

# **Boredom at the checkout Causes, coping strategies and outcomes of Workplace Boredom in a Supermarket setting**

**Sandi Mann**

Senior Lecturer in Occupational Psychology,  
University of Central Lancashire, UK

---

## **Key Words**

Boredom, boredom proneness, workplace emotions

## **Abstract**

*The current study explores boredom within the context of a retail environment in order to explore ways in which the experience of workplace boredom can be managed. The questionnaire-based study of 117 employees of a national supermarket chain found that although only 17% of participants experienced chronic boredom at work, 40-50% claimed that workplace boredom leads to potentially serious consequences such as making mistakes or leaving their jobs. Multiple regression analysis suggests that routine is the biggest contributor to workplace boredom, followed by the personality trait of Boredom Proneness. Implications for retail organisations are outlined.*

---

## **Introduction**

Contrary to popular wisdom, boredom is not the result of having nothing to do. Rather, boredom stems from a situation where none of the possible things that a person can realistically do appeal. This renders the person inactive, and generally unhappy. For most people, boredom is a negative experience; even described in one study as 'an extremely unpleasant and distressing experience' (Martin *et al* 2006, p.193).

Some researchers have attempted to define boredom although there is no real consensus. What is agreed about boredom is that it is a 'complex phenomenon' (Martin *et al* 2006 p.196). Pekrun *et al* (2010) describe it as 'an affective state composed of unpleasant feelings, lack of stimulation, and low physiological arousal' (p. 532). Lack of external stimulation leads to increased neural arousal in search of variety - failure to satisfy this leads to experience of boredom. There is little consensus as to whether boredom is an emotion, state or a trait. Many argue that boredom is a distinct emotional state leading Fisher, one of the forerunners in boredom research, to define boredom as 'an unpleasant, transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity...[such that] it takes conscious effort to maintain or return attention to that activity' (Fisher 1993, p.396).

## **Boredom at work**

Early studies into workplace boredom focussed on the idea that boredom is caused by low external stimulation such as monotonous work (O'Hanlon 1981) which

led to a plethora of studies in jobs requiring vigilance or repetition. Thus, workplace boredom has been studied in the context of a limited range of tasks such as mechanical assembly, vigilance tasks and continuous manual control. Professions studied include drivers (Heslop *et al* 2010), manual workers (Branton 1970), government clerks (Dyer-Smith and Wesson 1997), assembly autoworkers (Grubb 1975), clerical employees (Lee 1986), long distance truck drivers (McBain 1970) and repetitive press-operators (Hill 1975). More recently, research has begun to diversify into those jobs that are less likely to have those elements of routine and repetitiveness that so characterised the early research. It is acknowledged now that “boredom has a permanent seat in many workplaces, no matter the level of employee” (Joyce, 2005 p.2).

Boredom has been associated with a range of negative outcomes at work including poor performance at work (Vodanovich 2003), correlations with anger (Vodanovich 2003), accidents (Branton 1970, Drory 1982), absenteeism (Brisset and Snow 1993, Saito *et al* 1972), more errors (Cox 1980, Drory 1982, O’Hanlon 1981), stress, increased risk taking/thrill seeking (Hamilton 1983, O’Hanlon 1981, Orcutt 1984, Wasson 1981, Zuckerman 1979), sleepiness (Grose 1989), stress-related health problems e.g. heart attacks (eg Alfredsson *et al* 1982), job dissatisfaction (Caplan *et al* 1975) and property damage (Drory 1982). Some of these consequences are clearly symptoms of the boredom experience; accidents, mistakes, sleepiness etc are all the result of being unable to sustain attention. Other consequences are a result of the ways that individuals try to cope with their boredom; these coping strategies can be classified into two categories: (1) refocusing attention on the task and (2) seeking additional stimulation.

## Causes of workplace boredom

There are two main categories that are thought to cause individuals to experience boredom in the workplace: these are task/work environment effects and person effects. **Task/environment effects:** This category is concerned with the nature of the job itself. Tasks which are high in skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback are thought to produce less boredom (Hackman and Oldham 1980). For example, one study found that 55% of boredom incidents were due to quantitative underload (Fisher 1987). More recently a study by the Teacher Training Agency in the UK in 2004 in which 28% of employees claimed to be bored with their jobs, found that the most common reasons given by respondents to explain why their jobs were boring were to do with the nature of their job; lack of job challenge, not using skills/knowledge and routine in their jobs were the top causes for being bored.

