



United Way
Toronto & York Region

The Business Rationale for Greater Workforce Security: a literature review of practices that reduce or mitigate the impacts of insecure employment

Prepared by Stephanie Procyk & Ryan Maisonneuve

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1. Introduction

Employment security in Canada is undergoing significant transformations.¹ The proportion of full-time permanent jobs with benefits have been declining, while insecure jobs such as contract, temporary or short-term jobs have been growing.² In fact, temporary work and self-employment with no employees (which is also called independent contract work) has grown by 60% in the past 25 years.³ Research shows that these non-standard jobs are having a harmful effect on individuals, children and families. For example, workers in insecure jobs have poorer mental health, have more difficulty keeping up with bills and debt obligations, and are less able to afford school supplies and clothing for their children.⁴ These workers also experience more barriers than their secure counterparts that prevent them from moving into better opportunities.⁵ These labour market changes are not only harming individuals, they may also be harming the health and prosperity of Canadian businesses. There is growing evidence that these changes are negatively affecting the robustness of our economy and the ability of companies to compete globally.⁶ Businesses report that using insecure workers increases the risk of higher turnover, reduced performance, and reduced worker engagement.⁷

However, there are also businesses who have intentionally increased their workforce's employment security as a strategy for growth.⁸ These businesses include wholesale retailer Costco, cleaning services company Managed by Q, and contracting firm Belvedere Place Development Ltd., among others.⁹ As a result of these practices, these companies have lower turnover, a loyal workforce, and improved sales.¹⁰ What these examples illustrate is that with the right tools, businesses can make mutually beneficial choices that will both improve the security of their workforces and lead to business performance gains. The Workforce Security Case for Change project has sought to showcase these positive practices and help businesses understand how incremental practice changes that improve employment security can lead to gains for both workers and organizations.

This literature review was the first step in this project. It explores and synthesizes the literature on employer practices that improve employment security for workers while simultaneously contributing to positive business impacts. The goal of this literature review was to establish a foundation from which an assessment tool (called a maturity model), case studies, and a business case framework could be built to engage employers. Ideally, these tools will be used by employers to change their practices and, thereby, improve the wellbeing of their precarious or insecure workforce.

2. The Workforce Security Business Case Framework

The Workforce Security Business Case Framework project was rooted in the 2013-14 partnership between United Way Toronto & York Region and KPMG. This partnership involved research on employers' perspectives of insecure employment, which explored employer awareness of the issue and potential solutions through qualitative interviews and an employer roundtable. This report was published in 2014 and called *Precarious Employment: The Employers' Perspective*.¹¹ Results of this engagement showed that the business community is both interested in the issue and willing to think creatively to develop solutions to improve worker security. Participants of the roundtable advocated for a business case to be developed, which could be modeled on the business case for diversity that was developed thirty years ago.

Since then, United Way and McMaster University published the second Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) report in 2015, called *The Precarity Penalty*, which reiterated the recommendation to build a Canadian business case for reducing the incidence, and mitigating the negative impacts, of insecure work.* Moving forward on this recommendation, United Way again engaged KPMG to develop a practical tool for employers to assess their current practices and understand how they can change these practices to improve worker security while also benefitting their organization's performance. These findings can be leveraged by businesses when developing their own businesses cases to support new or updated practices to increase worker security. This business case framework has been developed into a toolkit that is called the Better Business Outcomes Through Workforce Security report.¹²

2.1 Structure of the report

This report covers the drivers of insecure work, the gains and costs of insecure work arrangements for the employer, and the employer practices that can be implemented that will both lead to business performance gains and improvements in the experiences of non-standard workers. Whenever possible, peer-reviewed studies and examples of real business practices were used to inform the review.

The scope of this review is limited mostly to the private sector, in part because the private sector employs the vast majority of workers.¹³ The private sector was also

* Another development was the Changing Workplaces Review, which published an interim report in Summer 2016 and a final report in May 2017. The Review made recommendations on updating legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks to address the changing world of work, with particular attention to the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act and has led to the introduction of Bill 148, *the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*. While Bill 148 is one way to influence the world of work, there is also a need to engage employers on this issue and aim to drive culture change above and beyond the floor of minimum standards proposed in the *Employment Standards Act*.

chosen as a focus area because there is a common broad goal of generating value, usually in the form of profit. However, there are important lessons that can still be applied to employers in other sectors such as the public and non-profit sectors as insecure work is present in all sectors. Through improved security for workers, organizations from all sectors can have a more engaged and productive workforce that helps achieve desired outcomes.

3. Research questions & Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The research questions were developed by the United Way-KPMG team. They are:

1. Which business practices reduce or mitigate insecurity for workers? (i.e. practices currently in use)
2. Which business practices have been recommended to reduce or mitigate insecurity for workers? (i.e. recommended practices that are not currently in use)
3. What benefits have accrued to employers based on these practices?
4. What costs have accrued to employers based on these practices?

3.2 Methodology

This report is the result of a review of over 250 articles from academia, the private sector, media, labour and the community sector. Business literature was mainly sourced through the Business Source Complete database through EBSCOhost and supplemented with the academic work of key academics such as Zeynep Ton (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Susan Lambert (University of Chicago). Media sources were primarily found through key word searches in major newspapers, as well as human resources (HR) and business trade publications located both in and out of Canada. Finally, grey literature was used by searching for key terms in the literature of think tanks, research institutes, and other similar entities.

