Bullshit Jobs

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The Bullshit Jobs Phenomenon: Quantifying Meaningless Work and Its Systemic Costs to Society

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Author's Note

This paper began where all the papers in this series began: with a person who got hurt, and a system that did the hurting.

The OMXUS Research Series exists because fourteen things need to change. Not fourteen policy preferences. Fourteen prevention requirements — each one traceable to a specific failure that broke a specific person. Goal 2 of those fourteen says: *Work 22 hours max. Keep your pay. Choose your hours. Work from home.*

People hear that and laugh. They think it's utopian. They think it's lazy. They think it's impossible.

This paper is the proof that it is none of those things.

The arithmetic is not complicated. Australia has approximately 16 million working-age adults. The functional work that keeps the country running — the healthcare, the food production, the teaching, the building, the maintenance, the research — amounts to roughly 352 million hours per week. Divide one by the other. You get 22 hours.

That is not a dream. It is division.

The remaining hours — the 208 million weekly hours consumed by the consultants, the compliance officers, the middle managers, the corporate administrators, the box-tickers, and the taskmasters — produce nothing that anyone needs. We know this because during COVID-19 lockdowns, approximately 40 to 60 percent of jobs ceased, and the world kept turning. The supermarkets stayed stocked. The hospitals stayed open. The power stayed on. The consultants stayed home, and nobody noticed.

John Maynard Keynes predicted a 15-hour work week by 2030. He was right about the productivity. He was wrong about what we would do with it. We invented bullshit instead.

This paper documents the bullshit. It names it. It counts it. It measures the psychological damage it inflicts on the people trapped inside it. And it shows — with numbers, not sentiment — that the resources currently wasted on meaningless work are precisely the resources that could fund a 22-hour week, a functioning care economy, a rehabilitative justice system, and the kind of community infrastructure that would make Goals 1 through 14 not aspirational but inevitable.

The system is not resource-constrained. It is allocation-constrained. The money exists. The hours exist. The people exist. What does not exist is the political will to stop wasting all three.

This paper is part of that will.

— A.A. & L.N.C.

Abstract

In 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that by 2030, technological progress would reduce the working week to fifteen hours. Instead, advanced economies have proliferated a vast category of employment that even its occupants regard as pointless. Anthropologist David Graeber termed these "bullshit jobs" — positions so devoid of purpose that the worker cannot justify their existence, yet feels compelled to pretend otherwise. Survey data from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands suggests that between 37 and 40 percent of workers consider their jobs meaningless, while a more conservative European estimate places the figure at approximately 5 percent, depending on question framing. This paper examines the bullshit jobs thesis through economic, psychological, and sociological lenses, with particular attention to Australian labour market data. We categorise the phenomenon using Graeber's five-part taxonomy (flunkies, goons, duct-tapers, box-tickers, and taskmasters), analyse its systemic drivers — including managerial feudalism, financialisation, the Protestant work ethic, and regulatory metastasis — and quantify its costs in terms of lost productivity, psychological harm, and misallocated human capital. Australian data reveals that public sector employment is growing at more than double the rate of population growth, administrative and support services now employ over 935,000 workers, and university management ranks have expanded substantially while frontline academic positions have stagnated. We demonstrate that the functional work required to sustain Australian society amounts to approximately 352 million hours per week — which, distributed across 16 million working-age adults, yields a 22-hour work week. The paper argues that the bullshit jobs phenomenon represents a structural failure of labour markets to allocate human effort toward socially valuable ends, documents the $32 billion annual cost of a justice system that embodies the same institutional pathology, and examines universal basic income as a mechanism for correcting this misallocation by decoupling survival from employment.

Keywords: bullshit jobs, meaningless work, labour economics, administrative bloat, universal basic income, David Graeber, Australia, managerial feudalism, productivity, 22-hour work week, care economy, institutional waste

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Defining and Categorizing Bullshit Jobs
4. The Scale of the Problem
5. Psychological and Social Costs
6. Systemic Drivers
7. Economic Costs
8. The 22-Hour Week: How Much Work Does Australia Actually Need?
9. The Justice System: $32 Billion Spent on Failure
10. The UBI Connection
11. Australian Context: A Case Study in Misallocation
12. The Unified Waste: Corporate and Carceral Non-Function
13. International Comparisons and Counterarguments
14. Policy Implications
15. Conclusion
16. References
17. Appendix A: The 22-Hour Calculation — Full Methodology
18. Appendix B: Cross-References to OMXUS Research Series
19. Appendix C: Australian Data Tables

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1. Introduction

Something has gone profoundly wrong with the way advanced economies allocate human labour. In 1930, John Maynard Keynes published his celebrated essay "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren," in which he predicted that within a century, cumulative productivity gains would allow societies to meet all material needs with a working week of just fifteen hours (Keynes, 1930). The technical side of his prediction was remarkably accurate: productivity in developed economies has increased roughly four- to eight-fold since 1930, precisely as Keynes anticipated (Crafts, 2022). Yet the average working week in countries like the United Kingdom has declined only from 49 hours to approximately 37 hours — nowhere near the radical reduction Keynes foresaw (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024).

Where did all the surplus labour go?

The conventional economic answer is that humans simply chose to consume more rather than work less. There is some truth to this. But David Graeber, the late London School of Economics anthropologist, offered a more unsettling explanation: rather than allowing technological gains to translate into greater leisure, advanced economies have invented enormous quantities of work that serves no discernible purpose. In a provocative 2013 essay titled "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs," Graeber argued that a significant fraction of the workforce — perhaps 40 percent or more — is engaged in work that even the workers themselves believe to be pointless, unnecessary, or actively pernicious (Graeber, 2013).

The essay went viral. It was translated into over a dozen languages within weeks. Clearly, it struck a nerve. When the polling firm YouGov subsequently asked British workers whether their job made

a "meaningful contribution to the world," 37 percent said it did not (YouGov, 2015). A parallel Dutch study found that 40 percent of respondents felt the same (Graeber, 2018). Graeber expanded the essay into a full book, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, in 2018, developing a taxonomy of meaningless work and an analysis of why market economies — which are theoretically supposed to eliminate inefficiency — instead generate it in abundance.

The thesis is not without its critics. Soffia, Wood, and Burchell (2022) found that when survey questions are framed differently, only about 5 percent of European workers describe their work as useless, and they attribute the phenomenon more to poor management and workplace alienation than to structural forces. Sémanne (2025) argues that Graeber misidentifies the cause, attributing bullshit jobs to capitalism when government interventionism and regulatory complexity are more proximate drivers. These are legitimate challenges that any serious treatment of the phenomenon must address.

This paper attempts to do so. It synthesises the available survey evidence, examines the psychological and economic costs of meaningless work, identifies the systemic forces that produce it, and applies the analysis to Australian labour market conditions. Australia presents a particularly instructive case: a wealthy, service-dominated economy with a large public sector, a significant mining-driven resource economy that generates substantial downstream service employment, and growing concerns about administrative bloat in education and healthcare.

The paper goes further than Graeber. It performs the arithmetic he gestured at. If you strip out the non-functional work, how many hours does a modern industrial society actually need from its citizens? The answer — 22 hours per week — is not a policy aspiration. It is a mathematical result. And it reframes the entire discussion: the question is no longer whether we can afford a shorter working week, but why we are forcing people to work twice as long as necessary in order to sustain an elaborate apparatus of institutional self-perpetuation.

The paper concludes by examining universal basic income as a structural intervention that could alter the incentives that sustain meaningless work, and by connecting the bullshit jobs phenomenon to the broader pattern of institutional waste documented across the OMXUS Research Series — including the $32 billion annual cost of a criminal justice system that fails by its own metrics.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Keynes and the Unfulfilled Promise of Leisure

Keynes's 1930 essay remains the essential starting point for any discussion of why humans work more than they seemingly need to. Writing at the onset of the Great Depression, Keynes nonetheless projected confidence in long-term economic growth, arguing that the "economic problem" — the struggle for subsistence — would be solved within a century. His prediction of a four- to eight-fold increase in the standard of living proved broadly correct for developed economies (Crafts, 2022). His prediction about working hours did not.

Several explanations have been offered. Benjamin Friedman and others have argued that Keynes underestimated the human desire for relative status and positional goods: people work not merely for subsistence but to outdo their neighbours (Friedman, 2008). Robert and Edward Skidelsky (2012) emphasise the failure of moral philosophy to provide a compelling account of "the good life"

that might motivate people to choose leisure over income. The standard economic explanation is simply that consumption preferences proved more elastic than Keynes assumed.

Graeber's contribution was to add a fourth explanation: that much of the work being done is not, in fact, producing anything that anyone wants or needs. The excess labour is not going toward greater consumption; it is going toward what amounts to an elaborate social performance.

2.2 Graeber's Original Essay and Book

Graeber's 2013 essay, published in the radical magazine *Strike!*, argued that technology had indeed made it possible to reduce work dramatically, but that "the ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger" (Graeber, 2013). Rather than allowing leisure, the system had invented meaningless jobs to keep the population occupied and exhausted.

The essay was deliberately provocative and loosely argued, blending anthropological observation with political polemic. Its power lay less in its academic rigour than in its resonance with lived experience. Millions of workers recognised themselves in Graeber's description. The essay was shared millions of times online, generating a public conversation that academic labour economics had largely failed to produce.

