events per worker-year	0.05	0.10	0.20	<i>Assumed.</i> The seven-day deadline on a change, and the absence of any annual requirement, are verified (CRA n.d.).
<i>Event counts per worker-year</i>				
Repeating: assignment disclosures (<i>A</i>)	2.00	5.00	8.00	ESA s. 74.6, one per assignment offered
Repeating: records of employment $((A - 1) \times g)$	0.30	2.00	5.60	Interruption of earnings, seven-day rule
Repeating: credential renewals	0.05	0.16	0.30	Table 4
Repeating: TD1 changes	0.05	0.10	0.20	CRA, on change
Repeating, total	2.40	7.26	14.10	
One-time: agency information, initial TD1, awareness training record, initial credential verification	4.00	4.00	4.00	ESA s. 74.5(1); CRA; O. Reg. 297/13; Table 4
Total events	6.40	11.26	18.10	
Repeating share	37.5%	64.5%	77.9%	

Notes: Classification is by event *type*: an event counts as repeating if its type will recur for a worker who stays, even where the instance observed is the first. The model counts worker-level document events only. It excludes agency-level obligations such as licence renewal and quarterly first aid box inspection, excludes payroll processing, and excludes the client-side hour-tracking obligation. It is therefore a lower bound on total recurrent administrative load. The result is an arithmetic consequence of the stated parameters and is not an empirical estimate.

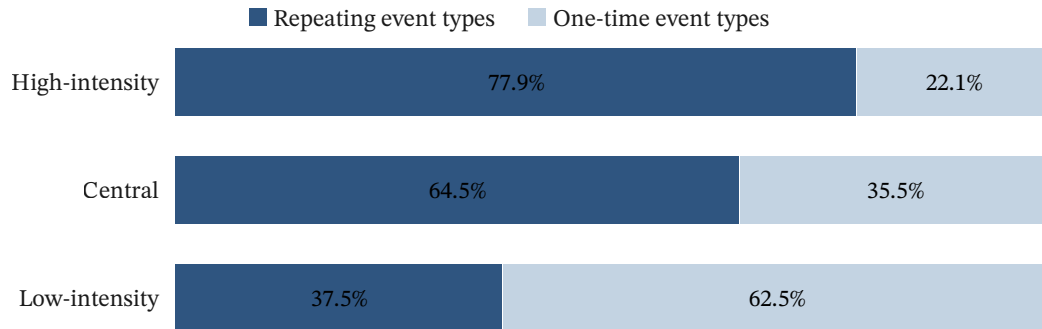


Figure 5. Output of the recurrence model. Under the central parameterisation, roughly two thirds of the worker-level document events an agency handles in a year belong to event types that repeat, and only about one third are the one-time registration work that the word “onboarding” denotes. The driver is not the calendar. It is the assignment count: the per-assignment written disclosure required by the Employment Standards Act and the record of employment triggered by each gap of seven consecutive days both recur within months rather than years. Over a longer tenure the one-time component is fixed while the repeating component grows without bound, so the share rises toward one.

Source: Model constructed for this paper. Event types and their triggers are all from primary regulatory sources (Table 4); the assignment count and gap assumptions are stated parameters, not published values (Table 5). Read this figure as an arithmetic consequence of stated assumptions, not as a measurement.

The central result is that roughly two thirds of worker-level document events belong to repeating types. We want to be exact about what that is and is not. It is arithmetic performed on verified statutory triggers with three stated assumptions, two of which have no published basis at all: the share of gaps reaching seven days, and the credential mix. It is not a measurement. Its value is that it makes the structure visible and the sensitivity explicit: even in the low-intensity case, where a worker takes only two assignments a year and most gaps are short, more than a third of document events are of types that repeat.

Two properties of the model are worth stating because they are robust to the assumptions. First, N is bounded at four and R is not, so the repeating share is increasing in tenure and approaches one for any worker who stays. The intuition that onboarding is the bulk of the paperwork is true only for a workforce that turns over fast enough that nobody reaches their second assignment. Second, the dominant term is A , the assignment count, and A is a property of how the agency books work rather than of how many workers it employs. Two agencies with identical headcount and identical revenue can differ by a factor of four in document volume purely through assignment length.