**Person effects:** The tendency to be easily bored has been viewed as a personality characteristic that differs from person to person (Harris 2000) and this tendency has been termed Boredom Proneness. Farmer and Sundberg (1986) developed the Boredom Proneness Scale and since then, a large number of studies have been carried out to examine the psychological correlates of the boredom-prone individual. Research has found, for example, that individuals scoring higher on ‘boredom proneness’, are more likely to be impulsive (Watt and Vodanovich 1992), less vigilant (Sawin and Scerbo 1995) and less sociable (Leong and Schneller 1993).

## Current Study

The current study aims to examine the experience of boredom in a specific retail setting, the supermarket, in order to better improve motivation and engagement of employees; frontline employees who are engaged and enthusiastic are more likely to encourage customer loyalty and perceptions of quality (Lemmink and Mattsson 2002). Previous researchers have suggested that employers in the retail sector should 'train employees to deal with emotions and learn empathic behaviors' (Lemmink and Mattsson 2002) and it is hoped that the current study will go some way towards this aim in dealing with employee boredom. A qualitative pilot study in which employees were asked qualitative questions about their experience of boredom, was used to develop the survey items for the current study (Mann 2006). The aim of the current study is to examine the causes, coping strategies employed, and outcomes of boredom at work within supermarket employees.

## Method

### Participants

117 employees of a national supermarket chain in the UK were recruited for this study. The researcher pledged anonymity to the participating retail group in return for access. 59% of participants were female and 41% male. Their job roles included General Assistant, Customer Service Assistant and Checkout Operator.

### Materials

A questionnaire was devised to measure the causes, consequences and moderators of boredom.

**Causes: (work environment effects):** This section was concerned with measuring 'work environment effects' and this consisted of a list of possible work environment effects that may contribute to workplace boredom, such as those to do with other people, work overload, work underload etc. Respondents were asked to select those items, from a list of eleven, that they feel contribute to their feeling bored at work.

**Cause (person effects):** The second 'cause' section of the survey was designed to measure the individual difference Boredom Proneness as a possible contributor or moderator of the experience of boredom. The scale used was Farmer and Sundberg's 1986 Boredom Proneness Scale which consists of 28 items that require a true/false response. The range of possible scores was 0-28, with higher scores indicating higher boredom proneness.

Many studies have documented the psychometric properties of the BPS which generally yields reliable scores (e.g. Vodanovich 2003). Farmer and Sundberg (1986) reported the internal consistency of the scale to be .79. Similar reliability estimates, ranging from .72 to .77, have been found by other researchers (see Vodanovich 2003 for review). In addition, the temporal stability of the BPS has been assessed in several other studies. For instance, the test-retest reliability of the scale has ranged from .79 to .91 across time intervals of between 1 to 3 weeks (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Vodanovich 2003).

**Coping strategies:** This item asked participants “*What do you tend to do to try to combat any boredom you might feel at work?*” with a list of 12 possible coping strategies to select from. The 12 items were based on items generated in the pilot study (Mann 2006). Some of these items could be classed as refocusing activities such as taking a break (allowing fresh focus after the break) or thinking (if it is about the task). Other strategies are more stimulation-seeking, such as doodling or daydreaming.

**Short-term Consequences:** This was measured with the item, ‘*Imagine that you have had a really boring day at work. What might you do when you get home (that you might not do after a more fulfilling work day)*’. Respondents were given a list of 14 possible options, some of which were ‘negative’ (e.g. smoking, or drinking alcohol), but some of which were ‘positive’ (such as do something creative or drive more carefully).

**Longer-term Outcomes:** Longer-term consequences or outcomes of being bored at work were measured in a question, asking, ‘*What are the consequences of being bored in your job?*’. This was designed to tap into more general, longer-term consequences of being bored, such as causing mistakes or accidents at work or leaving the job. 11 items were listed.

**Other items:** Other items on the survey asked for gender and a general Likert measure of workplace boredom: ‘*Do you ever feel bored at work?*’ with responses ranging from ‘never’ to ‘all the time’.

At the front of the survey was a briefing sheet containing instructions for completion and at the end a debriefing sheet with contact details for more information.