The 2018 book developed the thesis more carefully. Graeber collected hundreds of testimonies from workers who described their jobs as meaningless. He developed a five-category taxonomy (discussed in Section 3). He offered a structural analysis rooted in what he called "managerial feudalism" — the tendency of executives to build empires of subordinates as markers of status. And he connected the phenomenon to broader questions about the moral meaning of work and the case for universal basic income.

2.3 Responses and Criticisms

The academic response to Graeber has been mixed. The most significant empirical challenge comes from Soffia, Wood, and Burchell (2022), who used European Working Conditions Survey data to examine Graeber's claims. They found that in 2015, only 4.8 percent of EU28 workers reported not having the feeling of doing useful work — far below Graeber's 37-40 percent figure. They also found that the perception of uselessness was declining over time, contradicting the thesis that bullshit jobs were proliferating. They did confirm, however, that the perception of doing useless work was strongly associated with poor psychological wellbeing.

Sémanne (2025) offered a theoretical critique, arguing that Graeber correctly described the symptoms but misdiagnosed the cause. Rather than blaming capitalism or managerial feudalism, Sémanne pointed to government intervention — regulatory complexity, occupational licensing, and compliance mandates — as the primary generator of economically unnecessary work. This aligns with observations about the growth of the compliance industry, which exists largely to navigate rules that themselves exist largely to justify the existence of the compliance industry.

Other critics have noted methodological problems with the YouGov survey. The question "Does your job make a meaningful contribution to the world?" sets a very high bar. A clerical worker in a useful organisation might honestly answer "no" without considering their job useless. The gap between the 37 percent YouGov figure and the 5 percent European Working Conditions Survey figure likely reflects differences in question framing rather than differences in the underlying phenomenon.

2.4 Labour Economics on Job Quality

Independently of Graeber, a substantial body of labour economics research has documented the importance of meaningful work to human wellbeing. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) demonstrated that workers actively "craft" their jobs to create meaning, even in objectively monotonous roles. Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) found that meaningful work is among the strongest predictors of life satisfaction, exceeding income in predictive power above modest thresholds. The WHO has recognised workplace stress and disengagement as significant public health concerns.

In the Australian context, the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) survey has tracked job satisfaction since 2001. Average job satisfaction scores have remained relatively stable at 7.6 to 7.9 out of 10 over two decades (Melbourne Institute, 2023). However, PwC's 2024 Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey found that only 63 percent of Australian employees reported being very or moderately satisfied, while 35 percent felt neutral or unhappy in their current role. Among younger Australians, the data is more striking: 52 percent of Gen Z workers and 46 percent of millennials reported having left a job specifically because it lacked purpose (Moxie Insights, 2025).

2.5 The Australian Work Ethic: Mateship, Hard Yakka, and the Fair Go

Australia has its own variant of the Protestant work ethic, deeply embedded in national identity. "Hard work" is one of the nine core Australian values identified in demographic research — "you earn your keep" (see Applebee, 2026a). The concept of the "fair go" — "you have a go, you get a fair go" — ties dignity to effort. A man who doesn't work is not just unemployed; in the Australian moral framework, he is failing a test of character.

This creates a particular resistance to the bullshit jobs thesis in Australian culture. Telling an Australian tradie that 40 percent of office workers are doing nothing useful will get you a knowing nod. Telling the same tradie that his grandson should work 22 hours a week will get you a lecture about soft generations. The irony is precise: the tradie already knows the work is bullshit. He just cannot accept the conclusion that follows from what he knows, because it violates the deeper moral framework that says suffering through labour is what makes a person respectable.

The research does not say hard work is wrong. It says: you believe in hard work? You're working twice the hours for half the result. The surplus is not going to you or your family. It is going to sustain an administrative apparatus that produces nothing your family needs.

2.6 The Gap in the Literature

Despite the growing body of work on bullshit jobs, several gaps remain:

1. **No peer-reviewed replication** of the 37 percent YouGov figure exists outside of YouGov's own polling. The figure is widely cited but never independently verified with comparable methodology.
2. **No systematic reconciliation** of the 37 percent and 5 percent estimates has been published. This paper offers one (Section 13).
3. **No study has connected** the bullshit jobs phenomenon to justice system waste — despite both being manifestations of the same structural pathology (institutional self-perpetuation over functional output).

4. **No study has performed the arithmetic** that this paper performs in Section 8: dividing functional hours by working-age population to derive the actual work requirement. Keynes gestured at it. Graeber implied it. Nobody did the division.

5. **Australian-specific data** on bullshit jobs prevalence is almost entirely absent from the literature. This paper provides the first systematic application of the framework to Australian labour market conditions.

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3. Defining and Categorising Bullshit Jobs

3.1 Graeber's Definition and Taxonomy

Graeber defined a bullshit job as:

> A form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence, even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case. (Graeber, 2018, p. 9)

The definition contains several critical elements. First, the judgment of pointlessness comes from the worker, not from an external observer. Second, the job is not merely unpleasant or poorly compensated — it is *unnecessary*. Third, the worker is forced into a performance of pretended purposefulness, which Graeber argued constitutes a form of "spiritual violence."

Graeber identified five categories of bullshit jobs:

Flunkies are positions that exist primarily to make someone else appear important. The archetypal flunky is the corporate receptionist in a building where no one actually needs to be received, or the personal assistant whose duties could be performed by a calendar application. The defining feature is that the position serves a ceremonial or status function rather than a productive one. In feudal societies, the number of retainers a lord possessed signalled their status; Graeber argued that modern executives maintain subordinates for analogous reasons.

Goons are positions whose existence is only necessary because other organisations have them. Corporate lawyers exist because other corporations have corporate lawyers. Lobbyists exist because other interests have lobbyists. Much of the advertising industry is a zero-sum arms race that, in aggregate, produces no net consumer benefit. If all parties simultaneously disarmed, the work would simply disappear. Goon positions represent a collective action problem: individually rational, collectively wasteful.

Duct-tapers are workers who exist to patch problems that should not exist in the first place. The classic example is the employee who manually corrects errors produced by an automated system that could be fixed but is not. Duct-tapers also include the workers who manage the human consequences of bad organisational decisions — the project manager who spends their time smoothing over conflicts created by an incompetent superior, or the customer service representative whose job exists because the product was designed badly.

Box-tickers are employees whose work allows an organisation to claim it is doing something it is not actually doing. Compliance officers who produce reports that no one reads. Diversity and inclusion coordinators who change nothing substantive but generate documentation. Survey administrators

who collect data that is never analysed. The box-ticking function is about creating a paper trail of apparent diligence, not about achieving actual outcomes.

Taskmasters come in two varieties. The first are unnecessary supervisors who oversee workers capable of managing themselves. The second — and more insidious — are supervisors whose primary function is to create bullshit work for others. The taskmaster who convenes meetings to discuss the scheduling of future meetings, or who requires subordinates to produce reports justifying their continued employment, is generating second-order bullshit.

3.2 The YouGov and Dutch Survey Data

The empirical foundation of Graeber's thesis rests primarily on two surveys. In 2015, YouGov asked a representative sample of British workers: "Does your job make a meaningful contribution to the world?" Fifty percent said yes, 37 percent said no, and 13 percent were uncertain (YouGov, 2015). A parallel study conducted in the Netherlands found that 40 percent of Dutch workers believed their jobs served no meaningful purpose.

Graeber used these figures expansively. He noted that if 37 percent of jobs are bullshit, and if roughly 37 percent of the *remaining* jobs exist to support the bullshit jobs (administrative support for pointless departments, for example), then "slightly over 50 percent of all labour falls into the bullshit sector in the broadest sense of the term" (Graeber, 2018, p. 11).

This extrapolation has been criticised on multiple grounds. The YouGov question asks about "meaningful contribution to the world," which is a different question from "is your job necessary." A janitor in a hospital makes a meaningful contribution to the world; a janitor in a pointless corporate office does useful work (the office needs cleaning) within a larger structure of pointlessness. A nurse might answer "no" during a moment of burnout without actually believing nursing is pointless. The European Working Conditions Survey, which asked whether workers had "the feeling of doing useful work," found only 4.8 percent responding negatively (Soffia et al., 2022).

The true figure likely lies somewhere between these extremes. Soffia et al.'s question captures a narrower phenomenon: outright belief that one's work is useless. The YouGov question captures a broader existential assessment: the sense that one's daily labour does not contribute to human flourishing. Both are real phenomena, but they describe different things, and conflating them weakens the analysis.

3.3 Distinguishing Bullshit Jobs from Shit Jobs

Graeber was careful to distinguish bullshit jobs from what he called "shit jobs." The distinction is crucial and frequently misunderstood.

A shit job is a job that is unpleasant, degrading, or poorly compensated — but socially necessary. Garbage collection, aged care, cleaning, agricultural labour. These are jobs that the world genuinely needs done but that society chooses to compensate poorly and stigmatise socially. The person doing the work knows it matters; the problem is that no one else seems to acknowledge this.

A bullshit job is, in many cases, the mirror image: well-compensated, high-status, performed in comfortable surroundings — but pointless. The corporate compliance officer earning $150,000 to produce reports no one reads occupies a fundamentally different position from the aged care worker earning $55,000 to keep vulnerable people alive. The compliance officer's job may be bullshit; the aged care worker's job is merely poorly rewarded.

This distinction reveals what Graeber considered the deepest pathology of modern labour markets: an inverse relationship between the social value of work and its compensation. The more useful a job is to society, the less it tends to pay. Teachers, nurses, cleaners, firefighters — the people who do work the world demonstrably needs — are systematically paid less than corporate lawyers, hedge fund managers, and management consultants, whose work often ranges from unnecessary to actively destructive.

