

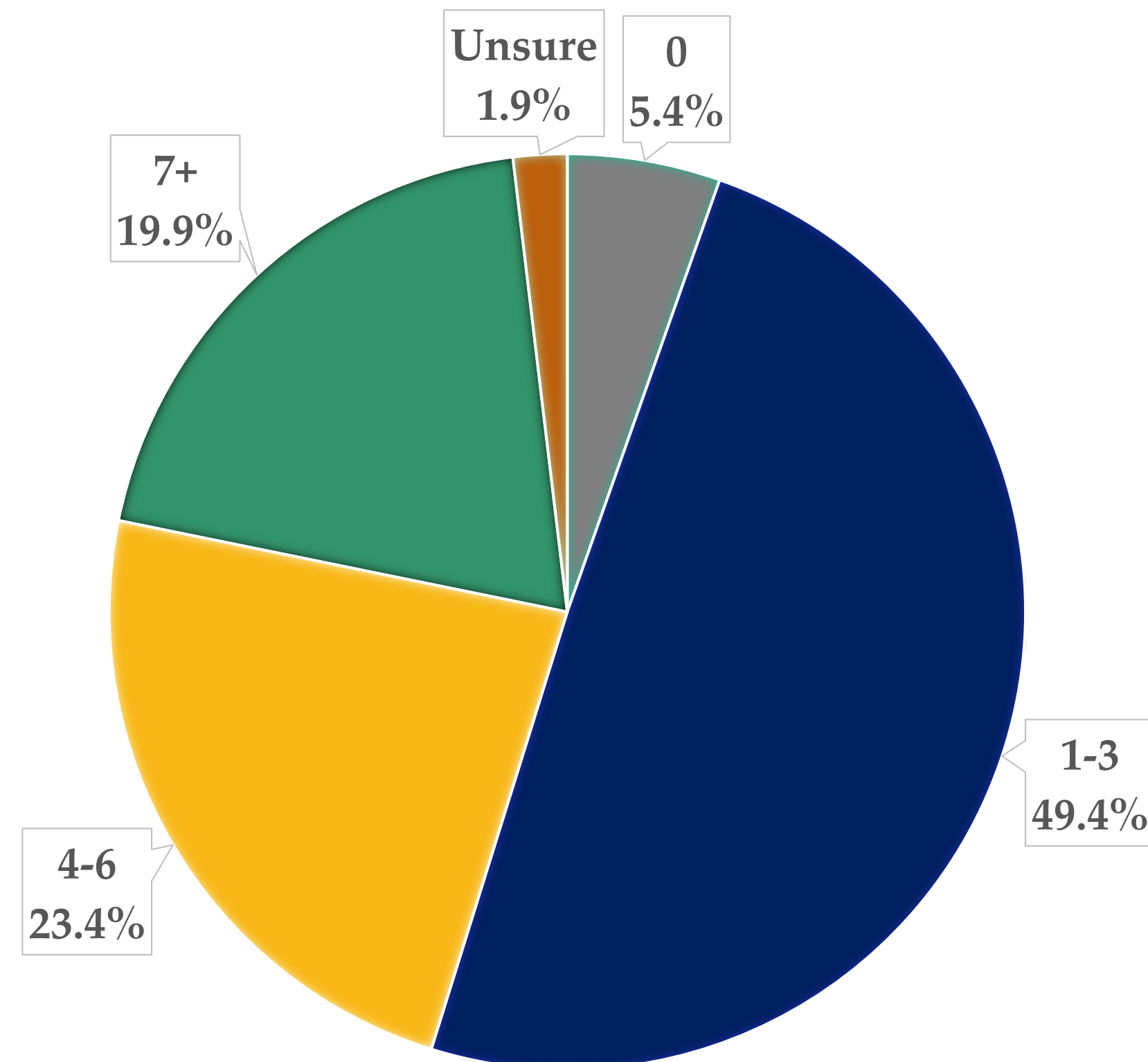


## INTRODUCTION & AIMS

While the role of the Research Administrator has evolved and expanded significantly since the profession emerged in the 1970s, only a limited number of formal university degree programs exist for formal training of Research Administrators into the profession. This puts the Research Administration profession in a vulnerable position when it comes to workforce and succession planning, and at risk for experiencing the negative effects of position vacancies that arise.

This management research project queried how Research Administration offices are planning for and managing vacancies presently, the perceived effects of the approaches engaged, and what strategies might be more effective.

**Fig. 1.** Vacancy count in the Research Administration office within the last 2 years



## METHODS & PARTICIPANTS

**Instrument:** Data collected through a fifteen (15) question web-survey, distributed through online Research Administrator forums, including the RESADML listserv and LinkedIn groups (incl.: SRAI; NCURA; EARMA; ARMS).

**Inclusion criteria:** At time of survey completion, respondent currently works as a Research Administrator in a Research Administration Office.