## **Procedure**

A number of UK retail organisations were approached, using convenience and opportunity sampling techniques. One national retail group was recruited and the questionnaires were sent to the occupational psychology section of the retail group; the questionnaire was put into a ‘house’ style appropriate to the organisation and mailed to section heads around the UK. Section heads distributed the surveys in hard copy format to employees who were asked to complete them. 150 were sent out from the occupational psychology department and 117 were returned via section heads.

## **Results**

The data was analysed using SPSS.

### **How often are they bored at work?**

17.1% of respondents reported being bored at work quite often or all the time, with 39% only sometimes bored and 43.8% claiming to be rarely or never bored.

### **Coping strategies**

The most popular responses to the question of what people do when they are bored, is ‘think’ with 54% of respondents selecting this and ‘chat with colleagues’ (53%). Other common responses are ‘take a break’ (34%) and daydream (33%). Other strategies include having a drink (16%) or doodling (12%) and eating (9%).

## **Short-term consequences of being bored at work**

The most common popular consequence of experiencing a boring day at work is to watch TV with almost half of respondents doing this. Other common consequences are seeking stimulating people to talk to (e.g. going to the pub) with 34%, taking a bath (27%), drinking alcohol (27%) and going to bed early (26%). Less common strategies were doing something creative (19%), smoking, taking exercise or arguing with a partner (all 15%) and driving more recklessly (9%).

## **Longer -term Outcomes of being bored at work**

The most common longer-term consequences of being bored in their job selected by respondents was that it causes them to 'lose concentration' (57% of respondents selected this) and to 'make mistakes' (56%). 40% of respondents felt that their boredom at work might lead them to consider leaving their job, whilst 26% felt that their workplace boredom caused them stress. For some, there were positive consequences; 20% felt being bored help them come up with new ideas.

A new variable was created in order to classify boredom scores as high (scores of 1 or 2) or low (scores of 3-5). This allowed Chi-squared tests to be performed in order to ascertain if there are significant differences between numbers of respondents from the high and low boredom groups who admit to various outcomes of being bored at work. None of the Chi-squares were significant except for one variable. Significantly more people from the 'high bored' group indicated that 'workplace boredom leads me to seek more stimulation outside of work' than from the 'low bored' group;  $\chi^2(1, N=105) = 4.22, p < 0.05$ .

## **Causes of boredom: work environment**

The most common aspect of the work environment that is likely to contribute to workplace boredom is repetitive work (58%) followed by routine (48%). Over a quarter of respondents cited not having enough work to do, restrictions on talking, not needing to think much and having little control over what tasks they do or how they do them, as aspects of the work environment likely to induce boredom for them. Slightly fewer (22%) claimed that their boredom was caused by not having enough to do of interest or the work not being demanding enough.

## **Causes/Moderators of Boredom: Person Factors (Boredom Proneness)**

The mean BP score was 10.44 with a standard deviation of 4.5. The range was 1-22 with a mode and median of 11. The cases were split into low and high BP groups such that those scoring 11 or below were classed as low BP and those scoring above 11 classed as high BP. 70 cases (60%) fell into the low group and 47 cases (40%) in the high group.

A Pearson's correlation conducted on BP and the 'bored at work' item revealed an  $r$  of -0.493 ( $p < 0.01$ ) which suggests that as BP scores go up, boredom scores go down. As lower boredom scores indicate greater boredom (ie the closer to one), this suggests that the more boredom prone an individual, the more they claim to be bored at work.

27.5% of respondents in the high BP group claim to be bored quite often or all the time, compared with only 10.8% of the low boredom prone group. The mean and SD of boredom score for the two BP groups is shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Mean and SD of Boredom score for low and high BP groups**

	Mean	SD
High BP	2.95	0.845
Low BP	3.6	0.897

An Independent t-test was conducted on the boredom score for the two groups. The results showed a significant difference between the two groups ( $t = -3.68$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) with the means showing that high BP group reported higher levels of overall boredom at work.