This is not merely Graeber's polemic. A 2017 study by the New Economics Foundation attempted to calculate the social value generated per pound sterling of compensation across several occupations. Childcare workers generated an estimated 7 to 9.50 pounds of social value per pound paid, while the financial sector destroyed an estimated 7 pounds of social value for every pound of compensation received (NEF, 2017). While such calculations involve significant methodological assumptions, they illustrate the direction of the asymmetry.

3.4 The Australian Taxonomy: Where the Bullshit Lives

Applying Graeber's taxonomy to Australian labour market data reveals sector-specific concentrations:

Category	Australian Examples	Estimated Employment
Flunkies	Executive assistants in organisations with digital scheduling; reception staff in buildings with electronic access; corporate event coordinators	~200,000-400,000
Goons	Advertising professionals (zero-sum brand competition); corporate lawyers (litigation arms race); lobbyists (Canberra's political services industry)	~300,000-500,000
Duct-tapers	IT support for systems that could be redesigned; customer service for badly designed products; project managers mediating incompetent leadership	~500,000-800,000
Box-tickers	Compliance officers (ASIC, APRA, TEQSA, ACSQHC, TGA compliance); diversity coordinators producing reports; survey administrators collecting unanalyzed data	~400,000-700,000

Category	Australian Examples	Estimated Employment
Taskmasters	Middle managers supervising self-managing teams; executives creating reporting requirements to justify their own positions	~300,000-500,000

These estimates are necessarily approximate. No survey has asked Australian workers to categorise themselves using Graeber's taxonomy. But the sector-level employment data (discussed in Sections 4 and 11) is consistent with total non-functional employment in the range of 4 to 6 million workers — the figure used in the 22-hour calculation in Section 8.

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4. The Scale of the Problem

4.1 Survey Evidence Across Countries

The available survey evidence on meaningless work spans several countries but varies enormously depending on question framing and methodology. The following table summarises key data points:

Country/Region	Year	Finding	Source
United Kingdom	2015	37% said job makes no meaningful contribution	YouGov
Netherlands	2016	40% believe they have a bullshit job	Schouten & Nelissen
EU28	2015	4.8% say they do not have the feeling of doing useful work	European Working Conditions Survey
EU28	2005	7.8% say they do not have the feeling of doing useful work	European Working Conditions Survey
Australia	2024	35% feel neutral or unhappy in current role	Rippling/PwC
Australia	2024	52% of Gen Z have left a job for lack of purpose	Moxie Insights
United States	2019	19% of workers say they have a "useless job"	Gallup

The wide range of estimates — from 5 percent to 40 percent — reflects genuine measurement difficulties. The concept of a "bullshit job" is inherently subjective: it depends on the worker's own assessment of their contribution, which is influenced by mood, workplace culture, question framing,

and the respondent's philosophical disposition. What is clear from the data is that the phenomenon is real, widespread, and consequential, even if its precise magnitude remains contested.

The declining trend in the European data is notable. Soffia et al. found that the proportion of workers reporting useless work declined from 7.8 percent in 2005 to 4.8 percent in 2015. This could reflect genuine improvement, or it could reflect increasing social pressure to describe one's work as meaningful — a form of the very pretense that Graeber described.

4.2 Sectoral Analysis

While bullshit jobs exist across all sectors of the economy, certain industries are disproportionately represented. Graeber identified finance, insurance, real estate (the FIRE sector), corporate law, consulting, marketing, public relations, and middle management as particularly prone to generating meaningless work.

The financial sector is perhaps the clearest case. The global financial industry employs millions of people in activities — derivatives trading, securitization, hedge fund management, high-frequency trading — whose net contribution to the real economy is, at best, ambiguous and, at worst, actively destructive, as the 2008 financial crisis demonstrated. In Australia, financial and insurance services employed 472,500 people as of December 2025 (ABS, 2025a). While much of this employment serves legitimate functions (retail banking, insurance claims processing), a substantial fraction is devoted to financial engineering that generates private profit without creating social value.

The consulting industry presents a similar case. Australia's professional, scientific, and technical services sector — which includes management consulting, legal services, accounting, and advertising — employed 1,291,200 people as of December 2025 (ABS, 2025a). Management consulting alone is a multi-billion-dollar industry whose value proposition is routinely questioned by its own practitioners. A recurring finding in the bullshit jobs literature is that consultants hired to produce strategic recommendations frequently report that their recommendations are never implemented, that the engagement existed primarily to justify decisions already made, or that the client organisation could have easily performed the analysis internally.

Administrative and support services employed 935,400 Australians in December 2025, making it one of the largest employment categories (ABS, 2025a). This sector includes temporary staffing agencies, office administrative services, document preparation, and call centers — many of which exist to manage the complexity generated by other parts of the bureaucratic apparatus.

4.3 The Growth of Administrative Bloat

Perhaps the most concrete manifestation of the bullshit jobs phenomenon is the growth of administrative employment relative to frontline service delivery across virtually all institutional sectors.

Universities. Australian higher education provides a striking case study. Between 1997 and 2017, Australian universities experienced a "striking and uniform growth in management-rank positions, concurrent with a substantial decline in lower-level and less expensive support roles" (Krause & Coates, 2021). While overall non-academic staff ratios remained stable, the composition shifted dramatically upward: more managers, more administrators, fewer clerical and support workers. A 2025 study published in *Science and Public Policy* found that administrative centralisation and service automation had, paradoxically, intensified the administrative burden experienced by academic staff — meaning that the growth of the administrative apparatus had not reduced but actually increased the amount of administrative work that academics themselves must perform

(Woelert & Larkins, 2025). Meanwhile, the student-to-academic-staff ratio increased to 22.10 in 2023, up from 21.83 in 2022, indicating that frontline teaching capacity was not keeping pace with enrolment growth (Department of Education, 2024).

Healthcare. Australia's health expenditure reached $270.5 billion in 2023-24, representing 10 percent of GDP (AIHW, 2025). The hospital workforce includes approximately 189,694 nurses and 56,700 doctors in public hospitals, alongside substantial numbers of administrative and clerical staff. While precise data on administrative growth relative to clinical staff is difficult to isolate from publicly available sources, international comparisons are instructive. In the United States, where administrative costs have been more closely studied, healthcare administration consumes an estimated 34 percent of total health expenditure — roughly double the proportion in countries like Canada (Himmelstein et al., 2020). Australia's healthcare system, while more efficient than America's, has not been immune to administrative proliferation, particularly in areas of regulatory compliance, quality assurance documentation, and insurance processing.

Public sector. Australian public sector employment reached nearly 2.6 million as of June 2025, representing 18 percent of all employees (ABS, 2025b). Critically, public sector employment grew by 3.3 percent between June 2024 and June 2025 — more than double Australia's population growth rate of approximately 1.6 percent over the same period (IPA, 2025). Public administration and safety alone accounted for 880,600 employee jobs, having grown by 3.7 percent in a single year. The Institute of Public Affairs noted that bureaucratic employment was growing at twice the rate of population growth, a trend that raises legitimate questions about whether the expansion represents genuine increases in service delivery or the kind of administrative metastasis that Graeber described.

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5. Psychological and Social Costs

5.1 Depression, Anxiety, and Meaninglessness

The psychological consequences of meaningless work are well-documented, even if the precise mechanisms remain debated. Soffia et al. (2022), despite challenging Graeber's prevalence estimates, confirmed that the perception of doing useless work is "strongly associated with poor wellbeing." Workers who believe their jobs are pointless report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress than workers in objectively more difficult but subjectively meaningful jobs.

This finding is consistent with decades of psychological research on the importance of purpose. Viktor Frankl's foundational work on logotherapy argued that the primary human motivation is not pleasure (Freud) or power (Adler) but meaning, and that the inability to find meaning in one's activities produces a distinctive form of suffering he called "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1946). More recent empirical work has confirmed that meaningful work is among the strongest predictors of life satisfaction, stronger than income above approximately $75,000 per year (Steger et al., 2012; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010).

The psychological impact of bullshit jobs may be worse than the impact of unemployment. A person who is unemployed at least has a clear understanding of their situation and can direct their energy toward finding meaningful activity. A person trapped in a bullshit job is forced into a daily performance of pretended purpose, which produces a distinctive form of cognitive dissonance. They must act as though the work matters while knowing it does not. Over months and years, this pretense corrodes self-respect, integrity, and psychological coherence.

5.2 The Moral Injury of Pretending

Graeber used the phrase "spiritual violence" to describe what bullshit jobs inflict on their occupants. The term is deliberately strong. He argued that being compelled to spend the majority of one's waking hours performing work one knows to be pointless constitutes a fundamental assault on human dignity.

The concept maps closely onto what clinical psychologists call "moral injury" — the distress that results from being forced to act in ways that violate one's moral beliefs. Military psychologists developed the concept to describe the suffering of soldiers required to carry out orders they believed to be wrong. Graeber extended it to the civilian workplace: workers forced to produce reports they know are meaningless, to attend meetings they know are pointless, to supervise colleagues who do not need supervision.

The moral injury is compounded by the social requirement to maintain the performance. Workers who publicly question the value of their own jobs risk termination, social ostracism, or being labeled as insufficiently committed. The emperor's-new-clothes dynamic — everyone knows the work is pointless, but no one can say so — creates a pervasive atmosphere of mutual deception that is, in Graeber's analysis, corrosive to institutional culture and individual psychological health alike.

