

Chapter 2

“I’m hopeful that the phone will keep ringing and keep me out of mischief”: Regional Small Business ‘On the Edge’

This qualitative study was a preliminary small group interview phase in the larger research project examining workplace dynamics, engagement and burnout. The most important theme to emerge from these initial small group interviews was a sense that running a small or micro business in a regional centre means being ‘on the edge’, particularly in regard to finding and keeping good staff. Participants invested considerable financial, personal and emotional resources into their businesses, yet were vulnerable to many outside influences which threatened their stability and security. These findings indicate the relevance of Leiter and Maslach’s (1999) six areas of worklife, to a more meaningful understanding of the problems facing regional small businesses in Australia.

Key words: Small Business, Micro Business, Psychological contract, Burnout, Engagement.

In modern industrialized societies a significant proportion of employees’ mental, physical and emotional resources are absorbed by the demands of work, because work accounts for most of people’s waking hours. Paid work provides a great deal more than income to support living standards; it provides many psychological needs, such as a sense of personal worth, affiliation and individual well being. Hence it can be seen as an important creative endeavour, that not only contributes to personal meaning and identity (Gill, 1999), but to social identity as well (Siegrist, 2002).

Because work affects people at a deeply personal level, it is inevitable that individual workers are vulnerable to workplace stresses. In a focus on mental health in the workplace, the International Labour organization (ILO) (2000), confirmed that the

workplace environment can have a significant effect on the mental health and well being of workers. The compromised mental health of workers is associated with increased costs to industry through sick days, increased staff turnover, and reduction in productivity (ILO, 2000). Therefore, it is in the interests of managers to develop an understanding of mental health in the workplace and to actively work towards enhancing it.

Stevens (1993) asserted that people begin their relationship with their work, with expectations of good feelings and success. This was supported by Rousseau (1995), who suggested the construct of the psychological contract. Unlike a formal workplace agreement which is signed by both parties and lists duties and behavioural expectations as well as the details of financial remuneration, a psychological contract consists of the expectations held by employers and employees of the attitudes and commitment each will bring to the relationship. So within a workplace relationship, each party will give of themselves in an expectation of receiving (Stevens, 1993). In the case of employees, expectations include; good feelings about their workplace, support and appreciation of their efforts, and in the case of employers, productivity and loyalty are expected of workers (Rousseau, 1995).

Consequently, well being within working relationships is highly dependent on a good fit between the organization and values, skills, and abilities of individual workers (Stevens, 1993). According to Leiter and Maslach (1999), mismatches in employment happen when critical ground rules are undecided or when something happens to alter the working relationship, thereby rendering it unacceptable to the employee. Hence the burnout/engagement focus shifts definitively from the employee to the relationship the employee has with the organisation. Workers in the 21st century experience employment issues and relationships with their workplace

that may impact on them in such a way that stress is an inevitable outcome. In addition, pressure on managers and business owners to comply with government regulations, achieve deadlines and improve production, can translate to a high level of stress for employees and employers alike (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001; Timms, Graham & Caltabiano, 2007), thus putting enormous strain on relationships within the workplace. Nevertheless, according to Mayer and Davis (1999), managers who are aware of the meaningfulness of these relationships will be conscious that their interactions in the workplace are characterized by ability, benevolence and integrity.

People, who are engaged in their work, enjoy it and are energised by it. Even though they work hard and may get very tired physically, they feel the satisfaction of having accomplished something worthwhile (Schaufeli, 2004). Furthermore they enjoy other aspects of life besides work. So they are individuals who have balance in their life and have the ability to relax when they need to do so (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). At the other end, of what some see as a bipolar construct (Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001), is worker burnout. The main characteristics of worker burnout include emotional exhaustion, a feeling of being overextended and stressed to the extent that a person's capacity for resilience is completely undermined; and cynicism, characterised by a sense of distancing from the organization and the people in it.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) described the 'downward spiral' of burnout which has its roots in the 'degree of fit' between the individual and six key areas of worklife. Mismatches on any of the areas of worklife, are likely to engender emotional responses, which by the nature of the environment in which they are experienced, are social experiences. The six areas so identified by Leiter and

Maslach (1999) are: (1) workload (excessive work, or the wrong kind of work for the person), (2) control (insufficient control of resources or authority to pursue the work in the most effective manner), (3) rewards (lack of recognition, appreciation or remuneration incommensurate with effort expended), (4) community (lack of support from colleagues in the workplace), (5) fairness (consistency of decisions and equity of rules), and (6) values (discrepancy between the values of the person and the organization). In an ideal world, employees and employers would arrive at a mutually acceptable balance on these six areas through unambiguous negotiation of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). According to Leiter and Maslach, the goal of professional intervention should be to support processes by which organizations and workers build up adequate balance in the six areas of worklife. This will occur through inventive and effective 'two way' communication channels within organizations.

Studies of human relationships within the small business workplace are rare (Matlay, 1999) and often models applied to larger business workplaces do not apply (Mazzarol, 2003). However, an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2001) census found that 3.3 million people were employed in small non-agricultural businesses within Australia. This figure represented 47% of private sector employees in 2000-2001 and so represents a significant proportion of the Australian workforce. For clarification the current study uses two terms to distinguish small businesses in Australia, 'micro' business is a reference to small business with less than 5 employees and 'small' business is a reference to businesses with 6-20 employees (ABS, 2001).

2.1.1 Aim

The aim of the current paper is to extrapolate major themes from several small group interviews and present a human face to the experience of engagement and burnout within the small business workplace. As it transpired, all participants in the small group interviews were managers within small or micro business, therefore workplace dynamics were discussed from a management perspective.

2.2 Methodology

The current phase of the research employed qualitative data collection by means of a card sort exercise in the context of small group interviews with informed participants. The researcher presented a talk introducing the six areas of worklife, burnout and engagement as well as the research plan at the request of members of a local chapter of Business Network International (BNI) (2006), a networking group for small businesses which aims to provide members with quality referrals. During the talk it was revealed that little was known about human dynamics in small and micro business. Members indicated that they were interested in providing their own insights into this topic.

2.2.1 Participants:

Ethics approval was obtained and groups of two or three interested workers or managers were sought to undertake the interview with the investigator at a time which was convenient to them and which did not impinge on their working hours. It was decided to use a structured introduction in order to direct participants' thinking about the organizational context of worker mental health outcomes, to ensure all participants were familiar with the terms being used in the questions and to achieve data within a short time frame (Millward, 2000; Vaughn et al., 1996). Consequently participants were selected by purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). This sort of

sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know people who would be good interview subjects, who can inform the research. For this reason sampling began with participants who belonged to a small business network group who were interested in contributing to the research.

A total of ten participants were interviewed; five women and five men. All were managers within their micro or small business spheres and seven were owners or part-owners of their businesses. Participants included a high pressure water cleaner/operator; a carpet cleaner; two real estate agents; a financial planner; a mechanic; a landscape gardener; a mortgage broker; and two office managers. Although it was planned to interview workers in separate interviews to managers, people who held management positions were substantially more interested in participating in the interviews than were employees. It is noted here that the research plan involved getting permission from management to approach workers. Within the context of micro and small businesses, concerns were raised by some workers that their anonymity could be compromised since their employers were aware they had been approached by the researcher, and participation of employees could well generate tension and unwelcome curiosity within the workplace. Consequently all participants in this phase of the research were managers.

2.2.2 Procedure

Most of the card sort words came from Saunders and Thornhill (2004) who used 21 words representing negative emotions and 19 representing positive emotions. For purposes of equivalence this research used 22 negative words and 22 positive words relating to emotions which might be felt within a workplace context. Actual words appear in Table 2.1.

Participants were asked to sort 44 cards, each containing one emotion which may well be experienced as a result of interactions within the workplace, into “do not feel” or “feel to some extent”. The methodology is explained in Saunders and Thornhill (2004) in the context of trust and mistrust in organizations. The “do not feel” cards were removed and noted. Each participant was then asked to commence a second sort of the cards containing an emotion in the “feel to some extent” cards into “felt strongly” and from these identify three felt “most strongly”. It was anticipated that discussion with participants during and following this process would identify aspects within the workplace which related to workplace relationships.

Table 2.1. Words used in card sort for small group interviews

Negative Words		Positive Words	
Angry	Mistrustful	Calm	Involved
Anxious	On edge	Cheerful	Keen
Concerned	Overwhelmed	Comfortable	Optimistic
Confused	Powerless	Confident	Positive
Demoralized	Resentful	Eager	Relaxed
Depressed	Resigned	Enthusiastic	Relieved
Disinterested	Stressed	Excited	Satisfied
Frustrated	Swamped	Expectant	Secure
Hopeless	Under pressure	Happy	Supported
Indifferent	Vulnerable	Hopeful	Trusting
Insecure	Worried	In control	Rewarded

Questions asked within the context of the card sort exercise, were derived from the literature (e.g., Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Maslach et al., 2001; Rousseau, 1995; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and included:

1. Participant impressions of workplace relationships as triggered by the card sort exercise.
2. Understandings of expectations of themselves and those who are managers (or employees) of participants (psychological contract).

3. What aspects of workplace relationships contribute to worker stress (burnout).
4. What aspects of workplace relationships contribute to worker empowerment (engagement).

