



# External Psychological and WHS Practice Evaluation

## Skodel Psychosocial Risk Assessment Methodology

Including the Workforce Strain Index (WSI)

### External Reviewers:

- **Andrew Fuller** – Psychological Methodology Review
- **Martyn Campbell** – WHS Practice and Regulatory Review

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**Commissioned by:** Skodel

## Overview of the Skodel psychosocial survey instrument

The Skodel psychosocial risk questionnaire is a **brief, self-report instrument** designed for use in workplace psychosocial risk assessment and consultation contexts. Completion time is intentionally low (typically **< 3 minutes**) to minimise respondent burden and support sustainable participation across diverse workforce groups and literacy levels.

The survey instrument is structured to identify **sustained strain rather than transient discomfort**, examine the **work-related contributors to that strain**, and capture worker perspectives on **risk-reduction opportunities**, supporting consultation-led psychosocial risk assessment and control design.

Items are written in non-clinical, plain language and deliberately avoid diagnostic or pathologising terminology, supporting accessibility across different literacy levels and cultural backgrounds.



Rather than functioning as a multi-scale psychometric inventory, the questionnaire is structured around **core dimensions required for risk interpretation**, including:

- workers' **predominant emotional experience at work**,
- the **impact of that experience on functioning and work capacity**,
- the **duration and persistence** of the experience, and
- the **contributing work factors (aligned to WHS hazards)** associated with psychosocial hazards, with language tailorable to organisation contexts to improve relevance for workers and insights for leaders.

The questionnaire is designed to complement, rather than replace, other organisational data sources and qualitative consultation methods (e.g. focus groups and incident reviews). Its primary purpose is to support **risk prioritisation, consultation, control planning, and targeted action**, rather than detailed psychological measurement or diagnosis.

## 1. Purpose of this evaluation

This evaluation examines the **psychological soundness, WHS alignment, and practical utility** of the Skodel psychosocial risk assessment methodology, including its survey instrument and Workforce Strain Index (WSI).

The evaluation considers whether the methodology is:

- fit for purpose for psychosocial risk management,
- ethically and professionally appropriate,
- usable and aligned to WHS frameworks,
- capable of supporting consultation, prioritisation, and risk control.

This evaluation does **not** assess clinical diagnostic capability.

## 2. Scope of review and materials considered

The evaluation draws on:



- documentation describing Skodel's psychosocial risk framework,
- survey design and reporting materials,
- descriptions of the Workforce Strain Index and its development,
- evidence of internal psychologist review and analysis of **15,000+ workforce survey responses**,
- explanations of how outputs are used in consultation, planning, and review.

The review focuses on **fit-for-purpose application in WHS contexts**.

# PART A – Psychological Methodology Review

## 3. Intended use and ethical boundaries

Skodel's methodology is clearly positioned as a **psychosocial risk assessment and consultation tool**.

It is intended to:

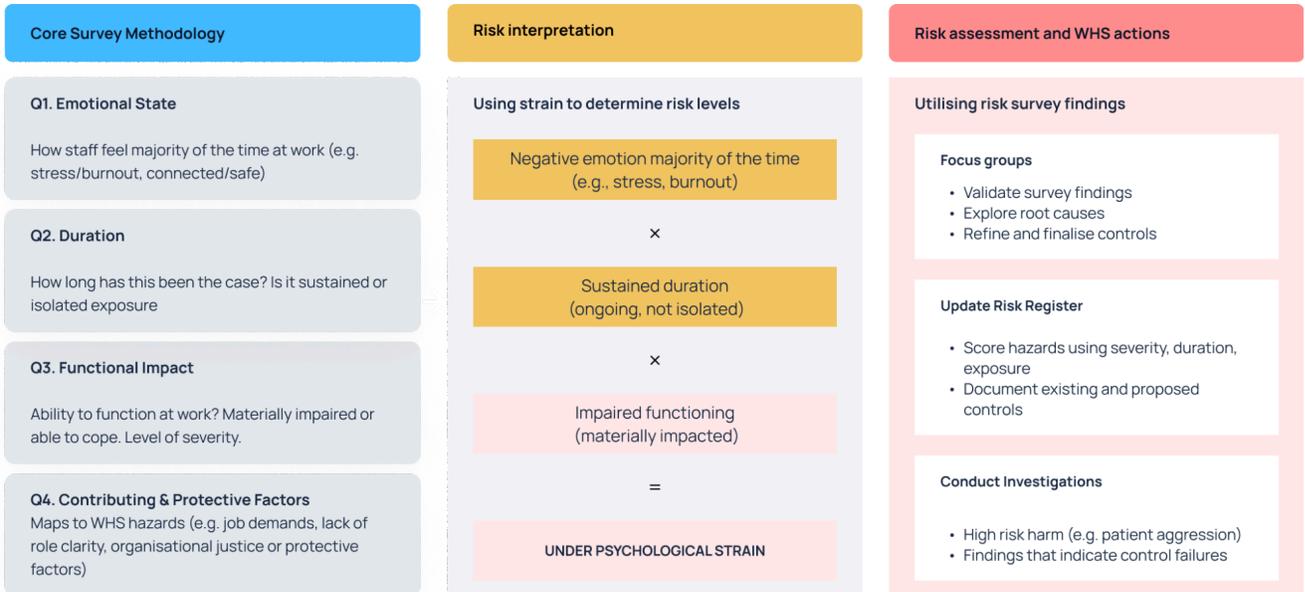
- identify psychosocial hazards,
- assess relative levels of workforce strain,
- inform prioritisation and consultation,
- support the development and review of controls.

It is **not intended** to:

- diagnose mental health conditions,
- predict clinical outcomes,
- replace clinical assessment.

This clarity of scope is appropriate and consistent with ethical psychological practice.

## 4. Conceptual framework



The methodology reflects contemporary occupational psychology and WHS principles by recognising that:

- psychosocial risks can be systemic and interacting,
- cumulative exposure increases strain,
- identifying the contributing work factors of strain so that controls can be targeted at root causes,
- meaningful risk management requires understanding both **prevalence (likelihood) and impact (consequence)**.

This approach is conceptually sound and aligned with modern psychosocial risk management thinking.

## Research Foundations for Core Survey Methodology

Domain	Indicative Predictive Strength for Psychosocial Risk	Foundational Research Statements	Key Research Foundations
<b>Emotional state at work</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Persistent negative emotional states (e.g. stress, exhaustion) are associated with elevated risk of strain-related outcomes. Emotional strain functions as an early indicator of psychosocial risk, but on its own does not reliably distinguish transient pressure from harmful exposure.	Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al.; Bakker & Demerouti); Stress appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman)
<b>Duration of experience</b>	<b>Very strong</b>	Research consistently shows that it is the chronicity of stress exposure, rather than stress exposure per se, that produces cumulative psychological and physiological load. Sustained exposure over time is associated with impaired recovery, exhaustion, and increased likelihood of adverse health and safety outcomes. Duration therefore acts as a critical risk amplifier.	Allostatic load theory (McEwen & Stellar; McEwen); Chronic stress and exposure models
<b>Impact on functioning</b>	<b>Very strong</b>	When psychological strain begins to interfere with an individual's ability to function effectively at work, it represents a significant occupational health and safety concern. Functional impairment marks a threshold at which strain translates into observable risk, including reduced performance, increased error likelihood, and safety incidents.	Occupational health and work functioning literature; Human factors and safety science

These domains represent empirically supported indicators of psychosocial risk and should be interpreted in combination rather than in isolation.

## 5. Survey design and worker experience

From a psychological perspective, the survey demonstrates:

- clear, non-clinical language,
- accessibility across workforce literacy levels,
- avoidance of stigmatising or diagnostic phrasing,
- low completion burden,
- consistent structure supporting reliable self-report.

These characteristics support engagement and meaningful workforce input.

## 6. Ethical safeguards

Appropriate safeguards are evident, including:

- confidential data handling,
- reporting at aggregated levels,
- avoidance of unnecessarily intrusive questioning,
- emphasis on psychological safety and prevention.

The methodology appropriately frames data as a basis for improvement rather than judgement.

## 7. Workforce Strain Index (WSI) – Psychological Perspective

The Workforce Strain Index is an internally developed composite indicator refined through psychologist review and empirical analysis of **15,000+ responses**.

From a psychological perspective:

- the WSI functions as a **risk prioritisation tool**, not a clinical score,
- it supports comparison across groups and time,
- it highlights compounding psychosocial hazards.

The conceptual logic of the Index is appropriate for its stated purpose. It is designed to distinguish between **temporary or situational discomfort** and **sustained psychosocial strain that may affect health, safety, or work capacity**.

A worker is only counted as experiencing sustained psychosocial strain when **all three** of the following are present:

- they report feeling in a negative emotional state (stress, burnout) at work **most of the time**,
- they report that this is **affecting their ability to function or perform their role effectively**, and
- they indicate that this experience has been **ongoing, rather than an isolated or short-term issue**.

(Refer to Section 4 for survey methodology.)

This approach is consistent with broader occupational psychology and psychosocial risk research, which demonstrates that **confidence in risk identification increases when related indicators align**, and when effects are sustained over time rather than transient.

This approach helps organisations focus attention on **meaningful risk**, rather than reacting to normal day-to-day pressures or isolated experiences.

# PART B – WHS Practice and Regulatory Review

## 8. Alignment with WHS risk management duties

From a WHS practice and regulatory perspective, the Skodel methodology aligns with core duties under Australian WHS legislation, including the obligation to:

- identify psychosocial hazards,
- assess psychosocial risks,
- consult with workers,
- implement and review risk controls.

The methodology supports a **structured, repeatable, and aligned** approach to psychosocial risk management.

## 9. Practical usability in real workplaces

The methodology is practically usable across organisations of varying size and maturity because:

- outputs are understandable to non-specialists,
- results can be readily communicated to leaders and boards,
- the radar graph effectively illustrates which hazards are highest risk and changes over time to measure control effectiveness
- the WSI assists in prioritising attention and resources,
- findings support informed discussion rather than abstract reporting.

This usability is critical for translating compliance obligations into action.

## 10. Consultation and worker engagement

The methodology appropriately positions survey results as:

- a starting point for consultation, not an endpoint,
- input into further qualitative inquiry (e.g. focus groups),
- a mechanism to support worker participation in risk management.

This approach aligns with regulatory expectations regarding meaningful consultation.

## 11. Decision-usefulness and WHS alignment

From a WHS regulatory standpoint, the methodology produces outputs that are:

- decision-useful,
- aligned to common risk management frameworks (identify, assess, control, review),
- supportive of effective psychosocial risk assessments.

Importantly, the methodology avoids common pitfalls such as:

- treating survey results as definitive findings,
- relying on a single metric without context,
- failing to link data to control planning and review.

## 12. Risk of misuse and safeguards (WHS perspective)

The methodology includes safeguards that reduce the risk of misuse, including:

- clear articulation of intended use,
- emphasis on professional interpretation,
- guidance against over-reliance on scores alone.



These safeguards are important for ensuring psychosocial data is used responsibly in WHS decision-making.

## PART C – Integrated Assessment and Conclusion

### 13. Integrated professional opinion

Taken together, the psychological and WHS practice reviews support the conclusion that:

- Skodel's methodology is **fit for purpose** for psychosocial risk identification and management.
- The survey and Workforce Strain Index provide **meaningful, decision-useful information**.
- The approach is ethically sound, practically usable, and aligned with WHS obligations.
- The methodology is particularly strong in supporting **prioritisation, consultation, and action**, rather than measurement alone.

### 14. Conclusion

This evaluation supports the Skodel psychosocial risk assessment methodology as an **evidence-informed, practitioner-focused system** suitable for WHS application.

When used as intended and accompanied by consultation and appropriate expertise, the methodology provides a robust foundation for managing psychosocial risk and supporting preventative action.

**External Reviewers:**



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