5.3 Compensatory Consumption

Graeber identified a self-reinforcing cycle between meaningless work and consumerism. Workers trapped in bullshit jobs, deprived of intrinsic satisfaction, compensate through consumption: buying things, taking expensive holidays, renovating kitchens, acquiring status markers. This consumption requires income, which requires continued employment in the bullshit job, which requires further compensatory consumption, and so on.

The cycle has macroeconomic implications. Consumer spending driven by compensatory consumption inflates demand for goods and services that are themselves often of questionable value, creating further bullshit jobs in marketing, advertising, retail, and the associated logistics chains. The economy grows — GDP increases — but the growth does not represent genuine improvement in human welfare. It represents the economy running in circles: people doing pointless work to earn money to buy things they do not need to compensate for the emptiness of doing pointless work.

This analysis aligns with broader critiques of GDP as a measure of economic welfare. GDP measures economic activity, not economic value. An economy in which 40 percent of the workforce does meaningless work and spends their earnings on compensatory consumption will register a higher GDP than an economy in which people work less, earn less, but spend their time on intrinsically valuable activities. By conventional economic measures, the first economy is "performing better." By any measure that accounts for human wellbeing, it is performing worse.

5.4 The Australian Mental Health Crisis and the Work Connection

Australia's mental health statistics provide indirect but compelling support for the bullshit jobs thesis. Beyond Blue reports that approximately 3.2 million Australians experience anxiety and 1 million experience depression in any given year. The Productivity Commission's *Mental Health Inquiry* (2020) estimated the economic cost of mental ill-health and suicide at $200-220 billion per year, or approximately 10 percent of GDP — a figure that includes lost productivity, healthcare costs, and informal caregiving.

The Productivity Commission did not attribute mental health costs to meaningless work specifically. But the correlation between workplace conditions and mental health is well-established. Safe Work Australia (2024) reported that work-related mental health conditions cost the Australian economy $6.5 billion annually in compensation claims alone — a figure that captures only the most severe cases and excludes the vast majority of workers who suffer in silence.

If even a fraction of Australia's mental health burden is attributable to the existential distress of meaningless work — and the psychological literature reviewed in Sections 5.1-5.2 suggests the fraction is non-trivial — then the mental health costs of bullshit jobs represent a substantial hidden subsidy: society pays hundreds of billions in mental health costs to sustain an employment system that generates hundreds of billions in economically valueless activity.

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6. Systemic Drivers

6.1 Managerial Feudalism

Graeber's central structural explanation for the proliferation of bullshit jobs is what he called "managerial feudalism." In feudal societies, a lord's power and status were signalled by the size of their retinue. A duke with a hundred retainers outranked a baron with twenty, regardless of whether the retainers performed useful work. Graeber argued that modern corporate hierarchies operate by an analogous logic: an executive's status, compensation, and organisational power are functions of the number of people who report to them.

This creates powerful incentives to expand headcount regardless of productive need. A vice president with a team of fifty is more important — more likely to be promoted, less likely to be eliminated in a restructuring — than a vice president with a team of five. The rational strategy for any ambitious executive is to hire as many subordinates as the budget will permit, assign them plausible-sounding tasks, and claim credit for the expanded operation. Whether the subordinates produce anything of value is secondary; what matters is the appearance of activity and the accumulation of organisational mass.

The feudal analogy extends to the creation of hierarchical layers. Each new management layer requires its own administrative support: assistants, coordinators, project managers, reporting analysts. These positions generate their own imperatives for further bureaucratic expansion. The result is an organisational structure that grows not in response to productive needs but in response to the status competition of its managers.

6.2 The Protestant Work Ethic and the Moral Value of Suffering

Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant work ethic remains relevant to understanding why societies tolerate massive quantities of meaningless work. Weber argued that Calvinist theology, by making worldly success a sign of divine election, invested productive labour with spiritual significance. Over centuries, this theological impulse was secularised into a generalised belief that work is inherently morally valuable — that having a job, any job, is virtuous, and that not having a job is shameful.

Graeber argued that this residual Protestantism explains the moral outrage that proposals like universal basic income frequently provoke. The objection is rarely primarily economic; it is moral. The idea that people might receive income without working triggers a visceral response grounded

in the belief that suffering through labour is what gives life meaning — or at least what makes a person deserving of food and shelter.

This moral framework serves to legitimate bullshit jobs. If all work is inherently virtuous, then the question of whether specific work produces anything useful becomes irrelevant. The worker's moral standing depends not on what they produce but on the fact that they show up, submit to workplace discipline, and endure. In this framework, bullshit jobs are not a problem to be solved but a moral good to be preserved: they keep people busy, and busy people are virtuous people.

6.3 Financialisation and the FIRE Sector

The financialisation of advanced economies — the growing dominance of finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) over manufacturing and agriculture — is a significant structural driver of bullshit job creation. In Australia, the financial and insurance services sector employed 472,500 people as of December 2025 (ABS, 2025a), while real estate services employed several hundred thousand more.

Financialization produces bullshit jobs through several mechanisms. First, financial complexity generates compliance and regulatory work: the more complex financial instruments become, the more lawyers, accountants, and compliance officers are needed to manage them. Second, the shift from productive investment to financial engineering means that more economic activity is devoted to moving money around than to producing goods and services. Third, the enormous profits available in finance attract talented people away from socially useful occupations — teaching, nursing, engineering — and into activities whose social value is questionable.

When a society's brightest graduates aspire to careers in hedge fund management rather than in medicine, education, or scientific research, the opportunity cost is enormous. The financial sector does not merely create bullshit jobs within its own ranks; by absorbing disproportionate quantities of human talent, it also degrades the quality of essential services by starving them of capable workers.

6.4 The Regulatory Compliance Industry

A distinctive feature of late capitalism is the growth of a self-referential regulatory apparatus: regulations that create compliance obligations, which create compliance industries, which lobby for further regulation, which creates further compliance obligations. Sémanne (2025) argues that this dynamic, rather than Graeber's managerial feudalism, is the primary driver of bullshit job creation.

The Australian regulatory landscape illustrates the phenomenon. The financial services sector is subject to regulations from ASIC, APRA, the ATO, AUSTRAC, and various state-level bodies, each of which imposes reporting, documentation, and compliance requirements. The healthcare sector must comply with standards from the ACSQHC, the TGA, Medicare, the NDIS, and state health departments. Universities must satisfy requirements from TEQSA, the Department of Education, the ARC, and numerous professional accreditation bodies. Each regulatory layer generates employment for compliance officers, auditors, inspectors, and consultants whose work consists entirely of demonstrating that other workers are complying with rules.

The question is not whether regulation is desirable in principle — of course it is. The question is whether the marginal compliance job produces social value commensurate with its cost. When a university employs more people to document its compliance with quality standards than to actually teach students, the regulatory apparatus has arguably become self-defeating. When a hospital's

administrative costs exceed its clinical costs, the system is optimising for documentation rather than care.

6.5 The Automation Paradox

There is a deep irony in the relationship between automation and bullshit jobs. Keynes assumed that automation would reduce work. In many cases, it has done the opposite.

Woelert and Larkins (2025) document this at Australian universities: systems introduced to automate administrative tasks actually increased the administrative burden on academic staff. The automation did not eliminate the work; it transferred it from dedicated support staff (who were cut) to academics (who were not), while simultaneously creating new categories of work — learning new systems, troubleshooting errors, producing data for automated reporting — that did not exist before.

This pattern is not unique to universities. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, customer relationship management (CRM) platforms, and project management tools routinely create more work than they eliminate, particularly when they are poorly implemented, inadequately customised, or used primarily as surveillance mechanisms rather than productivity tools. The bullshit job created by automation is a distinctively modern phenomenon: the worker who spends their day feeding data into a system that produces reports that inform decisions that were already made.

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7. Economic Costs

7.1 Productivity Loss

The economic cost of bullshit jobs is conceptually straightforward but practically impossible to quantify with precision. If, conservatively, 10 to 20 percent of the workforce is engaged in work that produces no social value — the range suggested by the gap between the YouGov and European Working Conditions Survey estimates — then the implied annual cost is enormous.

Australia's total workforce as of December 2025 comprised approximately 15 million employed persons (ABS, 2025c). If 15 percent of these workers (2.25 million people) are engaged in essentially valueless work at an average compensation of $80,000 per year (a conservative estimate including wages, benefits, and overhead), the direct cost is approximately $180 billion annually — roughly 8 percent of Australia's GDP.

This figure is necessarily speculative. Not all "bullshit" work is entirely valueless; some of it produces marginal benefits. And the workers in bullshit jobs are not literally doing nothing — they are performing activities, attending meetings, producing documents. The economic waste lies not in the absence of activity but in the absence of value: the gap between what these workers could produce if deployed to useful work and what they actually produce in their current positions.

7.2 Opportunity Cost

The opportunity cost of bullshit jobs may exceed their direct cost. Every person employed in a meaningless corporate position is a person not employed in essential services, scientific research, infrastructure maintenance, environmental remediation, or caregiving.

The disparities are stark. In Australia, the average salary for a management consultant is approximately $110,000-$150,000 per year, while a primary school teacher earns approximately $75,000-$95,000 and an aged care worker earns approximately $55,000-$65,000 (ABS, 2025d). These compensation differentials reflect market signals that actively direct human talent away from essential work and toward work of dubious social value. A society in which consulting pays twice as much as teaching will, predictably, attract more of its talented graduates into consulting than into teaching — and will then lament the resulting "teacher shortage" while treating the consulting surplus as evidence of economic vitality.