4. Defining insecure employment

In this literature review, the term 'insecure employment' is used as a general term to denote non-standard forms of employment such as contract, temporary, or part-time work, which are also called precarious employment or contingent work. The PEPSO Employment Precarity Index, which was a key way that the PEPSO project defined who was in precarious employment, was used as a guide to highlight relevant business practices that impact those in insecure employment. The Employment Precarity Index is based on these ten components:

- Getting paid if you miss a day's work

- Having one employer, who you expect to work for a year from now, who provides at least 30 hours of work a week, and who pays benefits
- Income variability in the past 12 months
- Likelihood that income will be reduced in the next 6 months
- Working on-call
- Knowing your work schedule at least one week in advance
- Being paid in cash
- Form of employment relationship (short-term, casual, etc.)
- Receiving employment benefits from your current employer
- Likelihood that current employment would be negatively affected if you raised a health and safety or employment rights concern.

5. Key terms

The literature on employer practices includes a set of key terms that can broadly be defined as positive business impacts. For the purposes of this report, we will focus on the following business impacts that can help to achieve desired business outcomes: hiring and retention, productivity, employee engagement, and business culture. Because these particular terms are not commonly used by all of the audiences of this literature review, their definition, impact on business performance and relevance to employment security will be covered below.

5.1 Hiring and retention

It is in the interests of businesses to attract and retain high performing workers to improve business performance as high performers contribute to innovation and can generate a competitive advantage. Higher retention also results in reduced worker turnover, and thus reduced costs associated with turnover. High turnover can therefore significantly decrease profit and impact the morale and wellbeing of remaining workers.¹⁴ Additionally, in the case of contingent workers, their tenure on assignment was found to be a consistent predictor of performance.¹⁵

Although it may seem that the nature of insecure work practices mean that an employer does not want to keep a worker at the organization, this is not necessarily the case. Some employers may continually renew contracts and desire the same worker to stay at the organization, but have judged the costs and liabilities associated with making non-standard workers full-time and permanent to be prohibitive. Employers may also be negatively impacted by non-standard workers leaving for better offers. In addition, employers who are testing insecure workers for fit within the company will want higher performers to stay on for permanent openings.

5.2 Employee engagement, commitment and loyalty

Employee engagement, commitment and loyalty can be viewed as inputs to the output of productivity. High levels of employee engagement can lead to improved productivity, higher profit, and increased stakeholder returns. Importantly, low levels of employee engagement can actively harm companies as well.¹⁶ Towers Perrin found that businesses with high employee engagement experienced a 19% increase in operating income, and a 28% growth in earnings per share, while companies with low employee engagement experienced a 32% drop in operating income and an 11% drop in earnings per share.¹⁷ Kenexa also found that higher employee engagement was connected to higher annual net income and total shareholder return.¹⁸

Engagement relates to commitment, which is “a bond or linking of the individual to the organization.”¹⁹ Workers’ commitment to organizations impacts how satisfied they are and therefore how likely they are to behave in ways that will contribute to an organization’s competitive advantage.²⁰ For example, workers who are less satisfied and engaged are less likely to deliver high quality customer service.²¹ When workers are hired on a contract or temporary basis, it can be challenging to engage them or increase their commitment when they perceive a lack of employer commitment to them.

5.3 Productivity

Productivity is viewed as a fundamental building block to organizational performance and growth. It is, in essence, a measurement of how much output a business can achieve for a given level of input.²² Improving productivity may mean that a company has developed an innovative new process that enables workers to produce more goods, for example. Additionally, as noted in Section 5.2, improving employee engagement, commitment and loyalty can lead to improved productivity. Productivity is generally difficult to measure in relation to individual employer practices, because practices do not occur in isolation. (The same can be said of other business impacts as well.)

There is limited literature on productivity and non-standard work.²³ However, the literature does discuss the connection between productivity and individual employer practices that could support non-standard workers such as paid sick days or extended health benefits. These are covered in greater detail below.

5.4 Business culture

The concept of culture within an organization is not a term that is concrete or definitive and it does not have a widely agreed upon definition in the business community.²⁴ It broadly refers to the values of an organization. Cultural alignment is viewed as important because it creates a consistent business culture, where worker actions demonstrate the values of the business.²⁵ Business culture is an important consideration in the area of employment insecurity. When parts of the workforce are segregated through the colour of their uniforms or are segregated from meetings, events, professional development, and other business operations, it may be challenging for this part of the workforce to understand and replicate the business culture. In contrast, businesses that have successfully integrated non-standard workers have experienced performance gains as a result and have gained a competitive advantage over businesses who do not engage this part of their workforce.²⁶ Integrating temporary workers more closely to the vision of the organization can also translate into better customer service, as workers are better able to deliver on the businesses' promised experience.

6. Employer use of non-standard workers

6.1 How are employers gaining from insecure workers or practices?

Employers choose to create or maintain insecure jobs or practices because they perceive themselves to be gaining from these practices. These gains include:

- **Flexibility in managing their workforces:** Employers are able to stay flexible and nimble in managing their workforces in order to address challenges such as costs, the fast pace of change in the business environment and fluctuating demand.²⁷
- **Ease:** Companies are able to access an on-demand workforce, which has become increasingly easier due to technology.²⁸ For example, scheduling software that has the ability to more accurately predict labour demand is increasingly being used.²⁹
- **Innovation:** Some businesses perceive improvements in innovation as they are able to get a new and diverse pool of talent when needed.³⁰ This may be more likely with highly skilled workers.
- **Ability to deliver on goals or services:** Hiring contingent workers can help businesses deliver on goals or services more effectively and efficiently than could be done solely using internal staff.³¹ This is often due to companies ability to bring in people with specialized skill sets.
- **Testing for fit:** Managers sometimes use temporary contracts as a form of testing a worker for fit within the company.³²

In addition, the literature consistently emphasizes that employers use insecure workers to save costs.³³ Costs are saved because employers can pay lower wages and not pay for extended health or retirement benefits, severance pay, payroll costs, taxes, or the costs of recruiting, managing and sustaining employees.³⁴

