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Inside the Scottish workplace: employee perspectives from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey¹

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Employee perspectives of their jobs, their managers and management-employee relationships at their places of work are important for two reasons. First, they help explain the current behaviour of some workers, such as lateness, absenteeism, or shirking on the job, all contributing to low worker productivity. Secondly, they help predict the future behaviour of all workers, notably their likelihood of quitting their present job.

This paper reports research which examined five sets of perspectives of workers employed at workplaces located in Scotland viz. (i.) about their jobs, and the various demands these jobs make on them; (ii.) about the influence they have over various facets of their jobs, their task discretion; (iii.) about the satisfaction they derive from several aspects of their jobs; (iv.) about their managers at their places of work; and (v.) about management-employee relationships, again at their places of work.²

The research made use of matched workplace-employee data sets which had their origin in two surveys associated with the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004) viz. the survey of managers and the survey of employees (Kersley et al, 2006). The initial unit of analysis in WERS 2004 is the workplace, defined as the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises. At each participating workplace, the manager with day to day responsibilities for employment was interviewed, and this constitutes the survey of managers. At each workplace which participated in the survey of managers, self completion questionnaires were distributed to a random selection of up to 25 employees, and this constitutes the survey of employees.

This paper has three aims. First, to report responses to questions of relevance in the survey of employees. For example reporting how many employees agree with the statement that 'my job requires that I work very hard?': how many are satisfied with the sense of achievement they get

from their jobs?: and how many would describe management-employee relations where they work as 'good'? Responses to these questions vary, between individuals and across places of work. The second aim is to report how these responses differ, for example according to individual personal characteristics and the characteristics of the workplaces at which the individual is employed.

The WERS 2004 survey is undertaken throughout Great Britain. Consequently, it is possible to compare the responses made by individuals employed at workplaces located in Scotland with their counterparts employed at workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain. Accordingly, the third aim of the paper is to report the extent to which the perspectives of employees in Scottish based workplaces are 'different'. This final aim is especially important, following recent research by Bell and Blanchflower (2007) who argued that "the Scots are less happy and less satisfied with life than is the case for the British population as a whole" (p. 189).

The remainder of this paper is in four substantive sections. The following section provides a descriptive overview of employee responses to ten questions used to examine the five sets of perspectives identified above. Then important, illustrative examples are provided of how responses to these questions differ, according to individual personal characteristics, such as age, gender, training received, and the characteristics of the workplace at which the individual is employed, especially whether or not it is a single establishment organisation. Differences in perspectives between those employed at workplaces located in Scotland and those employed at workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain are then reported. The final section addresses some policy implications which arise from the principal conclusions of the research.

The work-related perspectives of employees in Scotland

The work-related perspectives of individuals employed in workplaces located in Scotland are reported, by question posed in the WERS 2004 survey of employees, in Tables 1 through to 10. (The perspectives of those employed in workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain are given in parentheses.)

Although most employees agree that their jobs require them to work very hard, most feel that their jobs are secure and very few worry a lot about their jobs outside working hours (Table 1). The majority feel that their jobs make them feel 'tense', 'worried' and 'uneasy' 'occasionally' or 'some of the time' (Table 2). On the other hand, approximately one individual in four feels that his/her job makes him/her feel 'calm', 'relaxed' and 'content' 'most of the time' (Table 3).

One employee in three claims to have 'a lot' of influence over what tasks he/she does and the pace at which he/she

works. Almost one in two claims to have 'a lot' of influence over how he/she does the work and the order in which work is carried out. However, over one in three has no control over his/her start/finishing times (Table 4).

Most employees are satisfied with most aspects of their work, for example the sense of achievement got from it; and the scope it offers to make use of their own initiative. Where less satisfaction is to be found, it is in the context of the training received and, most especially, the pay received (Table 5).

Although more employees consider their managers to be 'good' rather than 'poor' at informing them about issues such as changes in the way the organisation is being run or changes in the way in which the job is to be done, nonetheless a sizeable minority feel otherwise (Table 6). Similar response outcomes are to be seen in the context of statements such as: agreeing that their managers can be relied upon to keep their promises; deal with their employees fairly; and are understanding about their out of work responsibilities (Table 7).