### Effects of BP on coping strategies and consequences

The low and high BP groups were compared in terms of the short-term strategies/coping responses selected and independent t-tests indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups except for daydreaming whereby the high BP group was more likely to daydream than the low BP group ( $t = 2.1$ ,  $df = 87.7$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

In terms of short term consequences of boredom, independent t-tests show that there are significant differences between high and low BP groups for three consequences; exercise, sleep and reckless driving. Significantly more respondents in the high BP group indicated that they slept more and that they drove more recklessly following a boring day at work (than they would after a less boring day at work) compared with those from the low BP group. For exercise, however, an examination of the mean scores for each group shows that significantly fewer respondents from the high BP group (mean 0.06) indicate that they exercise after a boring day at work compared with those from the low BP group (mean 0.2). These results shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Mean scores for low and high BP groups for consequences of boredom and the independent t-test results.**

Consequence	Low BP mean*	High BP mean	T-test result
Sleep	0.2	0.4	$t = 2.6$ , $df = 115$ , $P < 0.05$
Reckless driving	0.04	0.14	$t = 2.03$ , $df = 115$ , $p < 0.05$
Exercise	0.2	0.06	$t = -2.2$ , $df = 115$ , $p < 0.05$

\*Range = 0-1 where 1 indicates that agreement that this strategy is undertaken.

With outcomes of workplace boredom, there is only one out of the list of 11 consequences in which there is a statistically significant difference between the low and high BP group. Significantly more members of the high BP group (mean = 0.36) indicated that a consequence of being bored is that 'being bored causes me stress' than those of the low BP group did (mean = 0.18). Here,  $t = 2.16$ ,  $df = 115$  and  $p < 0.05$ ).

## Influence of BP on other causes of workplace boredom (work environment)

In terms of the work environment, four out of the 12 sources of workplace boredom show effects of boredom proneness. These are 'there is not enough to do that interests me', 'the work is routine', 'the work is repetitive' and 'I don't need to think much'. In all cases, significantly more of the high BP group indicated that these were causes of workplace boredom than the low BP group (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Mean scores for low and high BP groups work environment as a cause of boredom and the independent t-test results*

Cause	Low BP mean*	High BP mean	T-test result
Not enough that interests	0.14	0.34	T=2.56, df=115, p<0.05
Routine	0.35	0.65	T=3.33, df = 99.3, p<0.005
Repetition	0.5	0.7	T=2.19, df=115, p<0.05
Don't need to think	0.18	0.38	T = 2.4, df = 115, p<0.05

\*Range = 0-1 where 1 indicates that agreement that this is a cause of boredom

## Multiple Regressions

A forward stepwise multiple regression was conducted (due to the exploratory nature of the study) with 'experience of boredom' as the criterion (dependent) variable and the causes of boredom that were selected by more than 25% of respondents; repetition, routine, not enough to do, restrictions on talking, no thinking required, no control over job tasks and being over skilled for the job. Overall boredom proneness scores were also put into the model as a predictor. Before this was performed, a correlation matrix (see Table 4) was produced between these variables to check for multi-collinearity.

*Table 4: Correlation Matrix*

	Repetition	Routine	Not enough to do	Restrictions on talking	No thinking required	No control	over skilled	Boredom proneness
Repetition		.56*	-.07	.23 **	.28**	.19**	.24*	.25*
Routine	.56*		.01	.25**	.36*	.34*	.23*	.36*
Not enough	-.07	.01		.08	.14	.14	-.05	.06
Restriction talking	.3 **	.25**	.08		.16	.26**	.12	.21*
No thinking	.28**	.37*	.14	.16		.37**	.22**	.31*
No control	.19**	.34*	.14	.26**	.37		.22**	.15
overskilled	.24**	.23**	-.05	.11	.22**	.22*		.21*
Boredom proneness	.25	.36*	.06	.21*	.31*	.15	.21**	

\*P < 0.005, \*\*p < 0.05

A significant model emerged:  $F(4,100) = 9.97, p < 0.0005$ . Four of the 8 predictor variables were entered and the model explains 42% of the variance (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.44$ ).

Table 5 shows the information for the predictor variables that were included in the model.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression Model**

Step	Variable	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	T	Sign t
1	Routine	-.33	.27	.27	-3.9	<0.0005
2	BP	-.34	.37	.11	-4.2	<0.0005
3	Not enough to do	-.2	.42	.05	-2.6	<-0.05
4	No control	-.17	.44	.02	-2.1	<0.05

The multiple regressions shows that routine contributes most to experience of boredom as it accounts for 26.8% of the variance. The inclusion of BP in step 2 resulted in another 10% of the variance being explained, whilst the addition of 'not enough to do' in Step 3 only explained an additional 4% of the variance. Model 4 added 'control' which accounted for a further 2% of the variance.