Apart from the card sort exercise the interview was unstructured and focused on participants' experience of the 3 focus emotions within the workplace.

2.3 Analysis and Results

The recorded interviews were transcribed and categorized according to themes and patterns which emerged. Data were analysed by means of content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) using a directed approach and Nvivo 7 software. 'A priori' categories (Stemler, 2001) from the research model were used to guide coding analysis. These categories were based on the six areas of worklife model (Leiter & Maslach, 1999), engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), and burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) as well as the psychological contract (Rosseau, 1995). In order to maximise accuracy of coding analysis, two independent coders applied the chosen categories to the transcript document, with high (94%) concurrency. Inconsistencies were discussed and reconciled between the coders. Any inconsistencies were deemed of a minor nature by the researchers. For instance, one coder classified a participant's comment of "under pressure from a financial point of view – work and income" as workload and community and the other coder classified it as workload and control. One main theme and two 'sub' themes emerged from the predetermined categories, and formed the framework for data presentation in this study.

The main theme which emerged from the interviews was a reasonably constant feeling of being 'on the edge'. This feeling was engendered mainly by aspects of control, and to a lesser extent, workload, reward, community and values (Leiter & Maslach, 1999); and was both negative and positive from participants' perspectives.

On the one hand, participants lacked security and daily faced challenges which could well undermine the success of their businesses. On the other hand, there was a sense of achievement at having successfully faced challenges and of being self employed or of contributing in a substantial way to the success of a small business. Theme one is the pervasive theme for this chapter and incorporates aspects of themes two and three.

Theme two was a sense that running one's own business can provide satisfaction in that it is personally rewarding to have good relationships with clients and employees, to be in charge of one's own destiny by being a small business owner and to be absorbed in one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Of the ten participants, four reported high engagement with their work as described by Schaufeli (2004). Theme three provided for the two participants who reported major issues which could be seen as illustrations of burnout as expounded by Maslach et al. (2001).

2.4 Data presentation and relevant literature

It is noted that in this section participant comments are not specifically associated with their occupation or sex unless this information is revealed within their comments themselves. This is due to the small number of participants, the fact that some are well known in their regional Far North Queensland community, which is 1200 kilometres from the state capital city (Brisbane), and the need to protect their anonymity.

2.4.1 Theme 1. A sense that the business is, "on the edge"

The title for this theme was chosen because, a number of participants expressed a sense of having invested considerable financial, emotional and physical resources in their businesses; and yet were conscious of a constant possibility that circumstances or events beyond their control could open up areas of vulnerability for them and

quite possibly generate the seeds of misfortune. One participant expressed it this way, having chosen the word “hopeful” in the card sort exercise in the period just before Christmas which is traditionally a holiday season in Australia,

I’m hopeful that the phone will keep ringing and keep me out of mischief. The main reason that I’m hopeful is that I will have enough work to keep my really good employee. He is a good worker – I can’t afford to keep him on any other than a casual basis and I don’t want to lose him. I want to keep him occupied 40 hours a week – so I need the phone to keep ringing. That puts me on edge. I can see the potential this fellow has got and I don’t want to lose him.

Within this participant’s comment is an awareness of the seasonal fluctuation of any service business. Such businesses experience ebb times, during which they may need to find another good worker or face possible financial ruin. The same participant explained the choice of the word “expectant” which had been thought by the researcher to be a positive word, “Ah no – not really – it’s not a positive one. I’m expecting things to improve but really worried that they might not. It’s a horrible feeling”.

Cash flow was a common problem which contributed to a sense of insecurity mentioned by participants:

I don’t know how many times I’ve gone without pay – I’ve paid my employees but I haven’t had any pay myself – we always make sure our employees are paid and my business partner and I have gone without pay – that wasn’t for a week either, that was for a couple of months.

Unlike the previous example, this employer employed staff on a permanent basis thus providing them with job security, but experienced the problems inherent in

fluctuating cash flows by personally going without pay. The problem, as viewed by participants however, was not as simple as ensuring that enough work was available to keep workers busy and cash flowing within the business, it also involved the ability to find suitable and productive staff. This problem was mentioned by most participants. A participant who chose “depressed”, “powerless” and “hopeless” during the word sort exercise said,

Well at the moment my business is in a situation where because I can't get staff - I can't get mechanics and I desperately need at least one, I'm imploding. There is no light at the end of the tunnel, there is just a big brick wall and I'm powerless to do anything about it.

The issue of finding and keeping good staff, identified as a “critical bottleneck” by Mazzarol (2003, p. 27) was seen as a particular problem for these small businesses for three reasons, their distance from major urban centres, competition from larger businesses and a smaller pool of suitable people to employ.

Participants felt that their distance from the big Australian cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne put their regional small businesses at a disadvantage in terms of competing for quality staff;

If you were in Melbourne or Sydney you could get \$80-90 thousand [per annum], we simply can't pay that money... so if we paid these people that sort of money we would have a broker fee that would cost clients \$1000 and people would say 'get stuffed- I'm not paying that'.

In addition, if the small business was part of a national group of small businesses or a franchise, there was an additional traveling factor involved in successful operation, which inevitably impacted on the personal life of the participant,

Being part of a national group, we spend more time traveling to Brisbane e.g. for meetings. I will be away for business a total of ten nights over the next three months. Colleagues in the capital cities will still get to go home to their families every night.

In addition, competition from larger businesses who can afford to pay workers much larger salaries, leaving small regional businesses in a place where they cannot compete for talented workers was seen as a problem for participants:

The mines come along and say ‘we want you to work in the back of ‘Woop Woop’. We know that we can’t get you unless we pay you big money – you are being paid \$20- per hour now working in [*name of city*]. We will pay you \$50- per hour. We will supply you with a house; we will supply you with food so we’ll feed you and clothe you’. Fifty dollars per hour! They are on the next plane. They’re gone! And that is happening right across the trades”.

The third challenge, articulated by those involved in trade businesses, was a perception that fewer talented people were choosing trade career paths:

[this has been happening] since the government brought in the idea that we need a very smart country and everyone’s got to go to uni – people don’t become mechanics – People don’t go in for trades.

However the problem of recruiting suitable staff did not appear to be restricted to trades and only one owner/manager had no problem recruiting suitable staff with exactly the right skills to grow the business. The business was recently established by two former employees of a major bank and its staff comprised former work colleagues of the owner/manager:

The level we have come to now has been easy because everyone who works for us now, we have known personally. They are all ex [*name of bank*] bank. We were fortunate because we knew who were good

operators and who weren't. Not too many business people would have the luxury of knowing how someone performs and knowing what their attitude is and their personality and whatever. So we've been most fortunate.

The experience of this last participant underscores the uncertainty faced by those who are not in the position to have previous knowledge of potential staff. Other participants indicated that as employers in small business, they experienced a great deal of uncertainty when their business grew to the extent that they needed to employ staff. In spite of the fact that Leiter and Maslach's (1999) discussion of mismatch in the control area of worklife focused on employees in relationship to their superiors, participants' revelations of their vulnerability when employing staff was reminiscent of this. Leiter and Maslach discussed control in terms of workers having insufficient control over resources needed to do the work, and furthermore lacking authority to pursue what they believe to be the most efficient manner of doing the work. In the case of these employers in small business, the important resources were their workers who were central to owners' business success, yet there are forces outside of the control of business owners; these forces combined to create situations where participants' plans for their businesses were jeopardized:

I can't grow the business. My ambition was to have it three times the size of what I've got now. When I moved into that shed there was room for three mechanics and one apprentice to operate and my ambition was to expand into that. I was hoping that it would get to the stage where it was absolutely too small. Instead of that I've got a situation where I am working on the floor myself in grease and muck fixing cars. I had promised myself that I wasn't going to be in that situation at my age.

Participants also spoke of lack of control over circumstances whereby workers had to be hired in the first place; the following dialogue is between two

owner/managers and outlines the role of Government legislation, with mandated compliance practices, in shaping the growth of a business from micro to small business in order to remain viable:

Owner Manager 1. We've actually looked at where we're going in our business, and when [*name of partner*] and I had it on our own as a partnership – we were doing quite well and then the Financial Services Reform Act (2001, Commonwealth Consolidated Acts 2004) came along and it changed all that. We simply could not do it with the two of us – it was a physical impossibility. Too much paperwork, the demands – we had to employ people to fulfill government requirements. The moment we did that – we had to get bigger so we could pay the people we were employing. We then went into the spiral of having to get bigger. Then when you get bigger you think, 'well hang on, you've got to employ another person because the workload's got so big' and you're on this bloody train.

Owner Manager 2. The other problem you've got too is, [when] you're small - you've got small overheads, and you get bigger and you come to this level and you've got bigger overheads but you've still got the small income and that's where I am. I need to get to \$1million per year turnover to get anywhere.

Owner manager 1. Exactly – you've got the same problem we've got - we are in the wrong turnover and the next step – from here to there is the hard part to do – to move from here to there. To get to the first \$500,000 per year isn't all that hard to do - its hard, but its not breaking – but to get from \$500,000 to \$1million – Man Oh Man that's hard!