6.2 Why are employers using insecure workers or practices?

The increasing use of insecure workers and insecure practices has been well documented, including in both PEPSO reports.³⁵ This issue was also addressed in the qualitative interviews conducted by KPMG in 2014. The literature covers a wide range of reasons as to why employers use insecure workers or practices:

- **The market environment:** Employers use insecure workers or practices to stay competitive³⁶ and in difficult economic times to financially sustain themselves.³⁷ During challenging economic times, employers can rely on people to continue to apply for these jobs because of a lack of availability of other jobs.³⁸
- **Perceptions of worker desire:** In certain industries and sectors, there is a perception that workers desire these jobs more so than standard employment relationships due to the potential of higher wages, the ability to try out jobs before committing, and the desire for worker choice, though these would likely apply mostly to more professional higher paying jobs.³⁹
- **Capacity or desire to commit:** Some businesses or business units within larger organizations may not be ready to hire full-time or permanent staff. This is sometimes due to budgetary limits in the number of full-time employees they can hire, which forces them to hire non-standard workers in order to stay within budget.⁴⁰ They may also not be able to commit to more full-time or permanent staff due to their stage of development.
- **Demand for skills:** Businesses may only need help around specific projects or skill-sets, and may even organize their entire business model around project-based work.⁴¹ Temporary or contract workers can help businesses respond to unexpected or seasonal demand or unexpected business needs to meet an order or to accommodate inconsistent work flow.⁴²
- **Protection from legal obligations:** Some employers use insecure workers in order to protect their business from legal obligations, worker unionization, having to pay workers' compensation, and/or benefits.⁴³ In addition, the use of insecure workers can allow employers to more easily dismiss workers within the timeframe desired by the employer, without paying severance and without the fear of legal action for wrongful dismissal.⁴⁴

6.3 What are the negative impacts that employers are experiencing due to insecure workforces or practices?

There are risks associated with insecure workforces or practices that can impact desired business outcomes, and therefore threaten business performance. (These risks will be delineated in further detail below when they connect to particular employer practices). There may be risks for employers who use non-standard workers, such as:

- **Lower productivity:** As mentioned above (Section 5.3), there is limited literature on the connection between non-standard workers and productivity. However, one recent longitudinal study of Canadian companies found that increased proportions of part-time or temporary workers was associated with decreased productivity and profitability.⁴⁵ One reason may be that these workers often have to take on second jobs or have to search for employment, which leads to fatigue and lower productivity.⁴⁶ Productivity requires workers to have enough time on the job to 'learn the ropes' and non-standard work tends to be associated with shorter tenure. In addition, temporary agencies may help sell their services by noting that they are able to perform the oversight needed for worker productivity, but in practice this is difficult for them to fulfill.⁴⁷ Additionally, when worker health decreases, this can impact productivity. There is mixed evidence on the impact of insecure employment and worker health, due in part to how insecurity is defined. However, there is some evidence that insecure work practices can negatively impact people's mental and physical health, as well as increase injuries and even fatalities.⁴⁸
- **Conflicts of interest:** At times, workers may be employed by multiple competing companies at once. In these cases, companies may run the risk of workers sharing information with competitors or workers experiencing other conflicts of interest between companies.⁴⁹
- **Increased complexity in management:** Insecure workforces can be complex to manage and require substantial improvements in the area of strategic workforce planning in order to be managed effectively.⁵⁰ For example, HR has to work with line managers to assess which kind of non-standard worker is required and for how long. Workforce management can be particularly challenging for organizations that are more oriented towards projects, as they often do not have a formal human resources management function.⁵¹ Organizations also have to manage legal issues such as classification of employees versus non-employees.⁵²
- **Less trained workforce:** If employers are not training workers and there is a dearth of other places for workers to be trained, employers may not have access to workers with the needed skillsets.⁵³ Evidence shows that contract workers are often not trained enough during 'onboarding.'⁵⁴ This lack of investment can lead to operational problems and can lessen the likelihood that insecure workers will contribute to innovation.⁵⁵
- **Lower morale:** When wage or benefit cuts occur in a smaller workplace, there can be negative impacts on morale, productivity, and even profit.⁵⁶ There can

also be negative feelings when non-permanent workers are compensated differently from permanent staff.⁵⁷ Workers who are paid low wages and who have poor working conditions are unlikely to be happy and this dissatisfaction can translate to poorer interactions with customers and ultimately into lower productivity.⁵⁸

- **Higher turnover:** It can be more challenging to retain workers in jobs for the full length of time desired by businesses when employers do not invest in their workers.⁵⁹ When people are moving in and out of a company, it is difficult to maintain and build a company culture as well as build a consistent culture between permanent and contract staff.⁶⁰
- **Higher costs:** Although many employers view cost savings as a key driver for hiring non-standard workers, costs can actually be higher for non-standard workers than standard workers.⁶¹ For example, higher wages for specialized non-standard workers and payments to staffing agencies are some of the direct costs involved.⁶² There are also indirect costs such as the cost of increased oversight needed to compensate for low rates of training, the cost of fixing errors, the costs of higher turnover, and the costs of replacing and training new workers.⁶³

7. Employer practices

There are businesses who are undertaking actions to create more security in their workforce. Some of these businesses may be taking this step to intentionally create security, while others may be doing so to improve their business performance or for other reasons. It is important to note that insecure and secure employer practices may co-exist within one organization, just as standard and non-standard workers do.

The intent of this section is to denote the range of employer practices available to employers that will increase workforce security and improve their business performance. In cases where the business has decided to still use non-standard work arrangements, the security of workers can still be increased to improve outcomes for workers and businesses through practice changes. Most of the literature regarded the gains for business resulting from these practices in general. Only a limited range focused on these employer practices as a way to improve the experiences of contract, temporary, or part-time staff. Where possible, innovative practices and individual businesses are highlighted.