6 Regulatory divergence across three provinces

An incidental finding of the verification exercise deserves its own section, because it bears on any attempt to build a single compliance process across the three provinces where Canadian light industrial staffing concentrates.

Ontario regulates temporary help agencies under the Employment Standards Act, in a dedicated Part XVIII.1, with mandatory licensing since 1 July 2024, a \$25,000 security per legal entity, and a prohibition on clients knowingly engaging an unlicensed agency (Ontario, ESA licensing guide n.d.; Ontario, licensing overview n.d.). British Columbia regulates employment agencies under its own Employment Standards Act, section 12, with a \$100 application fee and a two-year record retention requirement (British Columbia n.d.). Alberta regulates the employment agency business under the *Consumer Protection Act*, through the Employment Agency Business Licensing Regulation (Alberta n.d.).

That last divergence is structural rather than administrative. In two provinces a staffing agency is regulated as an employer; in the third it is regulated as a business selling a service to consumers. The obligations that follow are differently shaped, and a compliance process designed around Ontario's employment-standards logic will not map onto Alberta's consumer-protection logic by adding fields.

Table 6. Three provinces, three regulatory homes. The divergence is not cosmetic: it puts staffing agencies under employment law in two provinces and under consumer protection law in the third.

	Ontario	British Columbia	Alberta
Governing instrument	Employment Standards Act, 2000, Part XVIII.1	Employment Standards Act, s. 12	Consumer Protection Act, with the Employment Agency Business Licensing Regulation
Licence required	Yes, since 1 July 2024, for agencies and for recruiters	Yes, for employment agencies	Yes, for the employment agency business
Client liability for using an unlicensed agency	Yes, clients are prohibited from knowingly engaging an unlicensed agency	Not stated on the pages verified	Not stated on the pages verified
Application fee	\$750, rising to \$1,500 for applications on or after 1 January 2026	\$100, non-refundable	Not stated on the pages verified
Licence term	One year, becoming two years for applications on or after 1 January 2026	<i>Not stated.</i> The regulation specifies no expiry period for employment agency licences; the one-year term in s. 9 applies to farm labour contractors	Not stated on the pages verified
Security or bond	\$25,000 to the Director of Employment Standards, per legal entity	Not stated on the pages verified	\$25,000 for international recruitment of NOC B, C or D employees

	Ontario	British Columbia	Alberta
Record retention	Three years for most items, five years for vacation entitlement	Two years for agency records, four years for payroll	Not stated on the pages verified
Fees to workers	Prohibited under s. 74.8(1)	Employment agency defined by charging a fee to <i>employers</i>	Prohibited: no fee from any person seeking employment
Notification of change	Not stated on the pages verified	Renewal at least 30 days before expiry	Written notice within 15 days of a change to address, ownership, or cessation

Notes: “Not stated on the pages verified” means the regulator’s published page or the regulation text we retrieved did not state it, and should not be read as an absence of the obligation. The British Columbia licence term is a confirmed negative: we read the regulation and it sets no expiry for employment agency licences, so any operation treating a British Columbia employment agency licence as annual is managing to a rule we could not find. Sources: Ontario licensing guide n.d., Ontario licensing page n.d., Ontario ESA manual n.d., Ontario record keeping n.d., British Columbia employment agencies n.d., B.C. Reg. 396/95 n.d., Alberta employment agency licence n.d., Service Alberta n.d..

One item in that table is a confirmed negative rather than a missing value. We read the British Columbia *Employment Standards Regulation* and it sets no expiry period for employment agency licences; the one-year term that appears in section 10 applies to farm labour contractors (B.C. Reg. 396/95 n.d.). An operation treating a British Columbia employment agency licence as annually renewable is managing to a cycle we could not locate.

7 The small-employer gradient

The last piece of context is who bears this load. Canadian small businesses spent 735 hours on regulatory compliance in 2024, of which 256 hours, about 32 business days, are characterised as eliminable, with aggregate compliance costs of approximately \$51.5 billion. The per-employee gradient is steep: firms with fewer than five employees spent about 198 hours per employee on compliance against about 8 hours for firms with a hundred or more, and \$10,208 per employee against \$1,374 (CFIB 2025).