This dialogue would suggest that some people who have previously been self employed in a micro business capacity may well have been placed in a position where they have had to expand their business in order to meet government compliance and accountability provisions and to sustain a particular income level. Mandatory extra paperwork and the necessity to employ extra people in order to

ensure that the paperwork was done therefore introduced another level of control problems (Leiter & Maslach, 1999) for these managers. This observation has some consistency with findings reported in Timms, Graham and Caltabiano (2007) where it was noted that teachers reported that government legislation introduced a great deal of extra paperwork in addition to their normal duties, thereby placing them in a situation of enormous strain by an increase in workload and an inability to control their working lives.

In her discussion of the mutual understandings of the reciprocal expectations brought into relationships between managers and employees Rousseau (1995) saw the psychological contract as an evolving process with both parties “filling in the blanks along the way” (p. 7). There was evidence in the interviews that participants did have the key expectations of their employees of performance, production and loyalty. Related to the issue of finding suitable staff was the disappointment and ‘fall out’ when it was discovered that a staff member had been employed who was unsuitable and therefore constituted a threat to the ongoing success of the business:

She has gone and we are still looking for the time bombs that are going to be there that we haven’t found- we know they are there but we simply don’t have the capacity to go through the files – there are 2,500 clients – it can’t be done – its just impossible to go through every page ...that’s an anxious situation that we have to try to cover.

The universal norm of psychological contract is reciprocity (Rousseau, 1995); this implies understanding and trust. Employers in this study expressed dismay at evidence of disloyalty of staff members often evident on the occasion of a sudden resignation, which is seen as a betrayal in this dialogue between two participants:

(1). Thousands and thousands of dollars we put into K. – and it's not just a financial investment, it's an emotional one as well – the emotional investment is more than the money.

(2). You're quite right – you know R. real estate – they had 4 employees who have now come over to the firm I am working for. I know them quite well, he [*the business owner of the other firm*] had a shot at me about the staff coming over (A lot of people think I have more influence than I have). He was almost in tears at the amount of work, money and time that they had invested in these people who at the drop of a hat came over to the firm I work for – I hadn't really thought about it.

Mazzarol (2003) found that the critical point for small business growth was the location, inspiration and keeping of good staff. Participants supported this finding, and pointed out that staff training and education represented a substantial business outlay which, in many cases, provided no ultimate benefit because of staff turnover. One participant expressed a sense of having been 'set up' by such an employee, who had until the very last minute, indicated her intention of becoming a partner in the business:

What hurts is – the same employee indicated that she wanted to eventually buy into the business on the Friday business meeting at [*name of restaurant*]. We were negotiating an arrangement - we asked, 'you are buying in'?

She said, 'yes, definitely'.

Then the following Wednesday she informed us that she wouldn't be able to afford to do it. Then Friday morning she 'dropped it' that she had got another job with an international broker – there is no way you can do that in a day and half in the insurance industry (they search you out, they check you out etc.), without it being set up before hand. That's what hurts, being set up.

Within this comment is a sense of breach of the psychological contract (Rousseau 1995). In this case, a conflict of values (Leiter & Maslach, 1999) between the

aspirations of the employer who thought that the employee was ‘buying in’ to the company (thus ensuring its future growth) and those of the employee, who perhaps wanted job security and was concerned about the risk involved in ‘buying in’ to the company. It could be that these concerns had not been communicated for any number of interpersonal reasons. However, the psychological effect of this particular experience on the employer/manager may well include an unwillingness to be in this position again.

There was however, evidence from participants that employee turnover often had its roots in circumstances beyond the control of the employer and the workplace, thus exacerbating the feeling of being on the edge:

Participant: I live in fear every day of losing my mechanic – the one I’ve got. He comes from [name of town, 100kms away], his wife comes from [name of town] – her whole family lives down there. His mother and step father live here, he’s just had massive problems trying to find a rented house to live in, so he was seriously thinking of transferring to [name of town].

Interviewer: So you’re finding that scary?

Participant: Yes – it is scary – and it’s still scary even though he has found a house, because he’s only renting, so in theory I’ve got him for another six months.

2.4.2 Theme 2. A sense that running one’s own business can provide satisfaction and that it is personally rewarding.

The psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), and its key role in a small business in regard to reciprocity was mentioned by participants in regard to their employees in terms of a harmonious work community:

Participant. Yes well having said that X was a miserable failure. T the new girl on the front counter, she is just wonderful, she is so nice to have

around, and she exudes ‘niceness’. She knows her stuff, she’s funny, she’s got a witty sense of humour. It really helps. S. would love to be a ‘woe is me, I fell out of the apple tree’ person but T won’t let her. We were sitting there today having our meeting and S. was on about something, T said ‘You fall out of the apple tree again?’, she said, ‘put a smile on your face – the world’s not that bad’ [*Laughter*]. I was sitting there laughing away to myself thinking, “this is so good”. She is fantastic and she’s very encouraging and all that – she’s good value, really really good value!

Interviewer. I think it is interesting how you said that T is encouraging and you find that really fantastic.

Participant. She is and it’s fantastic!

Interviewer. But you are her boss and she is encouraging you?

Participant. What I find is enthusiasm, encouragement, positiveness [sic] whatever you call it – it breeds on itself.

A key component in much of the literature is the central role played by management in the development of community within an organisation (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Another participant (an employee/manager) whose word choice included ‘rewarded’ said:

Participant: I feel rewarded in that people are friendly and nice and I am very optimistic that this business will grow into something that is really successful.

Interviewer: What do you put all that down to?

Participant: Um, I think, its support – there is a lot of support in here- we try to work as a team and support each other – I support X [*employee*] and she supports me and DDD [*employer*] is very supportive.

Interviewer: What do you appreciate about this job that you haven’t had before?

Participant: He’s [*the employer*] not just focused on the job, he sees the people and appreciates their work. Like a couple of weeks ago he saw that I was doing extra hours and the next day there was a book of movie

tickets on my desk. He just showed his appreciation for what I am doing
– You'd do ANYTHING for someone who is appreciative like that.

Community was also mentioned in regard to flexibility and 'give and take' within the work environment:

Yeah, well I've got, without sounding too – I don't know what the word is for it, but I think we are good people to work for, we are not, you know, stand over their shoulder, cracking the whip, we're flexible people, we are fun to work with and like a bit of a laugh. If they have to go early one afternoon, that's fine, because they stay back and work beyond five at different times. So we're very flexible. We are looking at building a bonus system into their salaries so they are part of the business success as well. The important thing is to make them feel part of the team.

Leiter and Maslach (1999) identified community as an aspect of worklife which could contribute to the engagement/burnout syndrome with social support from supervisors, management and co-workers a central element in 'buffering' the relationship of work demands and burnout.

Another important element in engagement of participants in their work was the sense of achievement and satisfaction in running their own business as illustrated in the following exchange between the interviewer and a participant in regard to the choice of the word 'rewarded' in the card sort exercise,

Participant: Yeah, very rewarded – compared to um .. up to two years ago when I came into the business. I was sort of working in a bank, it was monotonous, day after day, same sort of thing. On a salary .. you got your pay packet and your wheels stop going if you know what I mean, it didn't give you a real lot of satisfaction.

Interviewer: So the satisfaction you feel comes from?

Participant: Being rewarded, by having our own business and the opportunities for us in the future of building a successful business and the fruits of that.

Interviewer: Where exactly are the rewards coming from, are they financial, or relationships or success or feeling in control or what?

Participant: Um.. probably from the lot, probably the whole business everything. I mean, in control .. um We've built a very good business model here on how we do business. We've got some great systems and processes and we are committed to making the client's experience a happy one. That just builds the business further. As far as 'In control', I'm reasonably in control as a person. Our business is in control. I could probably give you a story for every single one of these [*indicates the cards*], and going on the success we have had to date and going forward, I am very rewarded that we've stumbled across a great opportunity and we've worked hard to get it going.

The sense of satisfaction and optimism from running one's own business, and being in the position where success is very much dependent on one's own efforts was reflected by other participants, including one who chose to discuss the word 'enthusiastic':

Because I am the eternal fisherman and I do believe that things work out, I am enthusiastically looking forward to that happening because I do believe that it will work out. I am always looking for the horse if I have a big pile of horseshit. Because if you don't encourage yourself with enthusiasm, you get depressed and I don't want to be depressed.

Other owner managers supported the sense that they played a key role in their own business success and recognised the leadership role they played within their businesses:

I run a staff of about 15 people so I need to be positive, I need to be enthusiastic, because they follow my lead. If I'm not those things, then they won't be those things.

Another viewpoint raised by participants was the necessity to have a complete break from work from time to time, in order to recharge energy levels to sustain their leadership role. Activities pursued during these breaks included physical exercise such as canoeing and running. One participant mentioned the enjoyment of flying small aeroplanes, "once a year I go flying for a week. I went to the Kimberleys for 10 days; it's just out of this world! Its great, you feel so released!"

Another participant used time off from work to build a shed:

My whole world was there, I was back fitting. The first day I was thinking "I could have stayed in this career", but by the time I finished I was saying "No bloody way" [*laughter*]. But it was fantastic, I felt great, I REALLY felt alive! What's happened is I've come back here – to a certain degree recharged.