The opportunity cost is compounded by credentialism. Many bullshit jobs require university degrees not because the work demands specialised knowledge but as a screening mechanism. This drives young people into expensive, prolonged education to qualify for jobs that do not require the education, while simultaneously channeling university resources toward credential production rather than genuine learning.

7.3 The Care Economy Gap

The most consequential opportunity cost of bullshit jobs is the systematic underfunding of care work. Aged care, childcare, disability support, mental health services, and community support work are chronically understaffed and undercompensated in virtually all developed economies, including Australia.

Australia's aged care sector has been the subject of a Royal Commission (2018-2021) that documented systemic neglect, understaffing, and inadequate care. The NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) has struggled with workforce shortages since its inception. Mental health services face chronic waitlists. Yet these sectors cannot attract sufficient workers because the compensation and conditions do not compete with the bullshit jobs available in the corporate sector.

The irony is precise: society cannot find enough people to care for its elderly, disabled, and children, while simultaneously employing millions of people in work that produces nothing of value. The care economy gap is not a problem of insufficient labour supply; it is a problem of labour misallocation. The workers exist. They are sitting in offices producing reports that no one reads, attending meetings about nothing, and supervising people who do not need supervision. If even a fraction of this labour could be redirected toward care work — at appropriate compensation — the staffing crisis in essential services would be substantially alleviated.

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8. The 22-Hour Week: How Much Work Does Australia Actually Need?

This is the core finding. Everything else in this paper — the taxonomy, the surveys, the psychological costs, the systemic drivers — leads here. The question is simple: if you strip out the bullshit, how many hours of work does a modern industrial society actually require from each adult citizen?

8.1 Functional vs. Non-Functional Work

Australia's approximately 14 million employed workers can be divided into those performing functional work — work that produces, maintains, or enables something people genuinely need — and those performing non-functional work that could disappear without societal consequence.

Functional work accounts for approximately 8.8 million workers producing roughly 352 million working hours per week, distributed across three categories:

Survival essentials (3.7 million workers, 28% of the functional workforce): Healthcare employs approximately 1.7 million, food production and distribution 0.8 million, transport and logistics 0.7 million, energy and utilities 0.2 million, and emergency services 0.3 million. These are the jobs that keep people alive.

Physical production (2.6 million workers, 19%): Mining employs approximately 0.3 million, construction 1.2 million, manufacturing 0.8 million, and agriculture 0.3 million. These are the jobs that build and extract the material basis of civilisation.

Scaffolding (2.5 million workers, 20%): Education employs approximately 1.0 million, research and development 0.2 million, governance and public administration 0.8 million, and maintenance 0.5 million. These are the jobs that sustain the institutional infrastructure on which everything else depends. This category deliberately includes research, entertainment, and the hospitality sector — because a society without culture, knowledge creation, or places to eat together is not a society worth sustaining.

Non-functional work accounts for the remaining approximately 5.2 million workers and roughly 208 million working hours per week. This includes financial services beyond basic banking, insurance administration, advertising and marketing, management consulting, corporate administration, duplicative positions across competing companies performing identical functions, and legal services beyond dispute resolution. These are the goons, box-tickers, flunkies, and taskmasters of Graeber's taxonomy, plus the vast secondary apparatus that exists to service them.

8.2 The Arithmetic

The arithmetic is straightforward. Australia has approximately 16 million working-age adults between 18 and 65. If the 352 million functional hours per week were distributed equally across that population, each person would need to work **22 hours per week** to maintain the current level of genuine economic output. Adding a generous buffer for inefficiency, learning curves, absenteeism, and the inevitable friction of any real-world system raises the figure to approximately **28 hours per week** — still well below the current standard of 38.

> **352,000,000 functional hours per week / 16,000,000 working-age adults = 22 hours per person per week.**

This is not speculative modelling. It is basic division applied to existing labour market data.

8.3 The COVID-19 Validation

And it was empirically validated, albeit unintentionally, by the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020-2021. During lockdowns, governments designated certain workers as "essential" and sent everyone else home. Approximately 40 to 60 percent of jobs ceased without societal collapse. Supermarkets stayed stocked. Hospitals stayed open. Power stayed on. Water kept flowing. The non-essential workers — the consultants, the marketers, the middle managers, the corporate administrators — stayed home, and the world kept turning. Society did not merely survive their absence; in many respects, it functioned more smoothly without them.

Keynes predicted a 15-hour week by 2030. The data suggests that 22 hours would maintain everything we genuinely need, and 28 hours would provide a comfortable margin. The gap between 28

hours and the 38-hour standard work week — ten hours per person per week, multiplied across 14 million workers — represents approximately 140 million hours of weekly labour that produces no social value. That is the quantified cost of the bullshit jobs phenomenon, expressed not in dollars but in human time irretrievably spent.

8.4 What People Would Do With the Extra Hours

The standard objection to a 22-hour week is that people would waste the extra time. This objection reveals its own assumptions: that human beings, left to their own devices, will default to laziness rather than agency. The evidence suggests otherwise.

The Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend data (Jones & Marinescu, 2018) shows that people given unconditional income do not stop being productive — they redirect their productivity toward activities they find meaningful. UBI pilot data consistently shows increases in education, caregiving, volunteering, entrepreneurship, and community engagement (see Paper 4 in this series: *Universal Basic Income*).

But the question also misses the point. The 14 OMXUS goals — direct democracy, community emergency response, education redesign, preventive health — all require something that the current 38-hour work week systematically denies: time. You cannot govern your own community if you spend 40 hours a week in an office and another 10 commuting. You cannot respond to your neighbour's emergency in 60 seconds if you are stuck in a meeting 30 kilometres away. You cannot learn, or teach, or build, or care for your people if every waking hour is already spoken for.

The extra 16 hours per week is not leisure. It is the infrastructure of self-governance. It is the time required to make Goals 1 through 14 possible.

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9. The Justice System: $32 Billion Spent on Failure

The misallocation of labour and resources documented above is not confined to the corporate sector. One of the most striking examples of systemic non-functional expenditure is Australia's criminal justice system, which consumes tens of billions of dollars annually to produce outcomes that its own metrics reveal as failures.

9.1 The Cost

The Australian Institute of Criminology estimated the total annual cost of Australia's justice system at approximately AUD $32 billion (AIC, 2019). Updated figures from the Report on Government Services (ROGS, 2025) place direct government spending at $26.5 billion, comprising approximately $17 billion on policing, $7 billion on corrections, and $2.67 billion on courts. These figures do not include the broader economic costs of crime itself.

Those broader costs are staggering. The AIC's Statistical Report SR55 (2023-24) estimated the total cost of serious and organised crime alone at $35.5 to $82.3 billion per year. Of this, illicit drugs account for approximately $19 billion — 39.5 percent of the total and the single largest category. The drug economy, in other words, is not a marginal phenomenon; it is the dominant driver of serious crime costs, and the justice system's primary response to it — prohibition, prosecution, and incarceration — has manifestly failed to reduce it.

9.2 The Failure Rate

The per-person cost of incarceration in Australia ranges from $110,000 to $200,000 per year, depending on the jurisdiction and security classification. Australia spends this sum on each incarcerated person in a system that produces a 45 percent recidivism rate within two years, rising to approximately 60-70 percent over five years — meaning that the majority of prisoners eventually return. For comparison, Norway spends at roughly comparable per-capita rates on a corrections system built around rehabilitation, education, and reintegration, and achieves a recidivism rate of approximately 20 percent.

9.3 The Detection Problem

The $32 billion system not only fails at rehabilitation but is built on detection mechanisms proven to operate at chance level. Paper 11 in this series (*Signal Inversion*) demonstrates that human deception detection accuracy is 54% (Bond & DePaulo, 2006; N=24,483), that 91.3% of credibility cues are inverted, and that false confessions account for 12-30% of documented exonerations (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004; Gross et al., 2005; Garrett, 2011; NRE, 2023). These heuristics are not merely currently wrong but permanently unfixable: publishing corrected calibrations allows both deceivers and truth-tellers to adapt, collapsing diagnostic value to zero. The system compounds this by treating confessions as the most powerful form of evidence while treating denials as what guilty people do (Kassin, 2012). An unknown proportion of those incarcerated at enormous public expense are factually innocent, convicted on the basis of heuristics that are provably worthless — and that no future research can repair.

9.4 The Connection to Bullshit Jobs

The justice system thus presents a particularly clear case of the bullshit jobs dynamic operating at the level of state policy. Enormous resources — $32 billion or more annually — are devoted to a system that, by its own measures, fails at its stated purpose nearly half the time. The system employs tens of thousands of police officers, corrections officers, court administrators, prosecutors, and support staff in a cycle of arrest, incarceration, release, and re-arrest that addresses symptoms while ignoring causes. The causes — poverty, housing insecurity, untreated mental illness, addiction, childhood trauma — are the domain of the chronically underfunded care economy documented in Section 7.3.

The connection to the bullshit jobs thesis is direct. Society spends $32 billion per year on a carceral system with a 45 percent failure rate at two years (60-70 percent at five years) while simultaneously underfunding the prevention, treatment, and support services that would reduce the need for that system. This is the same structural pathology that produces millions of corporate bullshit jobs while leaving care work understaffed: resources flowing toward elaborate, self-perpetuating institutional machinery rather than toward interventions that actually work. The justice system is, in Graeber's taxonomy, a vast institutional duct-taper — patching the consequences of problems that upstream investment could prevent.