In most cases, the literature did not delineate a causal relationship between the employer practice and the business gain, nor did most literature describe in detail how these two pieces may be related. For example, employee benefits are often noted as a factor that increases productivity, but the literature often did not detail *how* benefits increase productivity. However, the first large-scale empirical study on the effect of contingent employment use on business performance found evidence that the use of contingent workers can impact organizational performance, though it depends on the conditions of how these workers are used and for what purposes.⁶⁴

While the gains of the following practices were outlined in the reviewed literature, costs were infrequently assessed. These employer practices may cost businesses money, time, and resources, depending on the chosen practice as well as how it is implemented. In all, there will likely be trade-offs that employers will have to make to implement these practices, which will require the careful consideration of each organization.⁶⁵ Organizations considering implementing these practices will have to weigh the costs and benefits of each practice in their own context.

7.1 Compensation

Total compensation includes both wages and benefits such as extended health benefits, retirement benefits, and childcare benefits. One of the key challenges highlighted by PEPSO research in regard to compensation was that those in precarious employment not only earned lower wages, they were less likely to have benefits as well.⁶⁶ Increasing the wages of those in non-standard employment is an important employer practice in and of itself. For example, employers could explore the potential of becoming living wage employers. Living wage employers pay their workers wages that could cover the basics in their local area.⁶⁷ The living wage has in turn been found to be associated with decreased turnover, improved productivity, and lower absenteeism.⁶⁸ Aside from paying the living wage, there are innovative ways of improving wages through employer practices such as 'precarity pay.' These are covered in the benefits sections below.

7.2 Benefits in general

Challenge

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) considers a benefit to be "a good or service you give, or arrange for a third party to give, to your employee such as free use of property that you own. A benefit includes an allowance or a reimbursement of an employee's personal expense."⁶⁹ Benefits, according to the CRA, include health benefits, disability, child care, Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and other supports.⁷⁰ Depending on the benefit, an employer may be required to pay payroll taxes and to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), which means that a worker would be defined as an employee.⁷¹ Therefore, some employers do not offer benefits to non-standard workers, as they perceive that offering benefits could result in non-standard workers being classified as employees.⁷²

As a result, workers in non-standard jobs have significantly less access to benefits. PEPSO found that only 8% of those in precarious employment had an employer-sponsored benefit plan, compared with 100% of those in secure employment.⁷³ This pattern was similar for employer-provided pensions as well, with 12% of those in precarious employment having access to pensions, compared to 85% of those in

secure employment. These findings are supported by the business literature. The Conference Board of Canada's survey of medium and large employers found that full-time employees had almost universal benefits coverage and that part-time employees who worked a minimum of 20 hours per week were commonly covered.⁷⁴ In contrast, only 6% of employers reported that they provided full benefits to their contingent (contract, term, casual or seasonal) workers, though 52% reported that they provided some benefits to their contingent workers.⁷⁵ †

Promising employer practices

Despite the low rate of benefit provision for non-standard workers, many employers who employ non-standard workers do see the value in providing benefits for this workforce. In a 2016 American survey of 800 employers, 54% of employers of contingent workers agreed that these workers should be given more benefits as part of their job.⁷⁶

Practices related to the provision of benefits for workers in non-standard arrangements vary and can include full-time employee coverage, partial coverage, coverage given a minimum threshold of hours worked or a minimum length of time worked. More specific practices include:

- **Increasing wages in lieu of benefits:** Wages are sometimes increased in lieu of benefits. In some cases, employers have noted that contractors prefer higher wages in lieu of benefits.⁷⁷ ‡ However, this is more often practiced with higher earners, though low earners could also gain from this practice.
- **Lowering qualifying thresholds:** Generally, a worker has to qualify for benefits by a threshold of tenure or hours per week. Lowering either of these thresholds can lead to more non-standard workers being included in the benefits plan that is generally reserved for full-time staff.⁷⁸ The delivery company UPS, for example, offers full-time benefits for their part-time workforce.⁷⁹ In addition, Canadian Staffing Services company Aerotek offers extended health benefits for their contract and temporary workforce who work more than 32 hours per week.⁸⁰ Finally, the retail company Lands End offers extended benefits for the full year to seasonal employees who commit to working the following year during peak holiday times.⁸¹
- **Developing a 'benefit bank':** Several authors have recommended that employers develop and use benefit banks, which give employers or workers an opportunity to purchase benefits.⁸²
- **Creating a benefit fund:** Another recommendation has been made for employers to create a benefit fund for health coverage payment, from which workers could draw.⁸³

† Partial benefits may include one type of benefit, such as pensions, but not others such as extended health.

‡ In Australia, this practice is legislated for minimum workers and is referred to as 'precarity pay'.

- **Providing back-up child care:** Childcare is not often the first support that comes to mind when people think of benefit packages, but backup childcare can be very beneficial to non-standard workers whose schedules are irregular. One employer that began offering backup childcare as a benefit for employees is Chase Manhattan.⁸⁴ They found this benefit to have a 115% return on investment, which saved 6,900 work days in one year.