More employees agree than disagree with the statement that their managers are 'good' at seeking the views of themselves or their representatives or responding to suggestions from the same. However, more disagree than agree with the statement that their workplace managers are 'good' at allowing themselves or their representatives to influence final decisions (Table 8). This latter result is reflected in Table 9, which reports percentage responses to the question about employee satisfaction with the amount of involvement in decision-making. Nonetheless, the majority maintain that relations between managers and employees at their places of work are 'good' (Table 10).

Some differences in the work-related perspectives of employees in Scotland

Responses to the questions/statements from the survey of employees constitute the dependent variables in the estimations undertaken to examine the determinants of differences in the work-related perspectives identified. These responses are multiple, nominal and, sometimes, ordered. Consequently, as appropriate, multinomial logit and ordered logit models are estimated. The vector of independent variables consists of responses to some further questions from the survey of employees together with responses to selected questions from the survey of managers. This vector, which remains constant throughout, irrespective of whether the model estimated is a multinomial logit or an ordered logit, consists of three distinct types of variables. The first type reflects an individual's personal characteristics, both unrelated to and related to the workplace at which he/she is employed (for example, age/gender and tenure, respectively); the second type reflects the structural characteristics of the workplace at which the individual is employed (such as its size, its corporate characteristics, its Standard Industrial Classification etc.); and the third type reflects some of the

human resource management policies and practices in operation at the workplace at which the individual is employed (such as whether the workplace is Investors in People accredited, whether it has an equal opportunities policy etc.)³

Variables proxying age, earnings and educational qualifications are positively correlated with most aspects of job satisfaction, with the older, those earning relatively more and those without educational qualifications being more likely to report that they derive satisfaction from their work. Moreover, the significance of these same three variables extends further into some of the other perspectives examined, although the nature of their impact there differs. For example, whereas those in the older age categories and those without educational qualifications are correlated with positive feelings about their work – such as being relaxed and content – those in the higher earnings categories are correlated with agreeing with statements such as their jobs require them to work very hard and worrying a lot about their jobs outside working hours.

Women are more likely than men to report job satisfaction across its several aspects. Gender, however, proves to be of little significance in the context of the other four sets of perspectives examined.

The amount of training received in the past 12 months is the most important of all the variables designed to depict an individual's job related characteristics in explaining the different perspectives held. Those who have had between two and five days or more training in the past year, relative to those who have had no training whatsoever, do report some negative perspectives. For example, their jobs require them to work very hard; they never have enough time to get their jobs finished; and they tend to worry a lot about their jobs outside of working hours. More generally, however, their perspectives are positive, again relative to those who have had no training, not only about matters pertaining to their own jobs, but also about managers at their places of work. To illustrate: they are more likely to have more influence over all facets of job influence examined; they are more likely to derive satisfaction from six of the seven aspects examined – the exception is pay received; they are more positive about their workplace managers and of management-employee relationships at their places of work, notably so on matters relating to their involvement in decision-making.

A feature of previous studies of individuals at their places of work is the identification of what Noon and Hoque (2001) refer to as "the persistence of unequal treatment at work" (p. 105). Despite legislation post 1998 which seeks to address and remedy much of this, the research presents evidence of continuing perceptions of inequality on the part of some members of the workforce, notably those who are disabled; those who are not 'white'; and those who are working on part time/fixed term/temporary contracts of employment.

When compared to those who report no disability, those with some form of disability are less likely to consider their jobs to be secure; are more likely to feel tense; and less likely to feel calm. They are less likely to be satisfied with the jobs they do and the pay they get from doing them. They are less likely to agree with the statement that managers treat their employees fairly.

When compared to those who are white, individuals who are not white are more likely to be dissatisfied with the scope they have to make use of their own initiative; the influence they have over their jobs; the training they receive; and their pay. They are less likely to be satisfied with the work itself. Furthermore, individuals who are not white are more likely to consider their managers to be poor at seeking the views of employees or their representatives; and to be poor at allowing either to have some influence on decision-making. They are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their own involvement in decision-making.