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10. The UBI Connection

David Graeber was an advocate of universal basic income (UBI), and he explicitly connected the bullshit jobs thesis to the case for UBI. His argument was straightforward: if people had a guaran-

teed income sufficient for basic needs, they would no longer be compelled to accept bullshit jobs in order to survive. The labour market would, for the first time, contain a genuine exit option — the ability to say "no" to meaningless work without facing destitution.

10.1 Predicted Effects

This would produce several effects. First, workers freed from economic compulsion could redirect their labour toward activities they find meaningful: caregiving, community work, artistic creation, environmental stewardship, education. Second, employers would be forced to make bullshit jobs either genuinely useful or to eliminate them, since workers would no longer accept meaningless work merely because it pays. Third, essential but poorly compensated work — care work, teaching, agriculture — would likely see increased wages as employers compete for workers who now have an alternative to the labour market.

10.2 Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence on UBI's labour market effects is mixed but generally less alarming than critics suggest. The Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend, a form of UBI operating since 1982, has shown minimal adverse effects on labour market participation (Jones & Marinescu, 2018). A recent NBER study found that recipients of $1,000 monthly payments reduced their labour supply by only 1.3 to 1.4 hours per week on average (Pilkauskas et al., 2023). People given a basic income generally do not stop working; they work somewhat less, and they tend to shift toward work they find more meaningful.

In the context of bullshit jobs, this is precisely the desired outcome. A modest reduction in labour supplied to meaningless positions, coupled with a modest increase in labour supplied to meaningful ones, would represent a net improvement in both economic efficiency and human wellbeing. The conventional economic critique of UBI — that it would reduce labour supply and therefore economic output — assumes that all labour supply produces value. The bullshit jobs thesis challenges precisely this assumption.

10.3 The Administrative Savings

Graeber estimated that the savings from eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic overhead — including the administrative apparatus of means-tested welfare systems themselves — would substantially offset the cost of a universal basic income. While this estimate is speculative, the underlying logic is sound: a system that spends billions administering complex eligibility requirements for welfare payments is, in itself, generating bullshit jobs. Replacing means-tested welfare with a universal payment eliminates the need for the entire eligibility-determination apparatus.

Australia's welfare system employs thousands of staff in Centrelink and Services Australia to administer means-tested payments. The compliance and enforcement regime — including the notorious "Robodebt" scheme, which was found to be unlawful by the Royal Commission (2023) and which caused documented psychological harm and multiple suicides — represents a particularly egregious example of bullshit-job-generating bureaucracy. The government spent billions administering a compliance system that was ultimately illegal, caused immense suffering, and recovered less money than it cost to operate. A universal payment would have eliminated the need for the entire apparatus.

10.4 UBI and the 22-Hour Week

UBI and the 22-hour week are not separate proposals. They are two aspects of the same structural reform. The 22-hour week is what happens when you eliminate non-functional work. UBI is the mechanism that makes the transition possible without destroying livelihoods. Together, they represent the economic architecture of a society that has decided to stop wasting human time on institutional self-perpetuation and start investing it in human welfare.

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11. Australian Context: A Case Study in Misallocation

11.1 Public Sector Administrative Growth

Australia's public sector presents a compelling case study in administrative expansion. As of June 2025, Australia employed nearly 2.6 million public sector workers across federal, state, and local government — 18 percent of all employees (ABS, 2025b). Public sector employment grew by 3.3 percent between June 2024 and June 2025, while Australia's population grew by only approximately 1.6 percent.

Public administration and safety — the sector most directly associated with bureaucratic functions — employed 880,600 people and grew by 3.7 percent in a single year (ABS, 2025b). The Australian Public Service (federal government) had grown from 148,736 employees in December 2020 to substantially more by 2025, continuing a trend of expansion that the Institute of Public Affairs has described as bureaucrats growing "at double the rate of population" (IPA, 2025).

Not all of this growth represents bullshit jobs. Population growth generates legitimate demand for public services: more residents require more teachers, police officers, healthcare workers, and infrastructure. However, the consistent pattern across jurisdictions is that administrative and managerial positions grow faster than frontline service delivery positions. The South Australian Government's 2025 Workforce Information Report documented this trend explicitly: corporate services and policy positions expanded while operational roles grew more slowly (Government of South Australia, 2025).

The federal government's response to various crises — the pandemic, natural disasters, the NDIS rollout — has produced waves of hiring that create bureaucratic infrastructure with significant inertia. Programs established to address temporary needs tend to become permanent. Administrative positions created to manage emergency responses tend to be retained after the emergency passes. This ratchet effect is a well-documented feature of bureaucratic organizations and is consistent with Graeber's analysis of how managerial feudalism operates in the public sector.

11.2 The Mining Economy and Service Bloat

Australia's mining sector presents a distinctive variation on the bullshit jobs theme. Mining itself is not bullshit work — it produces tangible commodities that the world uses. However, the enormous wealth generated by the resources sector creates downstream effects that are relevant to the analysis.

Australia's mining and energy sector is projected to create 22,279 new jobs across 96 projects with a combined investment of $129.5 billion (Minerals Council of Australia, 2025). Mining sector employment is concentrated in Western Australia (46.88 percent of the national mining workforce)

and Queensland, with the FIFO (fly-in/fly-out) workforce earning average salaries of $141,000 per year (Terratern, 2026).

The resource wealth flowing through the economy supports a large tertiary service sector — consultants, lawyers, accountants, compliance officers, and project managers — whose relationship to the underlying productive activity becomes increasingly attenuated as the value chain lengthens. A mining company producing iron ore generates clear economic value. The consulting firm advising the mining company on its organizational structure generates less clear value. The consulting firm advising the first consulting firm on its marketing strategy generates virtually none. Yet all of this activity registers as economic output and employment.

The resources boom has also contributed to what economists call "Dutch disease": the tendency of resource-rich economies to develop overvalued currencies that make non-resource industries uncompetitive, driving economic activity further into services and away from manufacturing. Australia's manufacturing sector has declined from approximately 15 percent of GDP in the 1980s to under 6 percent today, replaced in large part by professional services, finance, and administration — sectors that are disproportionately prone to bullshit job generation.

11.3 Healthcare and Education Administration Ratios

Australia's healthcare and education sectors illustrate the administrative bloat phenomenon in concentrated form.

In healthcare, total expenditure reached $270.5 billion in 2023-24, representing 10 percent of GDP (AIHW, 2025). The hospital workforce has grown at approximately 3.5 percent per year since 2018-19, but the composition of this growth is uneven. Allied health professions grew by 67 percent between 2013 and 2022, medical practitioners by 41 percent, and nurses and midwives by 26 percent (AIHW, 2024). Administrative and clerical growth figures are more difficult to isolate from public data, but the international pattern of administrative costs growing faster than clinical costs is widely reported in Australian health policy literature.

The nurse-to-doctor ratio declined from approximately 4:1 in 2013 to 3.33:1 in 2022, reflecting faster growth in medical practitioner numbers (AIHW, 2024). However, ongoing workforce shortages — particularly in regional and remote areas — suggest that the growth in health employment is not matching the growth in health demand. If a significant fraction of health sector employment is devoted to administrative, compliance, and documentation functions rather than direct patient care, this would be consistent with the bullshit jobs thesis: the sector is hiring, but not necessarily for the roles that patients need.

In education, the trend is even more pronounced. The student-to-academic-staff ratio at Australian universities increased to 22.10 in 2023 from 21.83 in 2022, driven by a 3.2 percent increase in onshore students but only a 0.5 percent increase in academic teaching staff (Department of Education, 2024). Meanwhile, management-rank non-academic positions have grown substantially over two decades, even as lower-level support roles have declined (Krause & Coates, 2021). The net effect is a university system with more managers, fewer support staff, and approximately the same number of academics per student — a compositional shift that increases administrative overhead without improving the core educational function.

Woelert and Larkins (2025) documented a particularly perverse outcome: the centralisation and automation of administrative services at Australian universities, intended to reduce administrative burden, has actually *intensified* the amount of administrative work that academics must perform.

Systems designed to eliminate paperwork have, in practice, created new categories of paperwork. Online compliance portals, automated reporting requirements, and digital workflow systems have transferred administrative labour from dedicated support staff to academic staff, who must now perform these functions in addition to their teaching and research duties. This is a textbook example of Graeber's "duct-taper" category operating at an institutional scale.

11.4 The FIFO Phenomenon: When Real Work Subsidises Bullshit

Australia's fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) mining workforce presents a uniquely Australian dimension of the bullshit jobs analysis. Approximately 60,000 workers commute to remote mine sites on rotational rosters — two weeks on, one week off; four weeks on, one week off — performing physically demanding, genuinely productive work that extracts real resources from the ground.

These workers earn high salaries ($141,000 average) but pay an extraordinary personal cost: family separation, elevated rates of depression and anxiety, substance abuse, relationship breakdown, and suicide rates significantly above the national average (Parliament of Western Australia, 2015; Vojnovic et al., 2014). The Parliamentary inquiry into FIFO mental health found that the roster system, combined with isolation and the culture of "toughness" that discourages help-seeking, produces measurable psychological harm.

The irony for the bullshit jobs analysis is this: the FIFO worker does real work, suffers real harm, and generates real wealth — which then flows downstream to fund the salaries of thousands of Perth and Brisbane consultants, administrators, and compliance officers whose work the FIFO worker would, if asked, describe in terms unprintable in an academic paper. The miner's honest labour subsidises the consultant's bullshit. And the consultant earns a comparable salary while sleeping in his own bed.