Strategies for successful implementation

In order to extend benefits to non-standard workers, either in full or in part, while also contributing to organizational growth, researchers have recommended that businesses be strategic in their planning.⁸⁵ Batt notes, “To reap the long-term payoff of offering benefits, despite the short-term cost, employers have treated the benefits package as fixed and adjust their business goals, strategies and other variable costs to accommodate benefits”.⁸⁶ It also helps to show people their total compensation (wages and benefits) as people’s perceptions of their benefits packages can impact positive business outcomes.⁸⁷

Gains for business

A broad range of literature notes the substantial gains for business in offering benefits to their workers. Benefits are viewed as a key way for employers to differentiate themselves as ‘employers of choice’ and to attract and retain high-performing workers.⁸⁸ Almost 80% of employers in one study agreed that benefits are a critical component to attracting and retaining high quality employees.⁸⁹ This is evidenced by worker opinions as well. In one Canadian healthcare survey, 77% of those who had benefits stated that they would not move to another job without benefits.⁹⁰ Benefits are also associated with improved productivity, worker satisfaction, happiness and loyalty.⁹¹ In addition, as evidenced by the employer examples under promising practices, benefits can also yield financial gains for companies even after accounting for their cost.⁹²

Costs to business

The costs of providing benefits include the financial costs themselves, as well as the time and resources needed to manage benefits. The Conference Board of Canada estimates the cost of providing benefits per full-time employee to be an average of \$8,330, as of 2015.⁹³ This is only a partial estimate of costs as this does not include paid time off, wellness program costs, contributions to pensions, or the time and resources it takes to manage benefits.⁹⁴ It is difficult to provide a more accurate cost of benefits for non-standard workers, as the plans could vary significantly, depending on what the employer chooses to extend to their non-standard workforce.

7.2.1 Paid leave

Challenge

Leave benefits are another type of benefit to which non-standard workers have significantly less access. PEPSO found that only 12% of those in precarious employment were paid if they missed a day's work, while 100% of those in secure employment were.⁹⁵ This is echoed by an American survey of employers that found that 80% of employers offered paid vacation to their full-time employees, while only 13% offered this to their independent contractors.⁹⁶ Access to leave plays an important role in helping workers to establish a work-life balance. Not having access to paid time off can compromise a household's ability to cope with unanticipated events such as illness. This contributes to the higher levels of stress and anxiety reported in PEPSO research.⁹⁷

In Ontario, the *Employment Standards Act* gives workers the right to unpaid leave such as pregnancy and parental leave, family medical leave, and personal emergency leave (which covers illness).⁹⁸ Temporary agency workers also have the right to some forms of public holidays and public holiday pay.⁹⁹ However, many non-standard workers are not covered by Employment Standards, because these standards do not cover independent contractors. In addition, personal emergency leave is only mandated for workplaces with 50 or more employees, which leaves 1.7 million workers in Ontario without access to this leave.¹⁰⁰

Providing *paid* personal emergency leave days is up to the discretion of the individual employer, though the proposed Bill 148, *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017*, has introduced two paid leave days per year for employees. Employees do have a right to 4% of wages earned for vacation time under the *Employment Standards Act*, though again, this act excludes many non-standard workers.¹⁰¹

Promising employer practices

Employers in the United States have been increasingly legislated to provide leave benefits such as paid sick leave days to their contingent workforce and Bill 148 has proposed two sick days for all employees, which would still omit independent contractors.¹⁰² The literature addressed a few innovative practices that are recommended for or are in use by employers regarding the provision of paid leave for non-standard workers. These include:

- **Increasing wages in lieu of leave benefits:** Workers could be compensated in lieu of leave benefits, which would help ease the burden of any missed work time.¹⁰³ For example, the fast-food restaurant El Fuego provides a half day of wages for workers who are unable to come in due to illness.¹⁰⁴ These days are not capped.¹⁰⁵
- **Increasing flexible time policies:** Improving flexible time policies (which are listed in section 7.3.1), can allow people to balance work and life when they cannot access a full paid day off.¹⁰⁶ One example of this is incremental leave. Allowing workers to take vacation or sick time in small increments could help workers avoid taking the full day off when they only need a small amount of time for an appointment or an urgent matter.¹⁰⁷ Workers could make up for this time by working a few hours within the pay period. This allows organizations to avoid the impact of having to find coverage for a worker.¹⁰⁸
- **Creating a central benefit fund:** Similar to the previous recommendation for a benefit fund in Section 7.2, a benefit fund could be created to which employers would contribute sick and vacation pay for use by their non-standard workforce.¹⁰⁹

Strategies for successful implementation

Employers who provided paid sick days to most or all of their workforce offered some strategic solutions for businesses to ensure that organizational needs are still met. Options included assigning work to other workers, allowing workers to swap shifts or simply putting work on hold.¹¹⁰ Some have recommended that employers not lump different forms of leave together, as workers will be less likely to take sick days if it limits their vacation time.¹¹¹

Gains for business

The gains for business that result from paid leave benefits are similar to the gains that were listed in the previous section on benefits in general. Most of the literature on these gains were in reference to the provision of paid sick leave benefits.

Gains for business include:

- **Attracting and retaining high quality workers:** Having leave benefits can contribute to the retention and attraction of dedicated workers, which can also reduce turnover.¹¹² One staffing company even noted that providing sick days for non-standard workers could attract more standard workers to the non-standard workforce.¹¹³
- **Increased productivity:** It is difficult to prove a causal relationship between paid leave and productivity.[§] However, when sick workers come to work and infect other workers, this decreases productivity at a business because fewer workers are available. Paid sick days can therefore contribute to less overall absenteeism as illness will be limited in its spread.¹¹⁴ For example, one Cornell University study found that flu rates decreased by a minimum of 10% when workers gained access to paid sick days.¹¹⁵
- **Improved worker engagement:** Paid leave can improve morale, motivation, and loyalty— all of which contribute to an engaged and productive workforce.¹¹⁶ This was particularly noted of paid vacation days.¹¹⁷

The gains for business of paid vacation were underlined in a 2013 study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, which noted that “More than two-thirds of HR professionals agree or strongly agree that if these employees [who take less vacation] started taking more vacation, they would experience higher levels of job satisfaction (74%), be more productive (72%), perform better (69%) and be more engaged at work (67%).”¹¹⁸

Costs for business

There is limited literature on the cost of providing leave. A study on the introduction of mandatory paid sick leave in Connecticut noted that there was minimal or modest monetary cost increases for employers, though the vast majority of employers (89%) were already providing five paid sick leave days or more to their employees.¹¹⁹ Another qualitative study of 33 American employers found that employers reported that paid sick days did not impact their profit.¹²⁰ A key reason for this is that employers with overall good practices seem to build trust and engagement with their workforce, which may contribute to workers not using these days more than necessary.¹²¹ Sick days may involve short-term costs.