When compared to those working on 'normal' full time contracts of employment, those with temporary contracts are less likely to feel that their jobs are secure, sentiments shared with those on fixed term contracts. Additionally, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with the sense of achievement they get from their jobs; and are more likely to be dissatisfied with the scope they have to make use of their own initiative, sentiments also held by those on fixed term contracts. Finally, those on temporary contracts are more likely to disagree with the statement that managers treat their employees fairly; and they are less likely to agree that management-employee relations at their places of work are good.

Variables depicting the structural characteristics of the workplace at which the individual is employed are not without some consequence, notably so for the variables associated with single/multi-workplace nature of the organisation. Relative to those employed at single plant organisations, individuals employed at workplaces which are part of multi-workplace organisations are less likely to be satisfied with their job security. Also, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with matters relating to the scope they have to make use of their own initiative and their pay.

Perhaps most important of all, however, is their indictment of managers at their places of work. Again relative to those employed at single plant organisations, individuals employed at workplaces which are part of multi-workplace organisations are more likely to disagree with such statements as: managers keep their word; managers are sincere when attempting to understand employees' views; managers deal with employees honestly; and managers are understanding about employees' out of work responsibilities. This carries over into their perspectives of management-employee relations at their place of work, where individuals employed at workplaces which are part of multi-workplace organisations are critical of their (lack of)

involvement in decision-making and consider management-employee relations to be poor.

Differences between the perspectives of individuals employed in workplaces located in Scotland and those employed in workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain

The work-related perspectives of individuals employed in workplaces located outwith Scotland, i.e. elsewhere in Great Britain, are reported in parentheses, by question posed in the WERS 2004 survey of employees, in Tables 1 through to 10. Casual observation of these tables suggests little difference between their perspectives and those of their counterparts employed in workplaces located in Scotland.⁴

However, replicating the original multinomial logit and ordered logit estimations, this time making use of the full data set and incorporating a dummy variable to distinguish between 'Scotland' and the 'Rest of Great Britain', makes it possible to examine for possible differences controlling for the other factors included in the vector of independent variables in the models. In the 37 estimations associated with the original analysis, there are only three instances in which there is a statistically significant (i.e. at a 95 percent confidence level) difference between the two groups of workers. Only one of these is a matter of some substance viz. satisfaction with pay received.⁵ In the context of this aspect of job satisfaction, individuals employed at workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain are less likely to be satisfied with the pay they receive, relative, that is, to their counterparts employed in Scottish based workplaces.

These effectively negligible differences in work-related perspectives between workers employed at workplaces located in Scotland and those employed at workplaces located elsewhere in Great Britain contrast markedly with the research findings of Bell and Blanchflower (2007). Analysing a diverse set of data bases to examine an equally diverse range of objective and subjective indicators of health, welfare and well-being, Bell and Blanchflower paint "a relatively depressing picture of Scotland" (p. 192) in which Scotland consistently compares unfavourably with, for example, the rest of Great Britain. Bell and Blanchflower conclude that: "Economic factors are likely only to make a difference at the margin to these welfare outcomes." (p. 192). As a consequence, they question the high priority accorded to the policy objective of economic growth on the part of the Scottish Executive (as was), advocating that higher priority be given instead to more 'social' and 'health' orientated policies.⁶

Some policy implications of the research

This paper has reported research which examined five sets of work-related perspectives of individuals employed at

workplaces located in Scotland. Three results are particularly noteworthy, each with policy significance.

Training is found to be correlated with positive outcomes, relating both to an individual's personal job satisfaction and well-being at work and his/her perspective of managers and management-employee relations at his/her place of work. Training is integral to the battery of organisational policies associated with high commitment management, a strategy advocated because of its putative positive impact upon organisational performance (Walton, 1985). It is inappropriate to presume causation where no evidence of such exists. Training may not necessarily engender commitment which, in its turn, may not necessarily enhance organisational performance. Nonetheless, this research offers further supportive evidence of the apparent benefits to both individuals and organisations which may accrue from investments in human capital.

Perceptions of workplace inequalities exist on the part of minority groups. This does not necessarily imply that existing policies, towards equal opportunities and flexible working, for example, are not working. There may be problems of policy compliance. However, there may be also some requirement to strengthen existing policies of relevance.