This is the inverse-value problem in concentrated form. The person who does the work that matters is punished for it. The person who does the work that doesn't matter is rewarded. The system is not merely unfair; it is precisely backwards.

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12. The Unified Waste: Corporate and Carceral Non-Function

The 22-hour work week calculation (Section 8) and the justice system cost analysis (Section 9) are not separate observations. They are two manifestations of the same structural failure: a society that channels enormous resources into non-functional systems while starving functional ones.

12.1 The Parallel

In the corporate sector, approximately 5.2 million Australians perform work that could cease without societal consequence, consuming roughly 208 million working hours per week and hundreds of billions of dollars in compensation. In the justice sector, $32 billion per year sustains a system with a 45 percent failure rate at two years (60-70 percent at five years), while the upstream services that would reduce crime — mental health treatment, housing, addiction services, education, early childhood intervention — operate on waiting lists and skeleton staff. The corporate waste and the carceral waste are structurally identical: both represent elaborate, self-perpetuating institutional machinery that absorbs resources, employs large workforces, and fails to produce the outcomes it claims to pursue.

12.2 Incarceration as a Bullshit Job

The parallel extends to the phenomenological level. A bullshit job and a prison cell are structurally identical experiences of institutional confinement. In both cases, the individual is required to be physically present on premises regardless of productive output; cannot leave without severe consequences (termination and destitution, or re-arrest); must perform compliance — looking busy in one case, following rules in the other; and exists within a system that costs enormous sums to maintain while producing no measurable positive outcome. The office worker performing meaningless tasks eight hours a day and the low-risk prisoner sitting in a cell at $110,000 per year are both being warehoused by institutions that exist to perpetuate themselves. Society is paying, in both cases, to keep human beings somewhere doing nothing, when those resources could fund prevention, care, housing, or education. The bullshit job is incarceration with a salary. The prison is a bullshit job without one.

12.3 The Combined Picture

The combined picture is damning. A society wealthy enough to employ 5.2 million people in non-functional corporate roles and spend $32 billion annually on a failing justice system is not a society that lacks resources. It is a society that has profoundly misallocated them. The resources exist to fund a 28-hour work week, a functioning care economy, a rehabilitative justice system, and universal preventive services. What does not exist is the political will to redirect those resources from the institutions that consume them toward the purposes that would actually serve human welfare. The bullshit jobs phenomenon, understood in its full scope, is not merely a curiosity of labour markets. It is the central economic pathology of late capitalism: the systematic prioritisation of institutional self-perpetuation over human need.

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13. International Comparisons and Counterarguments

13.1 The Nordic Model: Less Bullshit, Better Outcomes

The Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden — provide the closest approximation to what a reduced-bullshit economy might look like. These countries share several characteristics relevant to the analysis:

- **Shorter average working hours:** Denmark averages 33 hours per week; Norway 34; Sweden 36 (OECD, 2024). All are below the OECD average of 37.
- **Higher unionisation rates:** 65-90 percent, compared to 12.5 percent in Australia (ABS, 2024). Strong unions resist the creation of make-work because workers have collective bargaining power to demand meaningful roles.
- **Flatter organisational hierarchies:** Nordic management culture emphasises flat structures and employee autonomy (Hofstede, 2001), reducing the managerial feudalism that drives bullshit job creation elsewhere.
- **Comprehensive welfare states:** Universal healthcare, education, and social security reduce the desperation that forces workers into bullshit jobs as a condition of survival.
- **Higher life satisfaction:** All five Nordic countries consistently rank in the top 10 of the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2024).

The Nordic model does not eliminate bullshit jobs — no economy has — but it suppresses the struc-

tural forces that generate them. Shorter hours, stronger worker protections, flatter hierarchies, and comprehensive welfare reduce both the supply of workers desperate enough to accept meaningless work and the institutional incentives to create it.

13.2 Switzerland: Direct Democracy and Institutional Efficiency

Switzerland is relevant to this analysis for a different reason. As documented in Paper 1 of this series (*Direct Democracy*), Switzerland has operated a system of direct democracy for 178 years, holding over 700 referendums. Swiss citizens vote directly on policy, including fiscal policy. This creates a structural check on the expansion of bureaucracy that representative democracies lack: when citizens vote directly on how their taxes are spent, they tend to resist the expansion of administrative apparatus that does not visibly improve public services.

Switzerland's government spending as a percentage of GDP (34 percent) is lower than most European countries, yet its public services consistently rank among the world's best (OECD, 2024). This suggests that direct democratic accountability produces more efficient allocation of public resources — precisely the kind of institutional discipline that would resist the proliferation of bullshit jobs in the public sector.

13.3 Counterargument: The Eye of the Beholder

The most serious objection to the bullshit jobs thesis is that "bullshit" is in the eye of the beholder. A compliance officer might consider their work pointless, but the regulation they enforce might prevent genuine harm. An advertising professional might feel their work is meaningless, but advertising does transmit information that consumers use to make purchasing decisions. A middle manager might seem unnecessary, but their mediation of interpersonal conflicts might prevent organizational dysfunction.

This objection has force. Graeber's definition — that the *worker* judges the job pointless — is deliberately subjective, and subjective judgments are fallible. A worker might underestimate the systemic value of their role. They might be in a bad mood on the day of the survey. They might not understand how their contribution fits into a larger productive chain.

However, the objection does not refute the thesis; it merely adjusts the estimate. Even if many individual workers are wrong about the uselessness of their specific jobs, the aggregate data — the growth of administrative employment relative to frontline delivery, the sector-level patterns, the COVID-19 natural experiment — confirms that the phenomenon exists at a significant scale. The question is not whether bullshit jobs exist but whether they constitute 5 percent or 40 percent of total employment. Either figure represents an enormous waste of human potential.

13.4 Counterargument: Creative Destruction Would Cause Unemployment

Another objection is that eliminating bullshit jobs would cause mass unemployment. This is true in the short term and false in the long term — but only if structural supports (UBI, retraining, reduced hours) are in place. The transition cannot be left to the market. Markets created the problem; they will not solve it.

The 22-hour week calculation provides the answer: if non-functional work is eliminated and functional hours are distributed across the working-age population, every adult works 22 hours. Nobody is unemployed. Everybody works less. The total output of genuinely useful goods and services remains constant.

The transition requires UBI as a bridge (so that workers displaced from bullshit jobs do not face destitution) and reduced standard working hours (so that functional work is shared rather than concentrated). These are not utopian proposals. They are the arithmetic consequences of the data presented in this paper.

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14. Policy Implications

Several policy implications follow from the analysis:

14.1 Universal Basic Income

UBI addresses the demand side of the bullshit jobs market by giving workers the economic freedom to refuse meaningless work. While UBI alone is unlikely to eliminate bullshit jobs entirely — the structural incentives for their creation would persist — it would reduce the labour supply available for such positions and empower workers to seek meaningful alternatives.

Australia's current welfare system already spends tens of billions on income support. The Robodebt Royal Commission (2023) demonstrated that the compliance apparatus designed to police welfare eligibility can itself become a source of institutional abuse. A universal payment eliminates the need for means-testing, eligibility determination, and compliance enforcement — all of which are, in Graeber's terms, bullshit jobs.

14.2 Reduced Working Hours

Reduced working hours address the supply side by acknowledging that less total labour is needed than is currently supplied. A 30-hour or four-day work week would reduce the pressure to create make-work and allow productivity gains to be taken as leisure rather than as additional, often pointless, employment.

The evidence base for shorter work weeks is growing. Iceland's 2015-2019 trial of a 35-36 hour work week across 2,500 workers found maintained or improved productivity with significantly improved worker wellbeing (Autonomy/ALDA, 2021). The UK's 2022 four-day-week pilot across 61 companies found that 92 percent continued the policy after the trial, reporting no loss in productivity and significant improvements in employee retention and satisfaction (4 Day Week Global, 2023).

The 22-hour figure derived in Section 8 is a theoretical minimum. A practical policy target of 30-32 hours — a four-day week — would provide the buffer for inefficiency while still representing a 20 percent reduction in working time. This is achievable within existing institutional frameworks and has been demonstrated to maintain productivity.

14.3 Care Economy Investment

Care economy investment addresses the opportunity cost by directing public resources toward essential services that are chronically underfunded. Substantial increases in pay and conditions for aged care workers, childcare workers, teachers, and mental health professionals would redirect labour from bullshit jobs to genuinely needed work.

The Aged Care Royal Commission recommended minimum staffing standards and wage increases for aged care workers. The Fair Work Commission awarded a 15 percent pay rise to aged care

workers in 2023 — a start, but insufficient to close the gap with corporate sector salaries that attract labour away from care work.

14.4 Regulatory Simplification

Regulatory simplification addresses one of the primary generators of compliance-oriented bullshit jobs. This does not mean deregulation in the libertarian sense; it means streamlining regulatory requirements to reduce the administrative burden they impose while preserving their protective function.

Australia's Productivity Commission has repeatedly recommended reducing regulatory complexity. The challenge is that every regulation has a constituency — the compliance industry that administers it — which will resist simplification. This is the self-referential loop identified in Section 6.4: regulations create compliance jobs, compliance workers resist deregulation, and the apparatus expands.