## Discussion

The findings suggest that employees within the retail sector have a somewhat contradictory attitude towards boredom. On the one hand, only 17% claim that they experience frequent boredom (defined as quite often or all the time) which seems to be good news for the retail industry. However, these cheering findings must be examined in the light of longer-term outcomes of being bored at work that this research has uncovered. Although the numbers claiming to suffer from chronic boredom are relatively low, much higher numbers of respondents claim that there are worrying consequences of being bored in their job. Over half claimed that being bored leads them to lose concentration and make mistakes, whilst 40% of respondents felt that boredom at work might lead them to leave their job which concurs with previous research suggesting that dissatisfied staff are more likely to leave the organisation (e.g. Hendrie 2004).

It might have been expected that there would be differences in these outcomes of boredom depending on whether the respondent considers themselves to experience high or low workplace boredom. It would seem logical to predict that those experiencing higher boredom would indicate significantly higher levels of outcomes of that boredom, but this is not the case (except for one item, 'workplace boredom leads me to seek more stimulation outside of work'). A possible explanation for this finding could be that people underestimate their levels of boredom, for various social desirability reasons. Asking people how much they experience boredom at work may not yield totally truthful answers, especially when, as in this study, there may be worries about line managers viewing answers. It might be that the question asking about outcomes or consequences of boredom yields a more truthful, though less direct, picture of the amount of boredom really experienced.

Either way, boredom is clearly perceived to have a range of very negative consequences or outcomes for the majority of employees. However, positive aspects of boredom are evidenced in the findings too; 20% felt that being bored at work helped them come up with new ideas whilst 12% felt it made them more creative at work.



Positive consequences of boredom are often overlooked so these findings add weight to the argument that boredom is not always bad for us.

In terms of coping strategies, the current study adds to the body of knowledge about what people do to cope with boredom. Thinking is the most popular strategy with over half doing this. This is likely to be a refocusing strategy, helping to refocus attention onto the task at hand. Of course, it is not known what respondents are thinking about when they are bored and it is possible that they are thinking about matters unrelated to the boring task – but this thinking would fall outside the definition of ‘daydreaming’, which is a separate category. Even if the thinking is not directly related to the boring task, it could be argued that ‘thinking’ as such, is likely to be a positive coping strategy that could lead to constructive outcomes.

The next two most popular strategies were taking a break and daydreaming, each selected by a third of respondents. Taking a break can help refocus attention back to the task but is a strategy that may not be freely available to all within a supermarket setting. Only those with the ability to structure their own working day have the freedom to take a break from a boring task when they choose to do so. Daydreaming is, perhaps a more freely available technique and could be seen as seeking extra stimulation when a task is boring. It is interesting to note that 16% drink something like coffee as a means of coping with boredom; this could be both a refocusing and stimulation seeking activity. Caffeine is often perceived to be a stimulant and can thus be used in order to help refocus on a boring task. About one in ten respondents eat something like chocolate as a means of coping with boredom and it is hard to see this as anything other than a negative strategy. Eating when bored, especially fatty or sugary snacks, is potentially an unhealthy way of coping.

Short-term consequences of boredom, ie what people are likely to do after a boring day (that they would not do after a less boring day) can also be either positive or negative. Positive consequences such as ‘doing something creative’ were selected by almost 20% which again lends credence to the suggestion that boredom can have positive outcomes. Most of the short-term consequences are about seeking extra stimulation to compensate for the stimulation that was lacking during the boring day. Thus, watching TV and seeking stimulating people to talk to are clearly stimulation-seeking. Some stimulation-seeking could fall into ‘thrill’ or ‘risk’ seeking such as driving more recklessly or doing something daring. Other strategies do not seem to fall into either stimulation-seeking category and seem to be more tied in with some kind of energy or stress outlet. Thus, taking a hot bath, doing exercise, arguing with partner, going to bed, smoking or drinking alcohol all seem to be related to stress or the need to burn excess energy. This could be related to the descriptions in qualitative studies of boredom as ‘feeling stressed, agitated, yet at the same time lethargic’ (Martin et al 2006, p.208) discussed in the Introductory material. If workplace boredom is indeed leading to such outcomes as arguing with partner (15%), drinking alcohol (27%) and driving more recklessly (9%) then these are potentially important outcomes to be aware of.