Simply taking a day off to stay in bed was also seen as a way of achieving balance and restoring energy levels to sustain the need to 'push' oneself, although it appeared necessary to give it a label to avoid creating an impression of laziness:

Because I have had Ross River Fever, you've got to have a label, you call it 'Ross River day' and that gives you an excuse to take it easy for the day. I can put it in a box, not worry about it, and have a rest.

The refreshing nature of activities that are completely different to one's normal work activities and their capacity to insulate the individual from the development of disengagement is consistent with the work of Sonnentag (2005). Sonnentag emphasized the important of restorative detachment from work in order to protect the individual's emotional and physical reserves.

2.5 Theme 3. Manifestations of burnout

Two participants told the researcher that they ‘had burnout’ and indeed they displayed evidence of emotional exhaustion, distancing from the business and a sense of helplessness about their situation (Maslach et al., 2001). One was an owner/manager in a micro business and one was an employee/manager in a small business. The micro business owner was experiencing major problems attracting qualified staff and has been cited earlier in this paper. This problem was exacerbated by some unfortunate experiences with apprentices:

In the last 18 months I’ve had eight apprentices – and I’ve sacked the lot. They are just not interested, they want the money to have cars (some of them) they don’t want to learn the trade, when they do come to work they don’t want to work.

The participant was worried about the future of his business, admitted to ‘feeling hopeless’, and had plans in place for the sale of the business. However some strategies for improvement had recently been implemented. A significant one had been the employment of an office assistant to complete all the general duties and paperwork associated with running a small business;

Yeah it has relieved a lot of my workload – in five years she’ll be burnt out too, but anyway that’s not my problem. I now do half of what I always did; on the admin [sic] side she does the majority of it.

Primarily this participant discussed burnout problems originating from mismatches in workload and control. The fact that he was prepared to distance himself from the potential burnout of his office assistant was problematic, however towards the end of the interview he noted that his own state of mind affected the tone of the workplace,

‘depression’ breeds on itself. I know I go to work and I’m ‘depressed’ and the whole place takes on the same thing. I think that might be why people don’t answer my ads in the paper – because the negative vibes flow through wherever!

By contrast, the employee/manager outlined problems of having been employed as an expert in the field but denied autonomy to run the business in the most effective and productive manner:

The three words that I have chosen are ‘frustrated’, ‘stressed’ and ‘resigned’. I’m resigned to the fact that he [*the employer*] will say ‘no’ to everything, even though my ideas will really work for the labourers and the business he will say ‘no’. This changes the way that I think about broaching anything to him. It’s a very negative way for me to think, but anything that involves him handing out any kind of money or whatever, he will say ‘no’ to. That’s very frustrating –it’s like a ‘push me pull you’, constant rebuttal. That stresses me out. I get extremely stressed. I can see growth areas – I know my industry like the back of my hand, I’ve been in it since I was a young girl so I know what I’m doing. He does not know [*name of industry*] at all, he’s an accountant. So he has employed me as a manager to run this side of his business but he micro manages and doesn’t give me enough rope to run it properly.

The unresolved work situation was impacting on the health of this participant to the point where it was affecting her health and creating a situation of emotional exhaustion,

I haven’t slept properly for the last two weeks – I’m exhausted. I know when I’m stressed because I get little ulcers in here [*points to her bottom gum*], little tiny mouth ulcers, first sign of stress. They just start popping up and they’ve started to pop up again in the last week.

A key disappointment for this participant was a feeling of being ‘in the middle’ and lacking in support from the people within the workplace community:

Yeah, it’s like, it comes from your boss, it comes from your workers and it comes from your clients as well. It’s from all sides so I have to wear all those ‘unhappinesses’ [sic].

Problems in control were illustrated by the fact that no procedures were in place for the systematic replacement and maintenance of necessary equipment;

... its very exhausting and frustrating because we need new tools, we need new plants, we need a lot of things to operate and so I’m constantly juggling a little bit of money to get those things. I’m ‘scabbing’ off our nursery, you know what I mean, to get what I need to keep the [*name of industry*] business going. It’s frustrating when you know where the money is going and you’ve to manage on not enough to keep it going well. It’s frustrating.

Although this participant loved the industry she worked in, “oh, I really would love my job if a few things changed”, she felt unrewarded, emotionally and financially in her present position,

I also need to consider that for me, I feel completely unrewarded, for all that I do, for the level of what I do and for what I have achieved for him. And in addition I am underpaid.

The feeling of being unrewarded led to a crisis in fairness as illustrated in this exchange between the participant and the interviewer who asked if the participant had approached the employer with regard to her concerns,

Participant. Um Not directly. Not ‘I want another \$20,000 per year, otherwise you will lose me’. I want a laptop computer so I don’t have to drive from [*suburb at north of city*] to [*suburb at south of city*] 5 times

per day and waste 5 hours everyday driving around. These are the things that frustrate me. A laptop computer ... God, it's a simple modern piece of equipment, that would save so much time!

Interviewer. You have asked for one?

Participant. Yep – I got a 'no'. Ah.... I once asked for a pay rise. I got 15 cents per hour. It comes to \$255 per year – Hey come on, it's insulting!

Clearly this participant had expectations of her work experience that deviated from the reality. The terms of her initial employment as a manager with autonomy to run a particular section of the business clashed with the reality of micromanagement on the part of her employer. She found herself in a chronic and distressing situation, experiencing mismatch in control, community, reward and fairness (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). The consequent deterioration in her worklife led inevitably to the burnout experience where she felt emotionally exhausted, alienated and powerless in her work situation.

2.6 Conclusion.

The current study was conducted to determine if the salient issues associated with the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), six areas of worklife (Leiter & Maslach, 1999), engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) were applicable to relationships within small and micro business in a regional centre. It was further anticipated that data from these small business participants may well inform survey construction for the next phase of the research project, by highlighting areas where there may well be a difference in experiences between people working in large businesses and those working in small businesses.

Findings from the current study have tended to illustrate key aspects of theoretical constructs. However, at least in the case of micro and small business, they have also illustrated that the six areas of worklife model (Leiter & Maslach, 1999)

applies to the experiences of owners and managers of organizations as well as employees. What has been achieved by this study is a snapshot of the human face of workplace dynamics within the small business environment. Unfortunately the portrait painted within the current research has, apart from the three employee managers, failed to capture the point of view of those who are employed as workers within small businesses. However it has highlighted the vulnerability of small business owners and managers in a regional centre of Far North Queensland to the development of burnout. This vulnerability stemmed largely from workload and control (Leiter & Maslach) issues. The study has also highlighted participants' noteworthy capacity for resilience, a feature of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

One outcome of this research has been the realization that it is necessary for the researchers to make provision for people to identify themselves as micro or small business employees in the workplace survey which follows this phase of the project. This will provide these people with a greater capacity to provide their perspectives in a way that ensures their anonymity. In addition, it has alerted the researcher to the need to ensure that participants are provided with the opportunity to indicate whether they work in a regional, rural or metropolitan area, as it is quite possible that the experience of micro and small business owners and workers is different in these areas. Thanks to information gained from participants in the small group interviews it will now be possible to capture these data from survey respondents. It is posited that the current study has highlighted how vital workplace relationships are to the continued stability and viability of micro and small businesses. These relationships are a very important key to business sustainability within a significant sector of the Australian economy.

Chapter 3.

'I just want to teach'. Queensland independent school teachers and their workload

Note: The content of this chapter was published in the Journal of Educational Administration and its citation appears below. It is noted that the three authors that appear in the citation are the PhD candidate and her two supervisors. Supervisors' roles in the production of the manuscript were advisory and editorial. Although formatting of the paper has been changed from the Harvard system used by the journal to the APA system adopted in the current thesis, the structured abstract required by the journal has been maintained. References for this paper have been incorporated into the larger dissertation reference list.

Timms, C., Graham, D., & Cottrell, D. (2007a). I just want to teach', Queensland independent teachers and their workload, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(5), 569-586.

Abstract

Purpose

The present study seeks to elucidate observed mismatches with workload in teacher respondents to a survey exploring aspects of the work environment.

Participants and Methodology

This phase of the study constituted a pen and paper survey of 298 currently serving teachers in independent schools in Queensland, Australia. Measures used in the research included the Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS), which identifies matches or mismatches between the worker and organisation on six areas of worklife, the

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).

Findings

One sample *t* tests revealed respondents reported significantly higher matches in the control, community, fairness and values areas of worklife than previously surveyed populations, whereas they reported no difference in reward, and significantly more mismatch with workload. Respondents reported significantly higher levels than previously established norms on the OLBI dimension of exhaustion, but similar levels of disengagement. Responses to the UWES revealed significantly higher dedication and absorption and lower vigour than previously established norms. In addition, respondents reported working long hours in order to fulfill all obligations. Expansion of the quantitative data with respondent comments indicated that teachers working independent Schools in Queensland have reached a level of workload that is unsustainable and which constitutes a serious risk to their mental and physical health.

Originality/Value

This article pinpoints the many reasons why demands made on teachers have extended to a level which is making their work unsustainable and will be of interest to those involved in the teaching profession.