Contrary to the "relatively depressing picture of Scotland" presented by Bell and Blanchflower (2007, p. 192), there is very little difference in the work-related perspectives examined between those employed at workplaces located in Scotland and their counterparts employed elsewhere within Great Britain. Moreover, in the single instance of substance where a difference is found, it is not those employed within Scotland who voice their dissatisfaction. In their assessment of policy requirements given the manifold problems which Bell and Blanchflower examine, they treat employment policy with some disdain, favouring instead more socially orientated strategies. However, given the findings of the research reported in this paper, perhaps the potential of appropriate employment policies is due more credit than they give. Although not necessarily reducing or eliminating individual differences in well-being at work, being employed would appear to eliminate many of the spatial differences in well-being they observe.

Endnotes

¹The author acknowledges the (former) Department of Trade and Industry, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and the Policy Studies Institute as the originators of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey data, and the Data Archive at the University of Essex as the distributor of the data. The National Centre for Social Research was commissioned to conduct the field work on behalf of the sponsors. None of these organisations bears any responsibility for the author's analysis and interpretations of the data.

²The research is reported in full in the Centre for Public Policy for Regions (CPPR) Working Paper No. 15, available from the CPPR website (www.cppr.ac.uk).

³Full details of these independent variables, most incorporated for purposes of control, are available from the original working paper. The estimating assumption is that these variables are exogenous, an assumption frequently made in other comparable estimations (e.g. Bell and Blanchflower,

⁴By way of a preliminary examination of the data set to test for possible statistical associations between the two sets of variables of relevance, each question/statement response was cross tabulated by the 'Scotland' – 'Rest of Great Britain' dummy variables. Pearson chi-square statistics established a statistically significant association (at $p < 0.05$) between the 'Scotland' and 'Rest of Great Britain' dummy variables and responses to the following questions: "thinking about the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel 'relaxed' "? ($p = 0.031$): "in general, how much influence do you have over 'the order in which you carry out tasks' "? ($p = 0.035$): "how satisfied are you with 'the scope for using your own initiative' "? ($p = 0.029$): "how satisfied are you with 'the amount of influence you have over your job' "? ($p = 0.028$): and "how satisfied are you with 'the amount of pay you receive' "? ($p = 0.001$). Again, see the original working paper for fuller details. 2007).

⁵The other two instances relate to worrying a lot about the job outside working hours and influence over starting and finishing times.

⁶The priority accorded to economic growth has not changed, despite the regime change in the Scottish Parliament and the presence, now, of a Scottish National Party 'Scottish Government' (Scottish Government, 2007).

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Table 1: Perspectives about the job (A)

Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your job: (net percentage agreement scores) (Rest of Great Britain (GB) in parentheses)

Statement	Percent
My work requires that I work very hard	72.46 (71.46)
I never seem to have enough time to get my work done	15.23 (15.17)
I feel that my job is secure in this workplace	49.17 (47.08)
I worry a lot about my work outside working hours	-20.71 (-21.62)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Note: The 'net percentage agreement score' is obtained by subtracting the percentage who disagree with the statement from the percentage who agree with the statement.

Table 2: Perspectives about the job (B)

Question: Thinking about the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel 'Tense', 'Worried', 'Uneasy' (percent of time): (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Response (Percent)\Feeling	Tense	Worried	Uneasy
Never	11.90 (9.88)	19.38 (18.14)	26.12 (27.30)
Occasionally	26.46 (27.42)	31.28 (32.19)	34.78 (33.21)
Some of the time	43.09 (43.88)	38.60 (37.66)	31.20 (29.47)
Most of the time	15.81 (15.51)	9.15 (9.99)	6.14 (8.08)
All of the time	2.75 (3.31)	1.58 (2.02)	1.50 (1.94)
Number of observations			1,202 (9,453)

Table 3: Perspectives about the job (C)