[§] For example, in Pichler & Zeibarth, 2016, the authors note, “To our knowledge, there exists no credible empirical causal evidence on how work productivity changes when employees gain access to paid sick leave.”

7.4 Predictability

Challenge

Standard workers are much more likely to work predictable, regular, and consistent hours than insecure workers.¹²² This may involve having the same schedule every week or having sufficient advance notice of hours in order to be able to plan one's week.

Those workers in non-standard jobs are much less likely to enjoy this stability and predictability. Workers in precarious employment are significantly more likely to experience irregular work schedules than those in secure employment. PEPSO research found that almost 25% of those in precarious employment had a work schedule that often changes unexpectedly compared to only 3% of those in secure employment.¹²³ In addition, almost half of workers in precarious employment did not know their schedules one week in advance.¹²⁴ Not having control over their schedules could be a major source of stress for these workers.¹²⁵

Some employers have been publicly recognizing the negative impacts of irregular and/or unpredictable schedules for their workers. A high profile news article on coffee retailer Starbucks' scheduling practices in 2014 led to the company committing to make swift changes to improve scheduling stability.¹²⁶ Loblaws and the union that represents many of its workers—the United Food and Commercial Workers—also introduced a pilot program to improve scheduling and predictability for their part-time workers, in recognition that this could improve outcomes for both workers and the business.¹²⁷

These challenges surrounding hours and predictability can be addressed through three sets of distinct, though at times overlapping, promising practices:

- **Improving predictability:** Scheduling practices entail improving the predictability of schedules. Employers still control the schedule, but workers can better plan their time with these practices.
- **Encouraging worker-led flexibility:** Worker-led flexibility practices are about shifting more control over hours worked from the company to the worker.
- **Increasing stability:** These are practices that are ways to increase the number of hours workers can access through practices such as sharing workers between companies or departments.

7.4.1 Encouraging worker-led flexibility

Promising employer practice

The term 'flexibility' has multiple meanings when used in relation to workers. For example, one person's definition of precarious employment could be another person's definition of flexible employment. In this case, flexible working time is being used to

describe the degree of flexibility in relation to workers' desires.¹²⁸ Examples of flexible work practices include:

- **Working compressed hours:** This involves allowing workers to work longer hours for fewer days.¹²⁹ For example, working a full-time work week over the course of three or four days.
- **Teleworking or telecommuting:** Telework involves a worker not needing to come into the office to work, and instead working from home or elsewhere while being connected via computer and phone.¹³⁰ After Aetna began allowing workers to work from home, they subsequently saw a 30% increase in claims processed.¹³¹ Similarly, after American Express introduced telecommuting as an option, they had a \$40 million increase in sales productivity.¹³²
- **Using flextime:** Flextime is the practice of giving workers the opportunity to work outside standard work hours for the business.¹³³ For example, a worker could choose to work nights or weekends instead of 9-5.
- **Enabling flexible start and end times:** One variant of flextime is allowing workers to have flexible start and end times. A worker in this case could choose when they begin and end their day, so long as they work the agreed upon hours.¹³⁴

Strategies for successful implementation

The literature notes some foundations for success that enable flexible work practices to occur. They include ensuring that:

- **Technology is used:** Research recommends that employers use technology to enable the management of flexible schedules, which can include documenting any trading off of time or shifts through online staff calendars, posting schedules in the office space, or using more sophisticated computer systems.¹³⁵
- **Flexibility policies are widespread:** Flexible time options will not have the desired effect if they are only available to certain individuals. Instead, they should be available to the workforce in general.¹³⁶
- **Policies are business-driven:** These policies have to be business-driven, in order to benefit the company, as opposed to being just driven by worker desires alone.¹³⁷
- **Trade-offs are mutual:** Workers and employers should both trade off flexibility and sacrifice to some extent. For example, engineering firm Metal Assemblies asks its workers to be flexible in responding to changing demand, and in turn asks its managers to be flexible with their workers' work-life balance needs.¹³⁸ This requires trust between workers and employers.¹³⁹
- **Investing in good management:** In order to be successful, flextime requires good management.¹⁴⁰ This is a strategy that is echoed in many employer practices in this review: success requires planning and good management.

Gains for business

In addition to the clear financial gains noted by the companies above, there are other gains for business that are associated with worker-led flexibility. These include:

- **Recruitment from a wider labour pool:** Flexibility can be used to access a wider pool of labour who may not be able to work standard hours, but who are committed to their profession.¹⁴¹ In addition, in more competitive markets, younger workers choose employers with flexible hours and view them as 'employers of choice.'¹⁴²
- **Higher retention and lower turnover:** Flexibility allows high performers and those with other commitments to continue working for a business.¹⁴³ One study noted that, "More than 80% of managers and employees say flexibility is important to recruitment and retention, and almost a quarter of employees using flexibility options would leave the company if they did not have the opportunity to work flexibly."¹⁴⁴
- **Financial gains:** Worker-led flexibility can sometimes lead to cost savings from reductions in payment of overtime.¹⁴⁵ This may be due in part to workers with unpredictable schedules being called in at the last minute to work an overtime shift.¹⁴⁶
- **Improved productivity:** Businesses who implemented flex time policies reported improved productivity.¹⁴⁷ This may be due to the connection between flexibility and higher worker engagement and commitment.¹⁴⁸
- **Ability to meet fluctuating demand:** Flextime allows employers to meet fluctuating demand.¹⁴⁹
- **Improved operations:** Compressed schedules were noted to provide more staff continuity and consistency and reduce unscheduled absences.¹⁵⁰ In addition, flexibility in general is associated with improved customer service.¹⁵¹