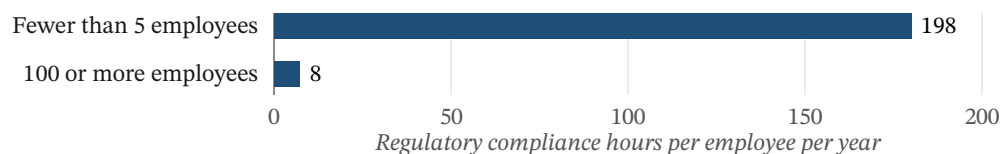


Figure 6. The small-employer gradient in Canadian compliance burden. A firm with fewer than five employees spends about twenty-five times as many compliance hours per employee as a firm with a hundred or more. The same survey puts the cost gradient at \$10,208 per employee against \$1,374. This matters for the argument because the modal temporary staffing agency is small, and because it means administrative burden in this industry is not a rounding error against payroll.

Source: Canadian Federation of Independent Business (2025), *Small businesses spend over 250 hours or 32 business days a year wrapped up in red tape*. Industry body survey. Own survey; not peer reviewed. The CFIB advocates for reduced regulatory burden and therefore has an interest in these figures being large, which readers should weigh. The same release reports total compliance hours of 735 per firm in 2024, of which 256 hours are characterised as eliminable, and aggregate compliance costs of approximately \$51.5 billion.

We cite this with a stated caveat. It is an industry body’s own survey, it is not peer reviewed, and the organisation advocates for reduced regulatory burden and therefore has an interest in the number being large. What survives the caveat is the gradient rather than the level. Compliance work has a large fixed component per obligation and a small variable component per employee, which is why it lands disproportionately on small employers, and the modal Canadian temporary staffing agency is a small employer operating in a sector whose total revenue was \$24.7 billion in 2023 with temporary staffing at 48.7 per cent of sales (Statistics Canada 2025).

8 What measurement would settle it

One definitional choice is inherited rather than invented. Administrative load is measured here in coordinator time per unit of delivered output, which is the quantity the Canadian light industrial benchmark study defines as office minutes per filled shift, namely “coordinator time spent on contact attempts, divided by shifts filled” (Kordis Research n.d.). That denominator matters: an administrative burden measure normalised on headcount will move for reasons that have nothing to do with burden, because headcount and assignment count are only loosely coupled in this industry.

Both questions are answerable with data that already exists or that would be cheap to generate.

For RQ2: instrument the document event, not the document

The recurrence share stops being a model the moment an agency logs, for each document event, its type, its trigger, whether the type has occurred before for that worker, the elapsed time from trigger to completion, and the number of touches required. That is five fields on an event stream most systems already generate implicitly. It would also, incidentally, produce the first published distribution of inter-assignment gap length, which is the parameter our model has to assume.

For RQ1: a hazard model with a document-event covariate

The estimand is the hazard of separation over the first thirty days, with document-event burden as a time-varying covariate and with job content, wage, shift pattern and client site as controls. The design that identifies it exploits variation in administrative friction that is unrelated to job quality, for example a change in a document requirement that affects some workers and not others for reasons of timing rather than of role.

A published-data route that does not require the agency's cooperation

There is one large administrative source that already isolates sub-quarter churn. The Quarterly Workforce Indicators distinguish *Hires New*, workers starting a job they had not held in the previous four quarters, from *Hires New (Stable)*, those whose new job “turned into a job that lasted at least a full quarter” (US Census Bureau n.d.). The complement of the ratio of the two identifies new hires who did not survive one quarter, and it is available by industry, including the temporary help services sub-sector, and by county. This is the most defensible published-data route to an early-attrition figure we found, and it is a better foundation than any vendor statistic. It has been used in exactly this way before, in a brief that derived warehouse turnover rates from these indicators and reported annual separation rates above 100 per cent in several counties (NELP 2020).⁵

A measurement template already exists in another field

Documentation burden has been developed as a measurable construct in healthcare, where a federal evidence review treats clerical burden as quantifiable and links it to clinician outcomes, using measures such as time spent on the electronic health record after hours (Wang et al. 2024). Nothing equivalent exists for workforce administration. The instruments are transferable and the transfer has not been attempted.