Aspects of the work environment that contribute to workplace boredom can be themed into: work under load (qualitative), work under load (quantitative) work overload, other people, repetition and threats to freedom as shown in Table 6:

**Table 6: Aspects of the work environment that contribute to workplace boredom**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Questionnaire item</i>
Work under load (qual)	There is not enough to do that interests me The work is not demanding enough I am over skilled for the task I don't need to think much
Work under load (quant)	There is not enough to do
Work overload	The work is too demanding
Other people	Another person bores me
Threats to freedom	There are restrictions on talking I don't have enough control
Repetition	The work is routine The work is repetitive There is too much paperwork

The category that scores most highly is 'repetition' with 58% citing repetitive work and 48% routine as the source of workplace boredom (paperwork received a lower score but this may well be because of the nature of retail work restricting the amount of paperwork involved). Other people and work overload receive lower 'hits' and are thus unlikely to be important sources of boredom for this group. Work under load (qualitative and quantitative), and threats to freedom tend to be selected by around a quarter of respondents which suggests that these are important factors contributing to boredom.

The second sphere of causes of boredom is that of 'person characteristics'. In this case, Boredom Proneness was measured and was found to correlate significantly with levels of boredom such that the higher the BP score, the more boredom respondents claim to experience. Clearly, boredom prone individuals experience more boredom and it is likely that being boredom prone moderates the experience of boredom. This is suggested by the multiple regressions that show routine to be the most significant cause of boredom, with BP being the second factor. It could be that boredom proneness moderates the experience of boredom such that those who are more boredom prone will be likely to find routine boring, for example; indeed, t-tests did show that the more from the high BP group did indeed indicate that routine work was a source of boredom than those from the low BP group.

In terms of the effects of BP on short-term consequences of boredom, there were three factors identified as being significantly more likely to be selected by the high BP than the low BP group; exercise, sleep and reckless driving. It has already been suggested that taking more exercise and going to sleep are likely to fall into a 'stress-related' category of consequences, but it had been suggested that driving more recklessly could be an example of 'thrill-seeking' activity. However, it might be that all three fall in the 'stress-related' category, because people may drive more recklessly because they are weary and tired rather than for the sake of seeking extra risk or thrills. It is possible then, that the results suggest that boredom proneness is associated with more stress-related outcomes. In concordance with this premise, of all the longer-term consequences of boredom measured, only one showed a significant difference between

the high and low BP group; this was 'being bored causes me stress' and those in the high BP group selected this more than those in the low BP group.

### **Practical Implications for the Retail Industry**

Although only 17% of participants claimed to suffer chronic boredom at work this relatively low figure might conceal more serious effects of workplace boredom; for example, high numbers reported potentially high levels of negative consequences of being bored – and these figures were the same for the 73% who claim not to suffer chronic boredom as for the 17% who do. These consequences include mistakes and intentions to quit their jobs; both of these outcomes imply negative repercussions for organisational productivity. It is interesting to note that previous research into environmental and organisational factors that contribute towards retail staff turnover only accounted for 38.7% of total variance in labour turnover (Booth and Hamer 2007), leading the authors of that research to conclude that there must be other factors not previously considered that lead to turnover within retail; the current findings suggest that boredom might be an important additional factor.

Other consequences are potentially negative for the individual, including increased consumption of chocolate and alcohol. These unhealthy coping patterns could impact on the long-term health of the organisation.

The findings do suggest then that the retail industry should take measures to manage workplace boredom and the study contributes further by highlighting the main sources of boredom. Routine work is the most significant factor and, whilst there may be little that organisations can realistically do to vary the work tasks, they might be able to look at aspects of the work environment that could be moderated to help employees cope with the routine better. For example, 'threats to freedom' such as lack of control or restrictions on talking could, in some cases be lifted to enable employees to seek extra stimulation to cope with the more routine elements of the job. 'Work under load' is another relevant factor and a better match between employee skills and abilities and the job tasks might help when coping with the more routine elements of the job; for example, workers who are over skilled should, in theory, be found work more appropriate to their abilities. In today's climate of austerity and recession, it is acknowledged that 'work under load' might be a growing problem as more qualified and capable workers seek positions below their abilities as they are unable to find work that better matches their qualifications.

Apart from routine, the trait of Boredom Proneness appears to be the most important contributor to workplace boredom. A quarter of high BP individuals experienced chronic boredom compared with only 17% of low BP. Boredom prone individuals do not only experience more boredom, but the findings suggest that boredom also cause them more stress-related outcomes. These findings suggest that screening for Boredom Proneness might be a useful selection strategy for those jobs with a high degree of routine built into them. This could be incorporated into existing selection methods; however, care should be taken to restrict such screening to only those high routine jobs in order not to screen out candidates who might be able to make an important contribution in other positions. Care should also be taken when the 'high

routine' jobs are a possible starting point for other positions, such as managerial posts; screening out high BP individuals at this stage, could leave organisations vulnerable higher up the organisational structure.