Costs to business

There is limited content in the literature regarding the costs to business of these particular flexibility policies. However, the literature notes that in situations in which the relationships with a customer are of importance, customer loyalty can be damaged if customers are unable to develop relationships with the same workers.¹⁵² In addition, it can take up manager time when managers have to use their time to accommodate flexible schedules.¹⁵³

7.4.2 Improving predictability

Promising employer practices

Predictability practices cover the range of supports that employers can enhance in order to make working schedules more consistent, predictable and stable. These practices can include:

- **Advance notice of scheduling:** In this case, workers would receive advance notice of their scheduling, and ideally changes to this advanced notice would be minimal.¹⁵⁴ For example, Costco and IKEA's Savannah Distribution Center both give three weeks' advanced notice prior to all shifts.¹⁵⁵
- **Consistent scheduling:** Consistent scheduling on certain times or days could decrease the degree of scheduling variability that a worker experiences.¹⁵⁶
- **Worker input:** This practice is about involving workers in scheduling in order to accommodate their preferences.¹⁵⁷ This can include worker input into start and end times, working particular shifts, working overtime or extra hours, or taking breaks at particular times.¹⁵⁸
- **Worker control over scheduling:** This option entails workers negotiating elements of their schedule through practices such as self-scheduling or through swapping shifts with one another so that a manager does not need to negotiate this.¹⁵⁹ This can include offering computerized self-scheduling. Just as technology enables companies to schedule workers, it also offers workers the opportunity to self-schedule.¹⁶⁰ Companies that already use computerized self-scheduling include JetBlue, J.C. Penney, and Kraft Foods.¹⁶¹

Strategies for successful implementation

Strategies that enable implementation include establishing systems to enable predictable scheduling practices such as instituting formal processes for consideration of requests from workers, training managers on how to deal with schedule requests and training workers on how to negotiate schedules.¹⁶²

Gains for business

Business gains from improving predictability are similar to the business gains for worker-led flexibility. These practices are associated with improved recruitment and retention, morale, worker engagement, productivity and financial gains.¹⁶³

Costs to business

The literature does not cover the costs associated with these practices though one can assume that an organization could incur short-term costs of manager time in planning and maintaining these practices as well as some financial costs.

7.4.3 Increasing stability

Promising employer practices

A third way to address the challenge of irregular hours is to increase the number of hours that workers can work through approaches such as:

- **Pooling or sharing workers in-house:** One strategy that has been successfully used for almost a century by large organizations is pooling or sharing workers

in-house.¹⁶⁴ This may involve pooling workers within one or multiple business locations of the same business.¹⁶⁵ “A pool consists of a group of contingent workers who are ready and willing to work on a variety of limited-duration assignments on an on-going basis”.¹⁶⁶ In essence, either the business itself or a third party partner acts as an internal staffing agency for the business’ non-standard workforce. R.H. Macy and Company pooled their contingent staff as far back as 1926, while other large companies such as Mary Kay Cosmetics, AT&T and Comerica have also used internal pooling.¹⁶⁷

- **Pooling or sharing workers externally:** In a similar and complementary vein, businesses can pool or share their workers with other companies to enable workers to go where the demand is highest.¹⁶⁸ This would require agreements or shared understandings between the organizations involved.
- **Guaranteed minimum hours or shifts:** Guaranteeing minimum hours or shifts can increase stability for workers who work irregular hours.¹⁶⁹ For example, Cooperative Home Care Associates—a homecare staffing agency—has been able to guarantee 30 hours of work for many workers without negatively impacting their business performance.¹⁷⁰
- **Using operations policies to enable stability:** The literature describes how different businesses use operations policies to smooth demand.¹⁷¹ One way of doing this is to use a system of reservations or appointments like in the case of restaurants or doctor’s offices.¹⁷² Another way to smooth demand is to cross-train workers to be able to work in the area of the business with surging demand when necessary.¹⁷³

Strategies for successful implementation

Pooling workers requires resources, planning, and support and is likely to be most effective in large organizations.¹⁷⁴ However, smaller firms could develop deals with third party providers like a workforce intermediary or larger firms to participate in workforce pooling.¹⁷⁵ In order for minimum hour guarantees to succeed, it has been noted that a trade-off is often in place where workers give up some flexibility to get these minimum hours.¹⁷⁶ For example, at the homecare staffing agency CHCA, workers and employers both have to compromise: workers get minimum hours, but they also have to be available to work on call every other weekend.¹⁷⁷

Gains for business

- **More skilled workers:** Workers are cross-trained, which lessens the need to hire more temporary or contract workers when demand surges.¹⁷⁸ This also eases the process of hiring for permanent positions from the non-standard workforce, because there is a ready pool of trained workers that are well known to the employer.
- **Avoid productivity declines:** When workers approach the end of their tenure for an assignment, productivity has been shown to decline.¹⁷⁹ By providing ongoing assignments, employers can avoid these productivity declines.¹⁸⁰

- **Improved innovation:** Pooling workers between firms can increase innovation and creativity as workers are able to bring new knowledge, experiences, and skills into businesses.¹⁸¹

Costs to business

This is another area that is not covered in depth in the literature. However, it requires resources, knowledge, and a commitment to a new way of operating to begin using some of these practices such as pooling workers. It may be resource intensive at the beginning, while organizations figure out how to implement these ideas.

7.5 Inclusion

Challenge

Standard and non-standard parts of the workforce often coexist within one organization. However, many practices exclude the non-standard workforce. This is in part because in some businesses, Human Resources manage the standard workforce, while procurement or another area of the organization manages the non-standard workforce.¹⁸² This also may be because employers are counseled to exclude non-standard workers from certain business activities to ensure that they will not be classified as employees under CRA rules.