9 Discussion

Three implications follow, and each is a claim about design rather than about effort.

The unit of administrative work is the assignment, not the hire. Every statutory trigger we verified that recurs is keyed to an assignment, an earnings gap, or a credential clock. None is keyed to a hire. A process built around onboarding will therefore be well designed for the minority of its own workload, and a system that measures itself on time-to-onboard is measuring the part that does not repeat.

The retention lever, if there is one, runs through perceived honesty rather than through information. This is the least intuitive conclusion in the paper and it has the best evidence behind it. The met-expectations pathway is null and the honesty pathway carries the entire effect (Earnest et al. 2011). Operationally that points away from giving workers more information about the job and towards making sure that what the process tells them is

5. We cite that brief for the derivation method and the underlying government indicators, not for its advocacy framing.

true: that the shift is the shift they were told about, that the pay is the pay that was quoted, that a document asked for is a document actually needed. Administrative accuracy, not administrative volume.

Expect small effects and measure them anyway. The one verified experimental result on reducing administrative burden in a labour market context produced odds ratios of about 1.16 to 1.18 (Nagtegaal et al. 2026). A process improvement in onboarding that produced a few percentage points of retention would be a real and economically meaningful result in a workforce with a mean spell of roughly ten weeks. It would also be far below what is currently claimed for it, and the gap between the claims and the evidence is a reason the question has not been measured properly.

10 Limitations

- *RQ1 is not answered.* This paper establishes that the decomposition has not been performed and argues for where to look. It does not perform it.
- *The recurrence model is arithmetic, not measurement.* Two of its parameters, the share of gaps reaching seven days and the credential mix, have no published basis. We give a range rather than a point estimate for this reason, and the low case should be read as the conservative bound.
- *The model omits load that would raise the recurrent share.* It counts worker-level document events only, excluding agency licence renewal, quarterly first aid box inspection, payroll processing, and the hour-tracking obligation that Ontario imposes on clients as well as agencies (Ontario, Record keeping n.d.). It is a lower bound.
- *Verified renewal intervals are jurisdiction-specific and we have marked them as such.* The working at heights interval applies to construction projects; the lift truck interval is verified for British Columbia only. Readers should not generalise either to Ontario warehousing.
- *Several regulatory cells are unknown rather than absent.* Where a table says the term or fee was not stated on the pages we verified, that is a limit of our retrieval, not a finding about the law. The British Columbia licence term is the one case where we assert a confirmed negative, on the basis of the regulation text itself.
- *The tenure evidence is a stock, not a hazard, and it does not isolate agency work.* Neither Statistics Canada nor the Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes a temporary help agency tenure series we could verify, and the one agency-specific tenure figure available comes from an industry body and rests on a 2014 survey (ASA n.d.).
- *The administrative burden transfer is a proposal, not a validated construct.* No instrument exists for measuring learning, compliance, psychological and time costs in an employment onboarding setting, and building one is a prerequisite for testing the predictions in section 4.2.

- *Canadian temporary employment composition data is dated.* The most recent analytical release with this breakdown has a 2018 reference year and does not separate agency work (Statistics Canada 2019).

11 Conclusion

Two claims, held with different confidence.

The recurrence claim is structural rather than empirical, and within the range of assumptions we think defensible it is robust in direction if not in magnitude. A large share of worker-level document events belongs to types that repeat, a clear majority under the central parameterisation and between a third and four fifths across the range, because the statute attaches disclosure to assignments and the federal record of employment attaches to earnings gaps of seven days. The share rises with tenure and with assignment count, and the only thing keeping it as low as it is in some operations is that workers leave before the recurrence compounds. Onboarding, in the sense of one-time registration, is the minority of the work.

The attrition claim is open, and the honest statement of it is that nobody has measured what we would need to know. What the literature does supply is a redirection: the mechanism that carries the effect of the classic early-attrition intervention is not whether the job matched its description but whether the employer's process read as honest. Administrative burden theory has the right vocabulary for that and has never been pointed at employment. The combination of a well-developed construct that has not been transferred, a mechanism finding that contradicts the standard account, and an administrative data source that already isolates sub-quarter churn makes this one of the more tractable unanswered questions in workforce operations. It is not tractable because it is easy. It is tractable because the instruments exist and nobody has picked them up.