### **Limitations of study and Implications for further research**

Tweaks to the methodology of the current study would address some of its limitations; for example, including more than one question to measure the amount of boredom experienced would allow greater scope; a longer scale was considered but the practical need for brevity became a more over-riding concern as it was extremely difficult to gain access to organisations to study a topic such as boredom (which is seen as something very negative by many employers who would prefer to think that none of their staff were ever bored).

The Boredom Proneness scale is in the original true/false format and it might be more useful to convert this into a Likert format as this could increase the sensitivity of the scale; this was not done at this time because of the increased length of the questionnaire that would have resulted - difficulty gaining access to employees required a reduction in the length of the document they were asked to complete in order to increase compliance. It would also be useful to examine the relationship between stress and boredom that is suggested by this study in future research.

### **References**

- Alfredsson L, Karasek RA, Theorell T. (1982). Myocardial infarction risk and psychosocial work environment: An analysis of the male Swedish working force. *Soc Sci Med* 16, 463-67.
- Booth, S and Hamer, K (2007) "Labour turnover in the retail industry: Predicting the role of individual, organisational and environmental factors", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 35 Iss: 4, pp.289 - 307
- Branton, P. (1970). A field study of repetitive manual work in relation to accidents in the workplace *International Journal of Production Research*, 8, 93-107.
- Brehm, J. W., & Brehm, S. S. (1981). *Psychological reactance: A theory of freedom and control*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Brisset, D. & Snow, R.P. (1993). Boredom: where the future isn't. *Symbolic Interaction*, 16, 237-256.
- Caldwell LL, Darling N, Payne LL and Dowdy B (1999). Why are you bored?: an examination of psychological and social control causes of boredom among adolescents. *Journal of leisure research* 31, 103-21
- Caplan, R.D., Cobb, S., French, J.R.P., van Harrison, R. & Pinneau, S.R. (1975). *Job demands and worker health*. Washington DC: US Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
- Cox & (1980) 'Repetitive Work'. In Cooper CL and Payne R (eds) *Current concerns in occupational stress*. Wiley, Chichester, UK
- Csikszentmihalyi M (1992) *The measurement of flow in everyday life: towards a theory of emergent motivation*. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Nebraska
- Damrad-Frye R and Laird JD (1989) The experience of boredom: the role of the self-perception of attention. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 315-20
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour*. New York: Penum.
- Dehlinger R (1975) 'The Yawning Student', p.44-54 in *Boredom: Root of Discontent and Aggression*, edited by Franz Goetzl. Berkely, CA: Grizzly Peak Press