**Duration:** Survey remained open for thirty calendar days.

**Participants:** 304 consenting individuals. Dominant sample characteristics:

- Organization is a public university or academic medical center (63.6%)
- Office geographically located in the United States (95.7%)
- Respondent works in a central Research Administration office (73.4%)
- Respondent is a mid-level manager; Director (45.2%)
- Total number of employees in the Research Administration office is between 1 and 25 (71.8%)

# MANAGING VACANCIES IN THE RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

Cira Mathis, CRA, PMP, MSc-SHRM

## RESULTS

### ➤ Timeframe to fill vacancies

- Vacancies filled in 8 months or fewer, on average (75%)
- Perception that vacancies are not filled within a *reasonable* amount of time (55.3%)

### ➤ Research administration office's control over human resources matters

- Lowest averaging control items (rating average):
  - salary/ pay scales (1.36)
  - head count (1.54)
  - position classification/grading (1.54)
  - promotions of existing staff (1.58)

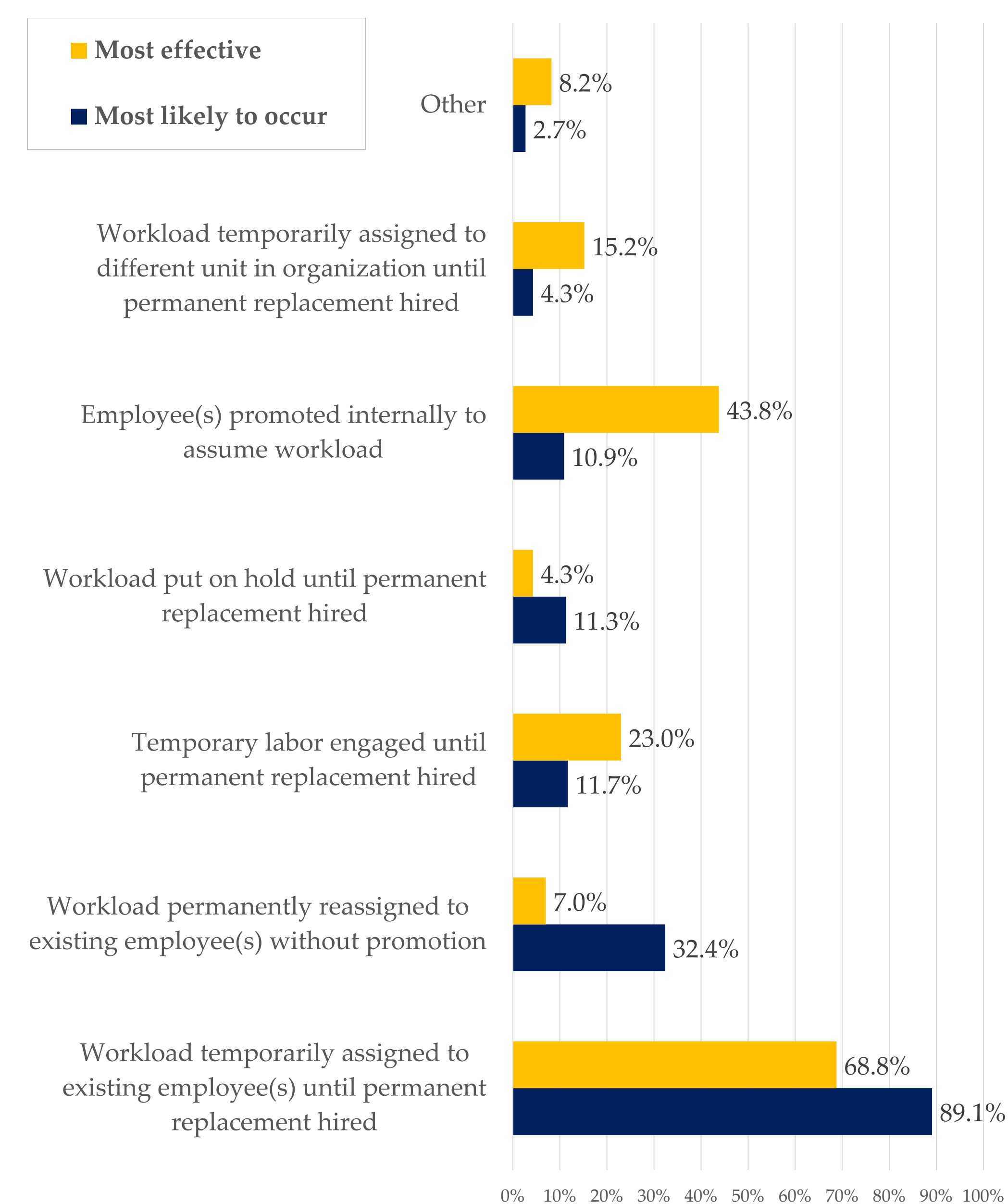
### ➤ Vacancy management strategies

- Predominantly *reactive*
- Vacancy or workload inequity must arise before the office takes action to address issues (68%)
- Workload temporarily shifted to existing employee(s) (89.1%)