Key words

Teachers, Job satisfaction, Grievances, Stress, Australia, Workplace

Paper type

Research paper

While most teachers find their work extremely satisfying (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006, Timms, Graham and Caltabiano, 2007), it is acknowledged by many

researchers that teaching is a stressful occupation (e.g. Friedman, 2000, Howard and Johnson, 2004). Hargreaves (1998) regarded the need to perform as being an integral component of an occupation which, of necessity, demands a form of emotional labour in its day to day execution.

Teaching involves immense amounts of emotional labor. Not just ‘acting out’ feelings superficially like pretending to be disappointed or surprised but also consciously working oneself up into a state of actually experiencing the necessary feelings that are required to perform one’s job well (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 840).

Therefore, the emotional labour of achieving a consistent and sustainable level of performance in day to day interactions with children is something that teachers expect within their normal working day, in the same way actors would expect to simulate emotions for realistic performance (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Rice (2005) observed the emotional nature of teachers’ work and further commented that the bulk of it occurs within their own classrooms and therefore within an autonomous work situation. However, according to Rice, embedded within this isolated autonomy was a major source of uncertainty that created vulnerability to negative community feedback for teachers.

Easthope and Easthope (2000) provided examples of intensified teaching workload. These included the expansion of student teacher ratios due to understaffing and different tasks being added to the teacher’s workday, many of which were administrative in nature. Howe (2005) observed that while the trend to longer working hours was a product of labour market deregulation and widespread within Australian workplaces, the phenomenon was most evident within education. This was due to poor resources to fund changes and resultant increased workloads for the teachers expected to implement them. The Queensland Independent Education

Union (QIEU, 2005) reported that members experienced “increased content of jobs (often through understaffing), less time for rest breaks, balancing more simultaneous demands, deadline tightening and the concept of working until the job is done” (p. 1). An example of the latter is mandatory paperwork which is legally required of teachers as accountability measures. Time that is necessary to complete this paperwork is not factored into the school day (Howe, 2005). In addition, Timms, Graham and Caltabiano (2007) and Gardner and Williamson (2006) observed that school reforms often overlap, leaving teachers little time to assimilate and adjust to changes before another change begins to impact on their lives. Finally, Fink (2003) noted the impact on teachers of increased ‘social work’ responsibilities and the integration of students with special needs into ordinary classes without necessary resource and professional development provisions.

Erickson and Ritter (2001) forewarned possible serious health consequences for those whose continuous experience of being at work required hiding feelings of agitation. Time filled with bureaucratic tasks peripheral to the main business of the individual, could well constitute an example of such emotional labour. Research suggests that teachers in many countries have become overloaded by external agendas which intensify the quantity of mandated work with increased accountability measures. This has been demonstrated in education systems in Canada (Fink, 2003, Hargreaves, 1998, 1999; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), United States of America (USA) (Tye & O’Brien, 2002) and Australia (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Gardner & Williamson, 2006; Howe, 2005; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Timms, Graham and Caltabiano, 2006, 2007). Teachers who experience this process invariably show a compromised capacity for sustaining the emotional nature of the work (Hargreaves, 1998). If an employee found themselves in a place where work had to be taken home

in order to fulfill and sustain a professional standard, opportunity for restorative psychological detachment from the job would not be possible (Sonnetag, 2005; Sonnetag & Krueel, 2006). Sonnetag and Zijlstra (2006) warned “continuous depletion of resources will lead to negative load effects (e.g. fatigue) and, ultimately, in the absence of recovery, to exhaustion, losses of function, and physical and mental impairment” (p.330). Connections have been drawn between burnout and cardiovascular disease, stroke (Melamed, Shirome, Toker, Berliner & Shapira, 2006) and depression (Smith, Roman, Dollard, Winefield & Siegrist, 2005).

Consequently, government reform agendas which intensify the quantity but not the quality of work performed by teachers have the capacity to erode teachers’ sense of mastery of their craft (Hargreaves, 1998), increase tension within the workplace, diminish individual satisfaction (Scott & Dinham, 2003), increase exhaustion (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou & Kantas, 2002) and reduce the amount of energy the person has to do the job (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). A recent report by QIEU (2005) underscored a striking incongruity between values articulated by those who employ the largest group of its members (Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations [ACCER], 2002) and actual experience. While ACCER acknowledged the importance of achieving a balance between work and life for their employees, the reality, according to QIEU, encountered by teachers in independent schools would indicate potential poor support for these teachers.

Burnout as defined in this study comprises two dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. Exhaustion is an emotional, cognitive and physical experience of being over extended and overwhelmed (Demerouti et al., 2002, Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005) and is the basic stress experience for the individual.

Disengagement is a feeling of distancing from and devaluing of the work experience

(Demerouti et al.). Workers suffering from disengagement will become negative about their work and the people associated with it. Sonnentag (2005) suggested that disengagement is a 'coping strategy' which follows the experience of extreme exhaustion, but is nevertheless part of the burnout experience. Engagement (the assumed opposite of burnout) on the other hand comprises three dimensions: dedication, vigour and absorption. Dedication is strong involvement in one's work and a feeling that the work is significant and challenging. Vigour is characterized by high levels of energy, mental resilience and willingness to expend energy in one's work. Finally, absorption is characterized by a sense of full concentration in work and of being fully occupied with it to the point that time will pass without one noticing it (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Incidentally, the absorption construct is reminiscent of the more complex concept of 'flow' which also has a component called 'absorption' (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In view of previous studies which have indicated a close relationship between workload and negative outcomes for teachers (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Fink 2003; Hargreaves, 1998, 1999; Hargreaves & Fink 2003; Scott & Dinham, 2003), it is the aim of this study to establish an understanding of the relationship of workload (Leiter & Maslach, 2006) to burnout (Demerouti et al., 2002) and/or engagement with work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). It is hypothesized that high workload is negatively correlated with the engagement measures of dedication, absorption and vigour, and positively correlated with the burnout measures of exhaustion and disengagement.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Participants were teacher respondents to a pen and paper survey randomly distributed to 1000 members of the Queensland Independent Education Union (QIEU) early in

2006. According to the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA, 2006), this sector (the non government school sector) caters for the education of 33% of primary and high school students in Queensland. Within the independent sector Catholic schools account for 20% of Queensland students and other organizations, mostly religious denominations (ISCA) educate the remaining 13% of Queensland's school students not educated within the government system. QIEU has 10793 teacher members, who represent about 60% of teachers currently serving in independent schools in Queensland (personal communication, QIEU, 25 September, 2006).

Another phase of the survey collected online responses from workers in other industries. The pen and paper teachers' phase achieved a response rate of 30% (n = 298) from QIEU participants. There were 83 (28%) men, and 215 (72%) women respondents. Respondents' mean age fell within the 45-49 year age group. Table 1 outlines employment status of participants. It is noted that P-12 schools cater for students from pre-school to grade 12, and of the 'other' category, two teachers had set up their own businesses coaching students with their school work and one teacher had been temporarily seconded to the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA, 2006).

Table 3.1. Employment status of participants by School

School Type			Employment Status				Total
			<i>Permanent full time</i>	<i>Permanent part time</i>	<i>Contract</i>	<i>Casual</i>	
Primary School	N	68	16	18	2	104	
	%	65.4%	15.4%	17.3%	1.9%	100.0%	
High School	N	131	12	8	2	153	
	%	85.6%	7.8%	5.2%	1.3%	100.0%	
P - 12 School	N	18	3	0	0	21	
	%	85.7%	14.3%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	
Kindergarten/ Pre School	N	8	4	0	0	12	
	%	66.7%	33.3%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	
English Language Schools	N	1	3	0	1	5	
	%	20.0%	60.0%	.0%	20.0%	100.0%	
Other	N	3	0	0	0	3	
	%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	
Total	N	229	38	26	5	298	
	%	76.8%	12.8%	8.7%	1.7%	100.0%	

3.1.2 Materials

The survey had a number of quantitative components which are summarized in Table

3.2.

Table 3.2. Measures used in the survey instrument

<i>Name of Measure</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>	<i>Source</i>
Self Rated Health	1	Ideler and Angel (1990)
Six Areas of Work Life Survey (AWS)		
• Workload	6	
• Control	3	
• Reward	4	
• Community	5	Leiter and Maslach (2006)
• Fairness	6	
• Values	5	
Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)		
• Dedication	5	
• Vigour	6	Schaufeli and Bakker (2003)
• Absorption	6	
The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)		
• Exhaustion	8	Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou and Kantas (2002)
• Disengagement	8	

Leiter and Maslach (2004, 2006) suggested that discrepancy between the individual and the organization and consequent development of engagement or burnout occurred within the context of one or more of six areas of worklife. The Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) matches and mismatches on: workload (the amount or quality of work to be done in a given time); control (workers' ability to contribute to decisions that affect them); reward (social and financial acknowledgement of contributions to the work); community (the quality of the social environment of the workplace); fairness (level of consistency and equitable treatment of people in the workplace) and values (what is important to the organization and the people who work for it). The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) has been recently translated into English after extensive testing with participants in the original

German language (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). It was chosen in preference to the more well known Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996) because copyright issues made it impossible to legally reproduce MBI questions in a survey document or online. The English version of the OLBI has achieved good validity and reliability comparisons with the MBI (Halbesleben & Demerouti).

Participants were asked to indicate length of time spent on work tasks in a normal week at school and at home. In addition, a half page was provided for participants to comment on any issue that was important to them.

3.1.3 Distribution

Distribution of the survey was facilitated by QIEU staff. Surveys were included in a union mail out to a random sample of union members in early 2006. A total of 298 (30%) completed surveys were returned to researchers by direct post in an enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Quantitative Results

Table 3.3 compares survey respondent means, standard deviations (SD), and Cronbach's alphas for quantitative data with those of previously tested populations.

Table 3.3. Means, SD, and alphas of survey variables compared to previously normed data

	N	Survey Means	Survey SD	Means Previously established	SD Previously established	α present survey	α Previously established	One Sample t test
Workload	293	2.35	.75	2.87	.84	.77	.76	-11.91***
Control	296	3.61	.74	3.36	.89	.72	.69	5.81***
Reward	297	3.16	.86	3.20	.89	.84	.82	-.80 (ns)
Community	294	3.66	.75	3.20	.93	.85	.82	10.44***
Fairness	290	3.07	.83	2.84	.83	.85	.82	4.42***
Values	293	3.65	.70	3.42	.72	.77	.72	5.60***
Dedication	293	4.33	.87	3.91	1.10	.87	.89	8.27***
Vigour	293	3.85	.74	3.99	1.11	.79	.84	-3.18***
Absorption	294	3.93	.74	3.58	1.18	.76	.79	7.99***
Exhaustion	296	2.59	.45	2.32	.58	.81	.73	10.26***
Disengagement	294	2.59	.32	2.23	.68	.79	.83	1.10 (ns)
Stanford General Health measure 1 item only	298	2.27	.88	3.29	.91	-	.92 (test-retest)	-19.93***

Note 1. Critical value for one sample t tests was set at .004 with a Bonferroni adjustment (t value > 2.888)

Note 2. *** $p < .001$

One sample t tests were conducted comparing respondent means with previously established population means and are displayed in Table 3.3. For the purpose of decreasing the risk of family wise error in this bank of t tests the critical value was set at .004 with a Bonferroni adjustment. Many t tests proved significant, with survey respondents reporting higher dedication and absorption compared to other populations (Schaufeli & Baker, 2003). Of relevance to the current paper is the observation that survey respondents reported significantly more mismatch on workload (Leiter & Maslach), significantly higher exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2002) and significantly lower vigour (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) than did the

samples previously tested with these measures. It is also noted that respondents in the present survey reported significantly better health than did previous samples (Ideler & Angel, 1990). With regard to all variables measured on the AWS, exhaustion (OLBI), and vigour (UWES), tests for differences between males and females, age groups, occupational level and types of school did not reach significance indicating that teachers tended to experience these variables in similar ways. However significant differences were noted in means between the two largest groups of respondents in regard to the UWES scales of dedication and absorption when the critical value was set at .02 with a Bonferroni adjustment. These differences are outlined in Table 3.4 and suggest that primary school teachers experience more dedication and absorption in their work than do secondary teachers.

Table 3.4. Significant differences between Primary and High School teachers on Dedication and Absorption

	Scale for component items	School Type	N	Means	SD	<i>t</i>
Dedication (UWES)	7 point likert	Primary	103	4.64	.68	4.81***
		High	149	4.16	.89	
Absorption (UWES)	7 point likert	Primary	103	4.16	.72	4.59***
		High	150	3.74	.69	

Note 1. Discrepancies in numbers reflect missing data in data set.

Note 2. *** $p < .001$

Table 4.5 outlines Pearson's correlations for main study variables. The AWS (Leiter & Maslach, 2006) are listed first, then the 3 dimensions of the UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), the 2 dimensions of the OLBI (Demerouti et al., 2002) and finally the hours per week spent working by respondents.

Table 3.5. Pearson's correlations indicating relationships between main study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 WORKLOAD (AWS) (Reverse Scored)	-										
2 CONTROL (AWS)	-.28**	-									
3 REWARD (AWS)	-.26**	.51**	-								
4 COMMUNITY (AWS)	-.16**	.46**	.56**	-							
5 FAIRNESS (AWS)	.23**	-.58**	-.62**	-.62**	-						
6 VALUES (AWS)	-.10(ns)	.57**	.56**	.64**	.73**	-					
7 DEDICATION (UWES)	-.09(ns)	.44**	.41**	.36**	.42**	.56**	-				
8 VIGOUR (UWES)	-.18**	.47**	.36**	.31**	.40**	.46**	.72**	-			
9 ABSORPTION (UWES)	.19**	.23**	.22**	.21**	.26**	.36**	.65**	.59**	-		
10 EXHAUSTION (OLBI)	.62**	-.45**	-.38**	-.32**	-.36**	-.35**	-.35**	-.49**	-.08(ns)	-	
11 DISENGAGEMENT (OLBI)	.24**	-.46**	-.47**	-.43**	-.49**	-.55**	-.69**	-.58**	-.46**	.56**	-
12 TOTAL HOURS WORKED BY TEACHERS PER WEEK	.31**	-.06(ns)	-.05(ns)	-.02(ns)	-.03(ns)	-.03(ns)	-.01(ns)	.04(ns)	.11(ns)	.11(ns)	-.00(ns)

Note 1. AWS scales are usually described on a 5 point likert scale from Severe Mismatch to Extreme Match however for ease of interpretation of correlations, Workload has been reverse scored so that a high score on workload = high workload rather than Extreme Match.

Note 2. ** p < .01 (2-tailed).

3.2.2 Work Hours

Respondents indicated hours spent working at school and at home in a normal working week. For teachers with full time teaching loads (permanent full time and contract teachers (n = 251, mean = 52.17 hours, SD = 9.14) these responses were combined and categorized into four groups: 'Normal Hours Employees' (minimum to 40 hours per week, n = 6, mean = 34.83 hours, SD = 3.86), 'Long Hours Employees' (40 to 50 hours per week, n = 89, mean = 44.81 hours, SD = 2.83), 'Very Long Hours Employees' (50 to 60 hours per week, n = 103, mean = 52.76 hours, SD = 2.68), 'Extremely Long Hours Employees' (60+ hours per week, n = 53, mean = 65.39 hours, SD = 8.18). The groups are displayed in Figure 3.1. The first three categories were obtained from a Queensland Department of Industrial Relations (QDIR) report (2003), the fourth category was added for the purposes of the present study. Table 3.6 provides details of the roles played by these permanent full time and contract teachers within their schools and demonstrates that teachers at all levels worked substantially longer than normal working hours per week.

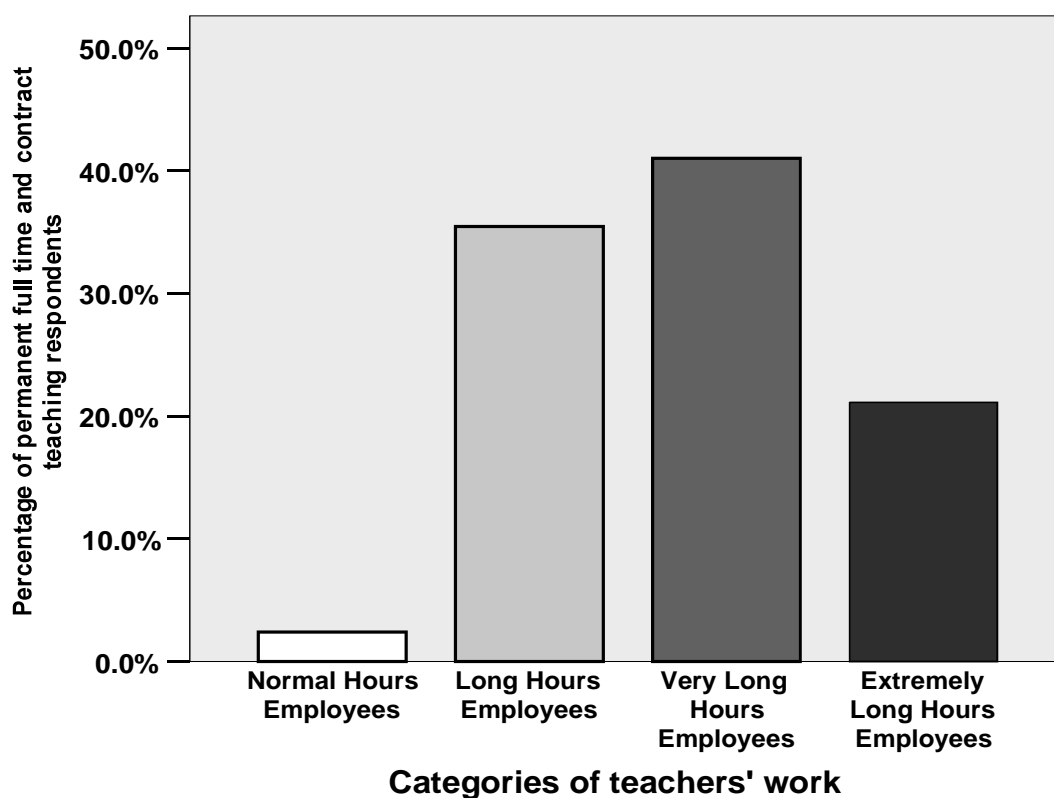


Figure 3.1. Hours worked by respondents (permanent full time and 'on contract', (n = 251) using QDIR report (2003) categories, the 'Extremely Long Hours' category was added for purposes of the current study.