Question: Thinking about the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel 'Calm', 'Relaxed', 'Content (percent of the time): (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Response (Percent)\Feeling	Calm	Relaxed	Content
Never	12.40 (10.48)	20.05 (9.95)	12.06 (10.47)
Occasionally	27.29 (28.59)	30.28 (30.74)	23.29 (22.62)
Some of the time	29.45 (30.05)	24.29 (27.97)	28.95 (30.56)
Most of the time	28.89 (28.57)	23.71 (21.45)	32.95 (32.50)
All of the time	2.00 (2.30)	1.66 (1.88)	2.75 (3.85)
Number of observations			1,202 (9,453)

Table 4: Perspectives about influence over facets of the job

Question: In general, how much influence do you have over the following, (Percent) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Facet/Response (Percent)	None	A Little	Some	A Lot	Total
What tasks you do	12.15 (10.57)	15.14 (14.45)	38.19 (34.53)	34.53 (35.53)	1,202 (9,453)
The pace at which you work	11.23 (10.94)	15.81 (15.35)	38.02 (35.96)	34.94 (37.76)	1,202 (9,453)
How you do your work	4.49 (3.65)	11.23 (10.90)	35.27 (34.38)	48.00 (51.07)	1,202 (9,453)
The order in which you carry out tasks	6.74 (5.18)	9.48 (11.05)	35.27 (33.66)	48.50 (50.10)	1,202 (9,453)
The time you start or finish work	37.35 (33.70)	14.98 (16.04)	22.05 (24.10)	25.62 (26.16)	1,202 (9,453)

Table 5: Perspectives about the satisfaction derived from aspects of the job

Question: How satisfied are you with the following, (percent) (net percentage satisfaction scores) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Aspect	Percent
The sense of achievement you get from your work	55.57 (60.12)
The scope for using your own initiative	56.99 (61.93)
The amount of influence you have over your job	38.11 (44.10)
The training you receive	21.88 (25.13)
The amount of pay you receive	0.42 (-7.08)
Your job security	48.17 (46.20)
The work itself	58.49 (61.97)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Note: The 'net percentage satisfaction score' is obtained by subtracting the percentage who are dissatisfied with the aspect in question from the percentage who are satisfied.

Table 6: Perspectives about management

Question: In general, how good would you say managers at this workplace are at keeping employees informed about: (percent) (net percentage 'good' scores) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Issue	Percent
Changes to the way the organisation is being run	23.21 (23.67)
Changes in staffing	13.15 (15.73)
Changes in the way you do your job	26.54 (26.00)
Financial matters, including budgets and profits	4.74 (9.54)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Note: The 'net percentage good score' is obtained by subtracting the percentage who report management are good with the issue in question from the percentage who report that management are poor.

Table 7: Perspectives about management

Question: Thinking about the managers at this workplace, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they: (percent) (net percentage 'agreement' scores) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Issue	Percent
Can be relied upon to keep their promise	19.47 (17.89)
Are sincere in attempting to understand employees' Views	25.54 (27.67)
Deal with employees honestly	29.62 (30.86)
Understand about employees having to meet responsibilities outside work	35.85 (36.23)
Encourage people to develop their skills	38.85 (38.88)
Treat employees fairly	32.53 (32.09)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Note: The 'net percentage agreement score' is obtained by subtracting the percentage who disagree with the statement from the percentage who agree with the statement.

Table 8: Perspectives about management-employee relations (A)

Question: Overall, how good would you say managers at this workplace are at: (percent), (net percentage 'good' scores) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Issue	Percent
Seeking the views of employees or employee Representatives	15.97 (15.99)
Responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives	9.23 (9.84)
Allowing employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions	-10.24 (-7.69)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Note: The 'net percentage good score' is obtained by subtracting the percentage who report management are good at the issue in question from the percentage who report that management are poor.

Table 9: Perspectives about management-employee relations (B)

Question: Overall, how satisfied are you with the amount of involvement you have in decision-making at this workplace? (percent) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Response	Percent
Dissatisfied	25.12 (23.57)
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	37.10 (37.12)
Satisfied	37.77 (39.23)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)

Table 10: Perspectives about management-employee relations (C)

Question: In general, how would you describe relations between managers and employees here? (percent) (Rest of GB in parentheses):

Response	Percent
Poor	18.05 (16.59)
Neither poor nor good	26.21 (24.85)
Good	55.74 (68.55)
Number of observations	1,202 (9,453)