Non-standard workers tend to be more socially isolated within and outside of work. For example, both middle income and low income insecure workers were almost twice as likely to report that they did not have a friend at work they could ask a favour of, compared to their more secure counterparts.¹⁸³ Inclusion can enable workers to develop better professional networks and to be less socially isolated.

During the 2014 KPMG project, inclusion was seen as an important way for businesses to extend positive employer practices to their contract and temporary staff.¹⁸⁴ While this has many potential benefits, there is little written in the literature about inclusion's benefits on business performance.

Promising employer practices

There are a range of activities in which non-standard workers can be included. The Conference Board recommends that businesses include them in their strategic business planning efforts, which may be a good first step toward other forms of inclusion.¹⁸⁵ Other recommended employer practices are:

- **Making inclusion part of business culture:** One option is to create a corporate culture that engages and includes the full workforce.¹⁸⁶ In one U.S. government agency, the importance of these workers was continually stressed to the whole organization. Along with special orientation sessions and the elimination of

subtle status differences between temporary and permanent workers, a business culture was developed that valued the input of temporary workers.¹⁸⁷ Polaroid also developed a culture of inclusion by treating temporary and permanent workers the same, rewarding temporary workers for performance that was equal or better than that of permanent workers.¹⁸⁸

- **Applying clear definitions:** Non-standard workers may err on the side of caution and not attend meetings that they could attend. Defining which meetings and work-related activities staff who are not permanent full-time are permitted to attend could help clarify this.¹⁸⁹
- **Including workers in communication:** Integrating contingent workers into all communication about projects and work-related communications is another option that would increase inclusion.¹⁹⁰
- **Including workers in planning efforts:** One employer practice that has been encouraged for the purposes of improving flexibility is also applicable for inclusion. Watson & Swanberg discuss the importance of teams working together to set performance objectives and then scheduling to meet these objectives.¹⁹¹ Including non-standard workers in this process could increase engagement.
- **Including workers in business activities:** This may entail including workers in performance management systems, career planning, discounts, or other perks and inviting them to plan these activities as well.¹⁹²

Gains for business

There is limited literature on the gains for business associated with inclusion practices. However, it was noted that inclusion can lead to increased retention of non-standard workers as well as improve the possibilities that a non-standard worker would take a permanent job at the business if offered.¹⁹³

Costs for business

The literature does not discuss the costs for business of inclusion, though in theory, costs could include financial expenditures and manager time associated with involvement of non-standard workers in organizational activities.

7.5.2 Inclusion in training and professional development

Challenge

The purpose of training is to improve a worker's skills, which can enable people to improve their career prospects or prepare them for new jobs.¹⁹⁴ Training and professional development may include onboarding as well as ongoing professional development. Those in non-standard jobs often have much less access to training. PEPSO research found that those in secure employment are almost 40% more likely to receive employment-related training than those in precarious employment.¹⁹⁵ This is in part because there is a common perception that non-standard workers already have the skills that are needed for the job they were hired for.¹⁹⁶ In addition, there is a common perception that is validated by some research that businesses may not be able to get a return on their investment into these workers' training when workers are with a company for a short duration.¹⁹⁷ As a result, workers in insecure employment are more likely to have to pay for training opportunities themselves and are less likely to have access to training paid for by the employer.¹⁹⁸

Yet, trained workers can better contribute to an organization's performance and its competitive advantage.¹⁹⁹ In addition, trained workers may be with the organization for a short tenure, but they may also be eligible candidates for permanent positions within the company, may return in the future, and/or may refer friends to the company.²⁰⁰

Promising employer practices

- **Cross-training workers:** Cross-training workers is both an important employer practice in and of itself as well as a practice that enables other practices such as pooling workers and worker-led flexibility to occur. Cross-training involves training workers to be able to fill in for multiple jobs.²⁰¹ For example, a front desk worker could be cross-trained to work as a server. Cross-training enables workers to respond to fluctuating demand levels of business, as discussed in Section 7.3.3 on increasing stability.²⁰²
- **Partial inclusion in training:** Partial inclusion refers to training non-standard workers on a limited range of tasks or developing a mini version of the training received by permanent staff that is more applicable to non-standard workers.²⁰³
- **Promotion from within the organization:** As mentioned above, employers sometimes hire workers for non-standard positions in order to test them for fit. Focusing permanent hiring efforts on this part of the workforce and developing clear and simple paths to permanent jobs can add value to an organization.²⁰⁴

Strategies for successful implementation

In the example of training, the literature did not capture strategies for successful implementation outside of the content that is already listed under promising employer practices.

Gains for business

Workers can perceive employers to be more loyal and committed to them when they are able to access training, which improves their dedication and commitment to employers, improves retention, and lowers turnover.²⁰⁵ In addition, lower turnover rates have been found for businesses that promote from within.²⁰⁶

Costs to business

Training costs money, and it may cost more than a business can recoup during the tenure of the worker. In these cases, it may be appropriate to provide the scaled down versions of training mentioned in the employer practices section above, or for businesses to take a longer-term view toward participation in training the workforce.

8. Conclusion

This literature review was used to inform the publication of the *Better Business Outcomes Through Workforce Security: A Business Case Framework* report in July 2017.²⁰⁷ The Better Business Outcomes report provides a business case framework for why employers should invest in their workforces, a series of case studies from employers engaging in promising practices, and an assessment tool called a maturity model, which helps employers make incremental changes to their practices.

As the proportion of our workforce that is non-standard or insecure continues to grow, it will be important for us to think constructively about how to leverage this growth to improve outcomes for both workers and businesses. It is clear from the business literature highlighted in this review that many businesses are already leveraging this growth and are seeing better business outcomes as a result.

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