Table 3.6. Work roles played by permanent full time and contract respondents (n=251) within their schools.

	Normal Hours Employees		Long Hours Employees		Very Long Hours Employees		Extremely Long Hours Employees		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Class Room Teacher	4	1.6	46	18.3	55	21.9	31	12.4	135	53.8
Head of Department (HOD) or Leading Teacher	0	0	14	5.6	11	4.4	6	2.4	31	12.4
Position of Added Responsibility (PAR)	2	0.8	13	5.2	29	11.6	11	4.4	56	22.3
Administration (Principal or Deputy)	0	0	6	2.4	2	0.8	2	0.8	10	4.00
Special Needs/ English as a Second Language (ESL) Support	0	0	4	1.6	4	1.6	2	0.8	10	4.00
Teacher-Librarian	0	0	2	0.8	2	0.8	0	0	4	1.6
Kindergarten Teacher/Director	0	0	4	1.6	0	0	1	0.4	5	2.0
Total	6	2.5	89	35.5	103	41.0	53	21.0	251	100.0

3.3 Discussion and qualitative results

The hypothesis that mismatches on workload would be negatively correlated with engagement met with limited support in the current study. High workload correlated negatively with vigour, indicating that this area of worklife impacted on the ability of individuals to sustain energy flows within their work. However there was a positive relationship between high workload and absorption, indicating that respondents tend to find their work so intrinsically interesting that they do not notice the passage of time, despite a reported mismatch in workload.

Hypothesized positive relationships between mismatch on workload and the burnout dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement were supported by significant correlations. Respondents indicated greater mismatch on the workload area of worklife than did respondents in previous studies (Leiter & Maslach, 2006). Unlike workload, other areas of worklife, such as control, community, values and fairness, rated highly with survey respondents in comparison to previously established norms, indicating that teacher participants in this survey tended to report matches with their work environment in these areas of their working lives. Consequently it is noted that respondents found that workload constituted the major source of dissatisfaction with their work environment. It is further noted that a previous finding of Timms, Graham and Caltabiano (2006) was not supported in the present study with men and women teachers reporting similar experiences on all burnout and engagement variables.

Eighty four percent of respondents worked long or very long hours as defined by the QDIR (2003). Gardner and Williamson (2006) found that teachers spent between 48.7 and 51.7 hours working on school work per week. Their research is

supported in the current study which found a mean of 52.17 hours (SD= 9.14) reported hours at work per week. The QDIR report found that employees who worked long hours had more flexibility and choice over when they worked. However, “the greater control they had over working hours under the guise of flexibility was in part a mirage, as their working hours were principally determined by their workload, over which they had very limited control” (p. 20).

The QDIR report provided an example of law firm professional employees who reported that they were under pressure to work long hours because of their workload, any ‘time off’ resulted in a greater sum of work to be completed the next day. This may explain an apparent anomaly with results in the present survey, respondents reported higher matches with the control aspect of their worklife as compared to previous studies. However questions relating to control in the areas of worklife measure (Leiter & Maslach, 2006) relate specifically to autonomy within the workplace, for example “I have control over how I do my work” and not to control over the amount and type of work they were given to do. Presumably participants in the current survey regarded the questions on this measure as relating to their particular classroom environments, over which they have a great deal of control.

3.3.1 Workload

Participants generally regarded their workload as increasing every year. Some saw this as possibly a feature of teaching in an independent school, an example of such a comment from a respondent was:

What tires me out (after 30 years of teaching) is the EVER increasing tasks that are placed into my “teachers’ work wheelbarrow”. Never

does anyone take tasks off, so the barrow gets harder to push, more TIME consumed, and often on tasks not directly related to face to face, classroom contact with children....In independent schools it seems admin believe they (and us teachers) must be “doing lots of different, extra things, because, after all parents are paying big \$s [sic] and expect something special! (*male primary school teacher*).

Another participant commented along similar lines:

My school puts too much pressure on staff. They try to make it that the school should become your life. A social life is not an option. All free time – even weekends needs to be given to the school as it is a Primary Boarding School. I will not stay at this school long because of this and that I am under appreciated (*female primary school teacher*).

This comment puts accountability for pressure on staff to participate in co-curricular activities onto those who administer the school. One respondent associated this pressure with an indication that it related to the religious affiliation of administrators:

I was not told or prepared for the endless perceived necessity for meetings and last minute arrangements. I love being in the classroom and the planning but it is the expectation that I should happily rearrange my life to enable this that makes me question the professionalism of the job, or rather the administration. I know it's a Catholic school but I'm not looking to be canonised (*female primary school teacher*).

In spite of the previous respondent's suggestion that her situation is related to the type of school in which she works, the comment is reminiscent of an observation previously made in the literature. Hargreaves (1998) warned that

teachers are especially vulnerable to negative emotions when they are hindered in achieving their goals for great teaching by mandated bureaucratic tasks and meetings.

While it is possible that those who are employed within independent schools experience pressure as a legacy of the cultural and religious history of their particular school, other participants indicated that the pressure to work extra hours was a factor of teaching in general, thereby supporting previous research such as that of Fink (2003), Gardner and Williamson (2006) and Howe (2005). Included within this perspective was a perception that society had expectations of teachers that increased pressure on them, for example,

I seem to be very tired after 24 years of teaching. The work – in particular the paper work and society's expectations of teachers have increased significantly over the time I have been a teacher. I hope I can last another seven years when my children finish school, then I will look for a simpler life – working in a post office I think!! Perhaps a nursery.... (*female high school teacher*)

This rather whimsical reflection and expressed desire for a more simple life is reminiscent of Fink's (2003) finding that "there is considerable evidence of passionate professionals reevaluating their lives and work and seeing teaching as 'just a job'" (p. 126). Several respondents to the survey commented on family commitments which competed directly with workload expectations, for example,

I have returned to work (part time) after having a baby, so this year my priorities have changed significantly. However I still feel pressure to work long hours outside school hours. I resent my school work

interrupting my family time however with the workload that we have, there is no choice or alternative (*female, primary teacher*).

The same participant, who because of her part time position would have experienced a drop in pay on her return to work, mentioned the ‘unbalanced nature’ of the workload, which was an expectation but which went unrewarded, “I also resent that I don’t get paid for extra school requirements (such as completing report cards) which are done in my own time – not during work hours”.

Rice (2005) noted that there was a lack of consensus within society in general as to what was expected of teachers, leaving individuals feeling that they have failed to meet expectations and vulnerable to the piling up of ever more time consuming tasks. These observations were supported by respondents in the current study, for example,

I am a PAR [Position of Added Responsibility], year level coordinator and I teach 4 English classes – Year 9 Advanced, Year 10 literacy, Year 11 and Year 12. I consider this a very heavy workload – draft marking, core marking, assignment marking, and extra-curricular marking of oral performances. I also do the extra-curricular debating (coach a year 11 team) in QDU [Queensland Debating Union] competition as a voluntary/honorary contribution to the school....Yet playground duties, extra lessons for absent teachers, etc. are allocated on the basis of hours spent with classes – not according to the nature of the hours spent (*female high school teacher*).

Union documents (QIEU, 2006) state clearly that teachers’ participation in co-curricular activities is ‘honorary and voluntary’. Therefore it would seem that although teachers have indicated that they feel pressure to take on co-curricular

work, the school is not obliged to factor this into the allocation of school duties which are additional to teachers' normal classroom load.

While many respondents commented on one or other particular issue, one respondent responded with detailed information as to the scope of factors which can encroach on teachers' time:

The increasing workload is both demanding and of concern and does impinge on one's private life more and more. The demands on teachers' time in terms of: -

- Attendance at meetings, playground supervision, the requirements of keeping up to date professionally (P.D. [*Professional Development*] days, (many out of school hours), P.R [*Public Relations*] duties (open days etc).
- Time involved in preparation and assessment and reporting of a curriculum aimed at engaging the individual student.
- Not to mention the physical demands of (volunteering!) for camps and excursions.
- Plus the mental and psychological demands simply of dealing with C21 teenagers (exciting and challenging as that may be!) ~ are all exacting and taxing. It is all "part of the job" and what makes this profession such an interesting and exciting one to be in, BUT it can, at times, be VERY EXHAUSTING! (*female high school teacher*).

This is consistent with Gardner and Williamson's (2006) observation that "teachers typically reported mounting pressure to do more in less time" (p. 126). The previous respondent made reference to camps and excursions and put the word 'volunteering' in parentheses with an exclamation mark, thus indicating that this particular demanding task (being responsible for a number of children away

from school premises and out of school hours) may well be far from 'honorary and voluntary' as indicated in QIEU agreements with employers (personal communication, QIEU, 8 May, 2006) and that she may feel that there was substantial pressure within the school for teachers to 'volunteer' for such activities.

Several other participants suggested that they too felt pressure to be involved in co-curricular activities, for example:

I think that the more pressure that is placed on individual teachers to take on other things ie. Interschool sport, etc., not only takes away from valuable class time, but it leaves me feeling disheartened by our profession. We already do so much and it goes unnoticed, and we are expected to continue to keep giving of ourselves. I have only been teaching for 6 years and what I originally thought was my "calling", I now am beginning to think that is my mental, emotional, physical health really worth sacrificing? I feel that I am too young to be suffering burnout. We need to be taught ways of balancing things in our lives so that school doesn't consume us, but the work still gets done (*female primary school teacher*).

This last comment is consistent with Friedman's (2000) hypothesis that young teachers experience an existential crisis where they re-evaluate their commitment to the profession and either adjust after a crisis experience or leave the profession altogether. However, Timms, Graham and Caltabiano (2007) commented that it was probable that this 'adjusting' was actually an accommodation to the job rather than a satisfactory solution to an existential crisis. This position is supported in the current study by the fact that mismatch on workload, exhaustion and disengagement was reported in all age groups.

Specialist teachers reported being especially vulnerable to the pressure to ‘volunteer’ for extra curricular work, for example:

As a music coordinator you are constantly expected to perform at every event and sometimes given a day’s notice. On top of this you end up being made to do a Musical that means you are at school everyday of the week (including weekends and public holidays). An example is that since starting school this year in January I will have had 2 weekends off in total by June. You are still expected to perform at top level in everything.

The downside of this is:

1. I now HATE my job
2. I have become extremely sick
3. My family life is suffering (*female, high school teacher*)

Consistent with her comment, this participant reported working 90 hours per week, and high levels of the burnout dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement. Her assertion that she was “being made to do a Musical” further supports a previous notation that the co-curricular load was perceived by participants as far from an ‘honorary and voluntary’ one. Sonnetag (2005) saw that disengagement followed the cognitive processing of the exhaustion experience. Disengagement is manifested in the respondent’s attitude towards her work, her health and the impact on her family.

Another specialist teacher made a similar point about her extra responsibilities but, in addition, indicated the extra responsibilities affected her ability to prepare properly for her normal classes,

I find that not enough time has been allocated for me to do my job well. I am a sports co-coordinator and I teach 4 subjects. I use all of

my preparation lessons doing sports administration work, and hardly ever get a chance to do lesson plans, assessment or general teaching preparation. Therefore I am under prepared when it comes to my lessons and don't feel organised and on top of things (*female, high school teacher*).

This sense of being 'under prepared' when it comes to normal lessons because of an unsustainable load is a theme advanced by a number of researchers (Gardner & Williamson, 2006; Howe, 2005). It is seen as a feature of the heavy workload, shoestring education budgets and a general failure of school authorities to appreciate the intrusive nature of time demands on teachers' private lives.

3.3.2 Refusing to do the extra

Fink (2003) suggested that some teachers might well adapt to their ever increasing workload by refusing extra curricular tasks and indeed several respondents indicated that this was the case. However, consistent with Gardner and Williamson (2006), in each instance there was a counterbalancing comment that in making this decision the individual was aware that the decision would thereby affect their own opportunities for advancement and promotion, for example:

There are people who work longer and harder than me at my school. I feel I have a healthy attitude to my work, and I feel sorry for some of those who take on extra responsibilities – but that's their choice. I only become annoyed when the harder working teachers complain that the rest of the staff are not doing more. My work is important to me but I'm not "driven", nor do I aspire to a higher position (*female, primary school teacher*).

According to Easthope and Easthope (2000), the juxtaposition of conflicting values creates a situation where teachers are placed in a position where it is

necessary to “rationalize their work and reduce their professional commitment” (p. 43). What is interesting in the current study, however, is the high concordance reported by respondents in the values and community areas of worklife. This would indicate that high workload is not seen by respondents as an ideological issue. In addition, high levels of dedication and absorption reported by participants indicate that most respondents remained highly committed to their work, despite its intrusion into their own time.

3.3.3 Unsustainable workloads

The finding of extensive mismatch in the area of workload, combined with matches for most respondents in the areas of community, values and control indicates that while participants in the current survey tend to be passionate about their jobs, they also feel that demands made on teachers have extended to a level which is unsustainable, for example: “Work intensification is taking good people out of the teaching profession and this is a great shame for our students” (female high school teacher). Tye and O’Brian (2002) found that the source of turnover in the teaching profession lay in the proliferation of tasks which had little to do with teaching well. This was supported by Gardner and Williamson (2006) who observed the effects on teachers of ‘curriculum overload’ due to the rapid nature of change and who also warned of its contribution to teacher turnover. Such job-person mismatch on any area of worklife was seen by Leiter and Maslach (2004) as a “critical source of burnout” (p. 92), indicating a clear causal path to mental health issues for workers. Sonnetag and Zijlstra (2006), Melamed and colleagues (2006) and Smith et al. (2005) also warned that the serious exhaustion pathway led to associated physical illnesses as well as burnout. These observations were

supported by another respondent who detailed the personal and professional cost for herself and colleagues she has known:

Probably my main concern in teaching is work intensification. I struggle to complete the tasks in my 'in-tray' as well as prepare innovative and engaging lessons that reflect development in education/new syllabuses. In addition, we are expected to do so much marking and tutoring to support our 'fee-paying' students. I feel so disheartened – I love to teach and I desperately want to teach well but I cannot meet the work expectations. I don't like compromising my teaching standards. In my twelve years of teaching I have witnessed collegial 'burn-out', 'breakdowns' and extended illness. This only places more stress on those of us who keep going. I just want to teach. That's what I love (*female high school teacher*).

What is demonstrated here is the point where the overload of emotional and physical exhaustion becomes cognitive (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005) as the individual struggles to make meaning out of incongruity. According to Leiter and Maslach (2004) cynicism (called disengagement by Demerouti et al., 2002) develops "in response to an overload of exhaustion and is self-protective, at first, as an emotional buffer" (p. 92) as the individual adjusts to the mismatch between themselves and their worklife.

3.3.4 Limitations

The cross sectional nature of the present study does not allow researchers to develop a causal path between the reported variables, however the extension of quantitative findings by participant comments and the findings of previous research do provide for some assessment of the direction of variable relationships. A further limitation lies in the nature of self report data, which does not provide

an objective measure of constructs. However, previous studies (Melamed et al., 2006) have indicated strong connections between burnout (particularly the exhaustion component which features strongly in the present study) and serious health consequences. In addition Sonnentag and Krueger (2006) and Sonnentag and Zijlstra (2006) have demonstrated strong relationships between long work hours, workload and an inability of the individual to experience restorative psychological detachment, with serious health implications for individuals.

3.3.5 Implications and future directions

Dinham and Scott (2000) noted that teachers found their work was becoming increasingly problematic due to the speed and nature of curriculum and legislative changes. The same researchers also found that increasing expectations which increased the workloads of teachers were impacting on their satisfaction with their work. Combined with this was a poor image portrayed in the media and a widespread perception in the community that teachers had undemanding working conditions. This is consistent with findings in the present study.

So, while survey participants reported matches between themselves and most aspects of their work environment (community, values and control) and general good health, there is sufficient concern within the findings of this study for the sustainability of individuals' good health into the future. It would therefore appear that attention to ideology and imperatives driving teachers' present employment conditions must, of necessity, receive sustained scrutiny and undergo revision. The present study has demonstrated that teachers in independent schools in Queensland are working with unsustainable and health threatening workloads under conditions where they feel pressured.

Respondents in the current study reported strong matches with the values and community areas of workload and high levels of dedication and absorption. However, the reported high workloads, long hours of work and their inevitable intrusion into teachers' private lives, combined with the high relationship of these variables with exhaustion, disengagement and reduced vigour, sound an unmistakable 'warning bell' to authorities who determine workloads for these employees. There are clear indications that respondents in this study feel pressure from various sources, including society and parents, in regard to their performance. Rice (2005) suggested that the isolated autonomy within which teachers work puts them in a weak position in regard to feedback on their performance. Accordingly, it could well be that teachers are the first to put pressure on themselves when it comes to 'volunteering' for co-curricular activities and extra responsibilities. However there is also clear evidence that failure to take on the extra load does impact on individual teachers' opportunities for promotion (Gardner & Williamson, 2006). This aspect of a very complex picture could perhaps indicate compliance on the part of employing authorities with a culture which pressures teachers and consequently takes advantage of their dedication and absorption with their work.

Hargreaves (1999) observed that it is important to remember that superb classroom learning for children must of necessity be reliant on good working conditions for those who teach them. One respondent supported this observation by writing:

Admin [sic] honestly get excited about their job of finding lots of new best practice ways to improve the school's outcomes but forget how to

care for and look after their most valuable asset, the teacher in the classroom (*male primary school teacher*).

Respondents in the current study have expressed a sense of their commitment to their work and its value with their demonstrated dedication and absorption. Moreover, vigour, the energy necessary to sustain engagement with work, has apparently been compromised by workloads which have reached an unsustainable level. In addition, an unambiguous relationship between individual mismatches on workload and the burnout dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement has been confirmed in the current study. Therefore it would seem that current workloads are unsustainable for a profession which is devoted to educating future citizens.