- Drory, A. (1982). Individual differences in boredom proneness and task effectiveness at work. *Personnel Psychology*, 35, 141-151.
- Dyer-Smith M. B. A.; Wesson D. A. (1997) Resource allocation efficiency as an indicator of boredom, work performance and absence *Ergonomics*, 40, Number 5, 1 May , pp. 515-521(7)
- Eysenck HJ (1967) *The biological basis of personality*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas
- Farmer R and Sundberg ND (1986) Boredom proneness: the development and correlates of a new scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 50, 4-17
- Fisher C (1987) *Boredom: Construct, causes and consequences*. Technical report ONR-9, Texas A&M University
- Fisher C (1993) Boredom at Work: a neglected concept. *Human Relations* 46, 395-417
- Gardner DG and Cummings LL (1988) Activation theory and job design: Review and reconceptualisation. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 10, 81-122
- Gaylin W (1979) Feeling Bored pp 113-129 in *Feelings: Our Vital Signs* edited by W.Gaylin. New York: Harper and Row
- Gosline N (2008) Bored? *Scientific American Mind* 18 (6) p20-27
- Grose, V.L. (1989). Coping with boredom in the cockpit before it's too late. *Professional Safety*, 34(7), 24-26.
- Grubb, E. A. (1975). Assembly line boredom and individual differences in recreational participation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 7, 256-269.
- Hackman JR and Oldham GR (1980) *Work re-design*. Addison-Wesley. Reading, MA
- Hamilton J (1983) Development of interest and enjoyment in adolescence. Part 11. Boredom and psychopathology. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 12, 363-372
- Harris M B (2000) Correlates and characteristics of boredom proneness and boredom. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30, 3 pp576-598
- Healy S (1984) *Boredom, self and culture*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses
- Hendry J (2004) A review of a multiple retailer's labour turnover. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 32 (9), p 434-441
- Heslop, S.; Harvey, J.; Thorpe, N.; Mulley, C (2010) Factors that comprise driver boredom and their relationships to preferred driving speed and demographic variables. *Transportation Planning & Technology*, Feb2010, Vol. 33 Issue 1, p75-89, 15p, Hill AB ( 1975) Work variety and individual differences in occupational boredom. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 60, 129-131
- Hill A.B & Perkins R.E. (1985) Towards a model of boredom. *British Journal of Psychology*, 76, 235-240
- Hoover M (1986) Extreme individualisation, False Subjectivity and Boredom. *Virginia Journal of Sociology* 2: 35-51
- Joyce A (2005) Boredom numbs the world of work. *Washington Post*, Wednesday August 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Klapp O (1986) *Overload and Boredom*. New York: Greenwood Press
- Lee, T. W. (1986). Toward the development and validation of a measure of job boredom. *Manhattan College Journal of Business*, 15, 22-28.
- Lemmink J and Mattsson J, (2002) "Employee behavior, feelings of warmth and customer perception in service encounters", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 30 Iss: 1, pp.18 - 33
- Leong FTL and Schneller GR (1993) Boredom proneness: temperamental and cognitive components. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 14, 233-239
- London H and Monello L ( 1974) Cognitive manipulation of boredom. In H London and ER Misbet (eds) *Thought and feeling- cognitive alteration of feeling states*. Chicago: Aldine

- McBain WN (1970) Arousal, monotony and accidents in line driving. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 54, 509-519
- Mann S (1999) *Hiding What We Feel, Faking What We Don't*, Collins & Brown.
- Mann S (2006) Counting Window Panes: An investigation into boredom-reducing strategies used by teachers and the causes and consequences of their workplace boredom. Presentation at the *Annual Conference of the Division of Occupational Psychology of the British Psychological Society*, Glasgow, January.
- Martin, M, Sadlo G and Stew G (2006) The phenomenon of boredom. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 193-211
- Mikulas WL and Vodanovich SJ (1993) The essence of boredom. *The Psychological Record*, 43, 3-12
- O'Hanlon JF (1981) Boredom: practical consequences and a theory. *Acta Psychologica* 49, 53-82
- Orcutt JD (1984) Contrasting effects of 2 kinds of boredom on alcohol use. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 14, p161-173
- Paik SB (1998) Are you noticing too many yawns? *Workforce*, April, Vol 77, Issue 4, p.16-18
- Pekrun, R, Goetz T, Daniels LM, Stupnisky RH, Perry RP (2010) Boredom in Achievement Settings: exploring control-value antecedents and performance outcomes of a neglected emotion. *Journal of Educational psychology* vol 102 no 3 p531-549
- Saito H, Kashida K, Endo Y and Saito M (1972) Studies on a bottle inspection task. *Journal of Science of Labor* 48, 475 - 532
- Sawin SA and Scerbo MW (1995) Effects of instruction type and boredom proneness in vigilance: implications for boredom and workload. *Human Factors*, 37, 752-765
- Scott, Marvin and Stanford Lyman. 1968. "Accounts." *American Sociological Review* 31: 46-62.
- Smith RP (1981) Boredom: A review *Human Factors* 23, 329-340
- Steinauer JM (1999) Bored Stiff. *Incentive*, Nov Vol 173 Issue 11, p.7
- Vodanovich SJ and Rupp DE (1999) Are procrastinators prone to boredom? *Social Behavior and Personality*, 27, 11-16
- Vodanovich SJ (2003) Psychometric measures of boredom: A review of the literature. *Journal of Psychology*, 137, p569-595
- Wasson AS (1981) Susceptibility to boredom and deviant behaviour at school. *Psychological Reports*, 48, 901-902
- Watt JD (1994) Boredom proneness and the need for cognition. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 28, 44-51
- Watt JD and Vodanovich SJ (1992). An examination of race and gender differences in boredom proneness. *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 7, 169-175
- Watt JD (1991) Effects of boredom proneness on time perception. *Psychological Reports*, 69, 1139-1146
- Zuckerman M (1979) *Sensation seeking: Beyond the optimal level of arousal*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum