THE HUMAN COSTS AND BENEFITS OF WORK:
JOBLOAD, SELF-PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE,
AND EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Abstract

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The primary purpose of this project was to investigate some relationships between workload and employee wellbeing. The necessary first stage was to formulate a theoretical framework – the JobLoad Model – to support a comprehensive and detailed investigation of the main factors that contribute to a job's workload. Building on the ergonomics concept of ‘workload’, this Model incorporates task- and job-level factors that have been identified within the research literatures of physical and cognitive ergonomics as important; additional constructs were added to take account of additional factors shown to be relevant to employee wellbeing, drawing on evidence from occupational health and organizational psychology literatures. Using this framework, available questionnaire-based measurement instruments for assessing workload and employee wellbeing were reviewed, new items were developed as required, and the JobLoad Index (JLI) was developed.

The JLI was used to collect data from public servants in two different workplaces, with participation rates of 63% and 73% respectively. Relationships were determined between major task, job and organisational environment factors, self-perceived performance adequacy, and various aspects of employee wellbeing including job satisfaction, physical discomfort and psychological fatigue, stress and arousal. For a sub-sample of participants in one of the two workplaces, levels of adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol were also measured from 24-hour urine collections.

The factors measured by the JLI accounted for a very substantial proportion of variance in these various dimensions of work-related wellbeing. The results provide potentially very useful insights into the relative influences of a wide range of work- and job-related variables on people's perceived abilities to cope with their job demands, and on several aspects of their wellbeing. Further, the importance of measuring multiple dimensions of wellbeing, and differentiating their separate sets of work-related determinants, was well demonstrated. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this study has identified the powerful role that self-perceived performance plays as an intervening variable between job demands and people's work-related wellbeing.
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