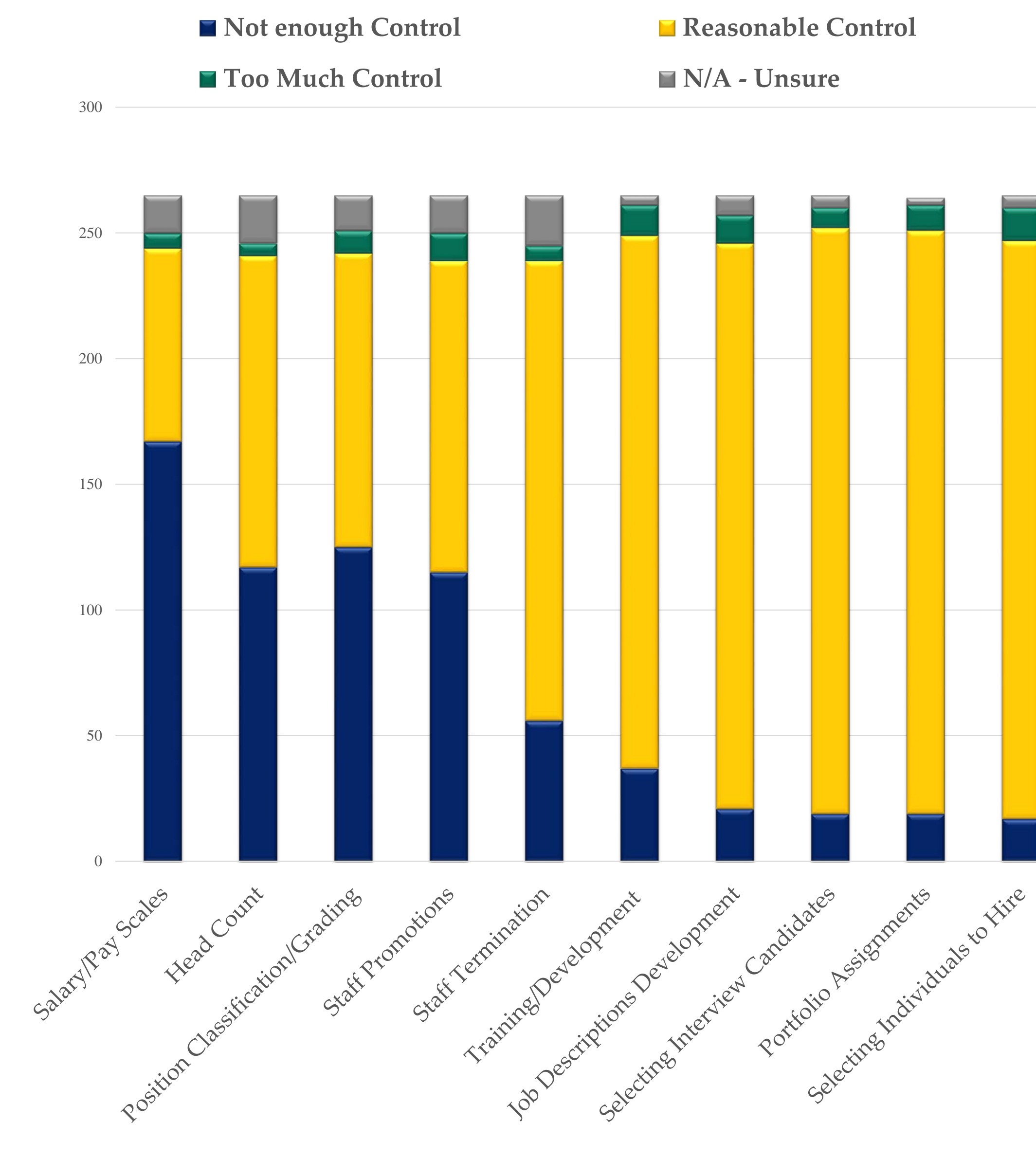
### ➤ Effects of vacancy management strategies used by the Research Administration office

- *Always* or *sometimes* an effect
  - Burden on coworkers (96.9%)
  - Burden on leadership (88.2%)
  - Decrease in quality and/or *timeliness* of service (86.6%)
  - *Gap* in service (83.1%)