Disclosure

Funding and interest

This paper was prepared at Kordis Research. Kordis sells software to temporary staffing agencies, and has a direct commercial interest in the conclusion that administrative load is large and recurrent. Readers should weigh the argument accordingly, and the recurrence model in section 5.3 is presented with its parameters exposed precisely so that a sceptical reader can substitute their own. No external funding was received and no client data was used.

What is derived rather than reported

Figure 5 and Table 5 are the output of a model built for this paper; the event triggers are verified and the parameters are stated assumptions. The figure of roughly five assignment spells per average-week position per year, used as the central assignment count, is computed from two separately published industry figures and is identified as a derivation where it appears. All other numeric values in figures and tables are as published by the cited source.

Typographic note

Set in STIX Two Text. There are no em dashes anywhere in the series. En dashes appear only in numeric ranges, page ranges, and quoted source titles.

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Appendix A. Source classification

Every source cited in this paper, with the class assigned to it on retrieval. Full details are in the reference list.

Table A1. Source classification.

Source	Class
Allen, D. G., and L. R. Shanock 2013	Peer-reviewed
American Staffing Association n.d.	Industry body
American Staffing Association n.d.	Industry body
Andersson, F., H. J. Holzer, and J. Lane 2009	Peer-reviewed
Bauer, T. N., B. Erdogan, A. M. Ellis, D. M. Truxillo, G. M. Brady, and T. Bodner 2025	Peer-reviewed
Bauer, T. N., T. Bodner, B. Erdogan, D. M. Truxillo, and J. S. Tucker 2007	Peer-reviewed
Canada Revenue Agency n.d.	Government department or agency
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety n.d.	Government department or agency
Canadian Federation of Independent Business 2025	Industry body
City of Toronto n.d.	Regulator or statute
Daigneault, P.-M. 2024	Peer-reviewed
Donovan, K., W. J. Lu, and T. Schoellman 2020	Working paper
Earnest, D. R., D. G. Allen, and R. S. Landis 2011	Peer-reviewed
Employment and Social Development Canada n.d.	Government department or agency
Employment Standards Regulation n.d.	Regulator or statute
FOODSAFE (Province of British Columbia) n.d.	Regulator or statute
Government of Alberta n.d.	Regulator or statute
Government of Ontario n.d.	Regulator or statute
Government of Ontario n.d.	Regulator or statute
Government of Ontario n.d.	Regulator or statute
Government of Ontario n.d.	Regulator or statute
Graef, M. 2020	Research centre
Hall, M., and M. Paul 2020	Research centre
Halling, A., and M. Baekgaard 2024	Peer-reviewed
Hom, P. W., T. W. Lee, J. D. Shaw, and J. P. Hausknecht 2017	Peer-reviewed
Kordis Research n.d.	Author's own research programme
Moynihan, D., P. Herd, and H. Harvey 2015	Peer-reviewed
Nagtegaal, R., M. van der Heijden, N. de Boer, and L. Tummers 2026	Peer-reviewed
National Employment Law Project 2020	Research centre
Ontario Ministry of Labour n.d.	Regulator or statute
Ontario Ministry of Labour n.d.	Regulator or statute

Source	Class
Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development n.d.	Regulator or statute
Province of British Columbia n.d.	Regulator or statute
Regional Municipality of York, Public Health n.d.	Regulator or statute
Saks, A. M., K. L. Uggerslev, and N. E. Fassina 2007	Peer-reviewed
Service Alberta n.d.	Regulator or statute
Statistics Canada 2019	National statistical agency
Statistics Canada 2024	National statistical agency
Statistics Canada 2025	National statistical agency
US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024	National statistical agency
US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics n.d.	National statistical agency
Wang, Z., C. P. West, B. E. Vaa Stelling, et al 2024	Government department or agency
Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of Ontario n.d.	Regulator or statute
WorkSafeBC. 2024	Regulator or statute
WorkSafeBC. n.d.	Regulator or statute

Notes: Assigned on retrieval and not revised. Where a source appears in more than one paper in this series it carries the same class in each.

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