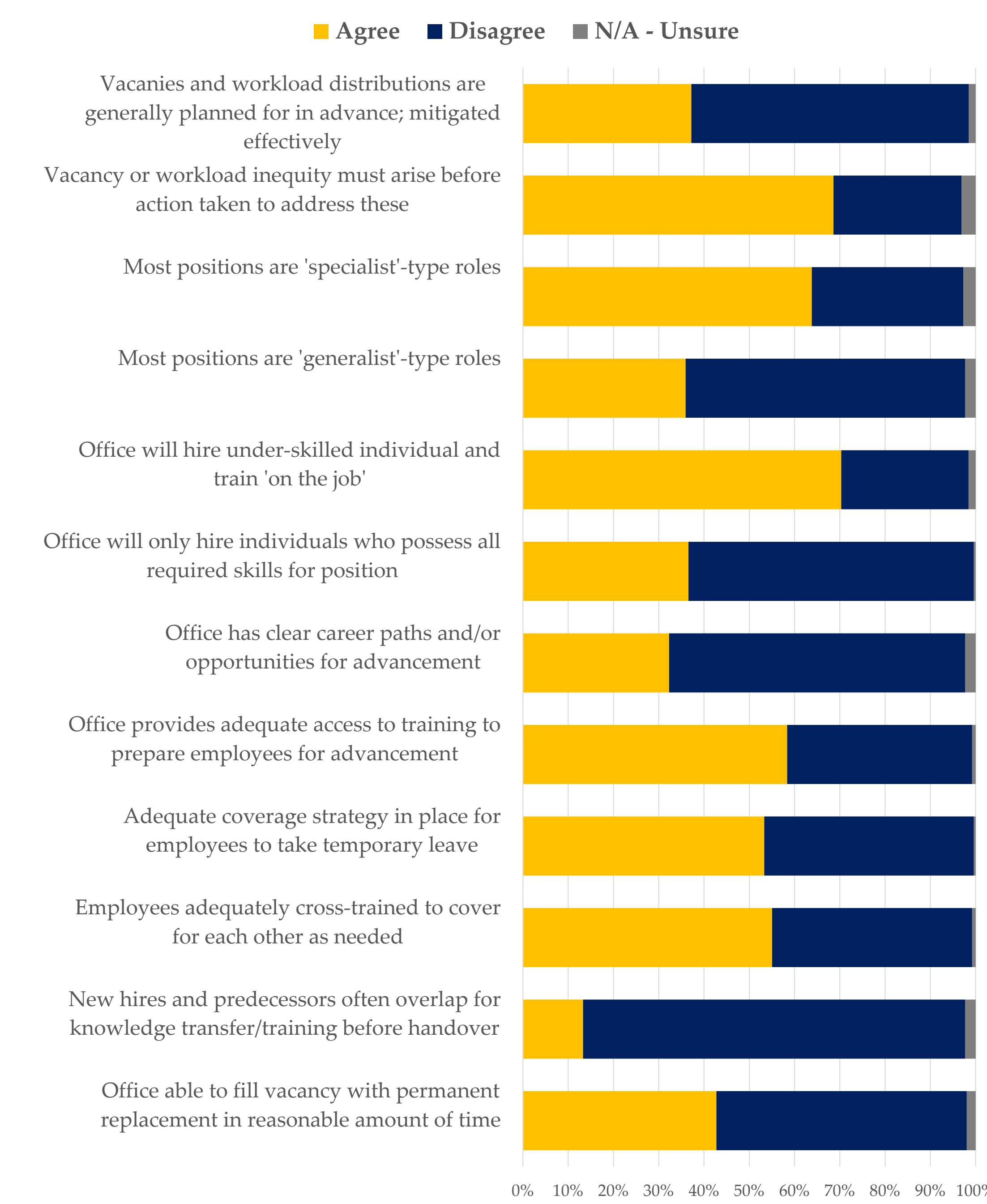
**Fig. 2.** Which practices *actually occur* to manage workload of vacated positions and what respondents believe would be *most effective* approaches.



**Fig. 3.** Level of control the Research Administration office leadership has in the office's personnel matters and decisions



**Fig. 4.** Practices of the Research Administration office related to workforce and succession planning



## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### ✓ Identify wider organizational constraints

- Incompatibility between strategies Research Administration offices want to execute and perceived ability to actually execute
- Identify institutional barriers; assess the extent to which these can be changed or mitigated

### ✓ Bridge the gap between succession planning and actual implementation

- While ~58% of respondents agree the office prepares employees for career progression, only ~32% affirm the existence of clear career paths and/or real opportunities for advancement
- Strengthen the pipeline of skilled employees (true career development vs. training) as an approach to mitigating vacancy impacts

### ✓ Promote from within, or otherwise incentivize workload shifts

- Approx. 48% of respondents would prefer to see a formal promotion accompany a permanent workload shift.
- If temporary workload shift is unavoidable, employees prefer to be incentivized (e.g.: monetary, time-in-lieu).
  - Incentives would not necessarily address or alleviate the negative effects identified as accompanying temporary workload shift (e.g.: coworker burden and decreases in quality/timeliness of work).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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