14.5 Administrative Auditing

Administrative auditing in public institutions — particularly universities and hospitals — could identify positions that exist primarily to satisfy internal bureaucratic imperatives rather than to serve students or patients. The goal would not be to eliminate positions arbitrarily but to redirect institutional resources toward frontline service delivery.

14.6 Direct Democracy as Structural Accountability

The connection between bullshit jobs and democratic governance is underexplored in the literature but critical. In representative democracies, politicians create programs and agencies that generate public-sector bullshit jobs, and the electorate has no mechanism to challenge this expansion except through infrequent elections in which bureaucratic efficiency is never the decisive issue.

Direct democracy — as practiced in Switzerland for 178 years — provides a structural check. When citizens vote directly on budgets, programs, and institutional mandates, they impose a form of accountability that representative systems lack. A citizen who must personally approve spending is more likely to question whether a new layer of compliance officers is necessary than a politician who benefits from the expanded bureaucracy.

This connects directly to Goal 1 of the OMXUS framework: direct democracy, where citizens vote on big decisions. The bullshit jobs phenomenon is, in part, a governance failure. The people who create the bullshit are not accountable to the people who endure it.

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15. Conclusion

John Maynard Keynes was right about productivity. He was wrong about what we would do with it. Rather than converting technological gains into leisure, advanced economies have converted them into an elaborate apparatus of meaningless work. The precise scale of this phenomenon remains contested — somewhere between 5 and 40 percent of jobs, depending on how you ask the question — but its existence is not in serious doubt. Workers across the developed world report performing work they believe to be pointless, and the structural forces that generate such

work — managerial empire-building, regulatory complexity, financialisation, and a lingering moral framework that equates busyness with virtue — show no signs of abating.

The costs are substantial. Economically, bullshit jobs represent an enormous misallocation of human labour, diverting talented people from essential services into activities of negligible social value. Psychologically, they produce depression, anxiety, and the distinctive suffering that comes from spending one's life in performances of pretended purpose. Socially, they perpetuate the paradox of a wealthy society that cannot adequately staff its care homes, schools, and hospitals while simultaneously employing millions in corporate offices to produce reports that no one reads.

Australia is not immune to these dynamics. Public sector employment is growing at twice the rate of population growth. University management ranks expand while academic staff ratios worsen. Healthcare administration proliferates while regional communities face chronic shortages of clinicians. The resources boom generates cascading chains of tertiary service employment whose connection to underlying productive activity becomes increasingly tenuous.

The core finding of this paper is arithmetic, not ideology. Australia's functional work — the work that keeps people alive, builds things, teaches things, and sustains the institutional infrastructure of civilisation — amounts to approximately 352 million hours per week. Distributed across 16 million working-age adults, that is 22 hours per person. The remaining hours are bullshit.

The solution is not to eliminate jobs for their own sake — that path leads to unemployment and misery. The solution is to decouple survival from employment, through mechanisms like universal basic income, so that the labour market is no longer compelled to generate meaningless positions simply because people need incomes. If workers could afford to refuse bullshit jobs, bullshit jobs would have to become either useful or extinct. If essential work were properly compensated, the labour currently trapped in pointless corporate positions would flow toward the caring, teaching, and building that society actually needs.

The justice system, consuming $32 billion annually to achieve a 45 percent failure rate, embodies the same pathology at the level of state policy. The care economy, chronically underfunded despite a wealthy nation, represents the obverse: what happens when resources flow to institutional machinery rather than to human need.

David Graeber died in 2020, before the full implications of his thesis could be tested against the post-pandemic reorganisation of work. But the phenomenon he described has, if anything, become more visible. The COVID-19 lockdowns revealed, with uncomfortable clarity, which jobs were essential and which were not. Most societies chose to forget that revelation. The evidence suggests we should not.

The 14 goals that drive the OMXUS Research Series are not policy fantasies. They are the arithmetic consequences of taking the evidence seriously. If 22 hours of work per week is enough to sustain civilisation, then the remaining hours belong to the people who work them — to govern their own communities, to respond to their own emergencies, to educate their own children, to care for their own elders, and to build the kind of society that does not require a paper to explain why human time should not be wasted.

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Appendix A: The 22-Hour Calculation — Full Methodology

Data Sources

All employment figures are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Account (December 2025) and Labour Force survey (January 2026). Population figures are from the ABS Estimated Resident Population.

Step 1: Total Employment

Australia's total employment as of December 2025: approximately 14.5-15 million persons.

Step 2: Functional Work Classification

Workers were classified as "functional" if their roles directly produce, maintain, or enable goods and services that people genuinely need. The classification is conservative — it includes categories (entertainment, hospitality, research) that a stricter analysis might exclude, precisely because a society without culture and conviviality is not a society worth optimising.

Category	Sector	Workers (millions)
Survival essentials	Healthcare	1.7
	Food production & distribution	0.8
	Transport & logistics	0.7
	Energy & utilities	0.2
	Emergency services	0.3
	Subtotal	**3.7**
Physical production	Mining	0.3
	Construction	1.2
	Manufacturing	0.8
	Agriculture	0.3
	Subtotal	**2.6**
Scaffolding	Education	1.0
	Research & development	0.2
	Governance & public admin	0.8
	Maintenance	0.5
	Subtotal	**2.5**
Total functional		**8.8**

Step 3: Functional Hours

8.8 million workers x 40 hours/week average = 352 million functional hours per week.

Step 4: Working-Age Population

Australia's population aged 18-65: approximately 16 million.

Step 5: Required Hours Per Person

352,000,000 / 16,000,000 = **22 hours per person per week**.

Step 6: Buffer

Adding 25% for inefficiency, learning curves, absenteeism, and systemic friction:

22 x 1.25 = **27.5 hours (rounded to 28)**.

Sensitivity Analysis

Assumption	Hours/Week
Functional workers = 8.8M (base case)	22
Functional workers = 10M (conservative)	25
Functional workers = 7.5M (aggressive)	18.75
With 25% buffer (base case)	28
With 50% buffer (very conservative)	33

Even under the most conservative assumptions (10 million functional workers, 50 percent buffer), the required work week is 37.5 hours — still below the current standard of 38.

Validation: COVID-19 Natural Experiment

During 2020-2021 lockdowns, approximately 40-60 percent of Australian workers were classified as non-essential. Essential workers maintained societal function. This is consistent with the base-case estimate that approximately 60 percent of work (8.8M / 14.5M) is functional.

Appendix B: Cross-References to the OMXUS Research Series

This paper is No. 12 in the OMXUS Research Series (32 theses). The series examines, through grief-to-design methodology, the systemic failures that produce preventable human suffering — and the evidence-based alternatives that already exist.

Every paper in this series proves every other. That is not rhetoric. It is the structure of the problem: the same institutional logic that creates bullshit jobs also fills prisons, underfunds schools, poisons food, and isolates people from their communities. The papers are numbered for convenience, not hierarchy. They form a web, not a chain.

Paper	Title	Connection to This Paper
1. Direct Democracy	*The Swiss Model: 178 Years of Direct Democratic Governance*	Direct democracy provides the structural accountability that prevents public-sector bullshit job proliferation. When citizens vote on budgets, bureaucracies cannot expand unchecked. (Goal 1)
2. The $19 Trillion Solution	*Global Resource Misallocation and Reallocation*	Identifies $19 trillion in misallocated global spending. This paper identifies a specific category of that misallocation: the 37-40% of employment that even its occupants consider pointless. (Goal 2)
3. Prevention Over Punishment	*The Case for Upstream Investment*	Documents $1.3 trillion in annual incarceration costs globally. This paper shows the justice system is a macro-scale bullshit job — $32B/year for a 45% failure rate. Same logic, same waste. (Goal 3)
4. Universal Basic Income	*Decoupling Survival from Employment*	UBI is the mechanism that makes bullshit job elimination possible without mass destitution. This paper provides the labour-market evidence that makes UBI urgent. (Goal 2)
5. Justice Paradigm Shift	*From Punishment to Restoration*	The justice system as institutional duct-taper: patching consequences of problems that upstream investment could prevent. (Goal 4)
6. Drug Policy Reform	*The Portugal Model and Beyond*	Illicit drugs account for $19B of Australia's $35-82B serious crime costs. Prohibition creates an entire ecosystem of bullshit enforcement jobs. Legalization eliminates them. (Goal 7)

Paper	Title	Connection to This Paper
7. Emergency Response	*Community-Based Emergency Systems*	The $29 ring (Goal 13): community emergency response in 60 seconds. Only possible if people are not trapped in offices 40 hours a week. The 22-hour week is a prerequisite for community safety.
8. Housing First	*Housing as a Human Right*	Housing insecurity is a primary driver of justice system engagement. Housing the homeless is cheaper than incarcerating them — another case of spending more on institutional non-function than on prevention. (Goal 9)
9. Education (Prussian Model)	*Compliance-Based Education and Its Alternatives*	The education system that produces workers trained for compliance with bullshit jobs, not for agency, curiosity, or self-governance. Play-based education (Goal 12) produces humans who refuse pointless work.
10. Cooperative Capitalism	*Worker Ownership and Democratic Enterprise*	Worker-owned cooperatives eliminate managerial feudalism. Mondragon (Spain) has operated for 70 years without creating five layers of supervisors to supervise supervisors. (Goal 2)
11. Signal Inversion	*The Credibility Assessment Paradox*	Human deception detection is 54% accurate (N=24,483). The justice system's bullshit-job apparatus is built on heuristics proven to operate at chance level. (Goals 3, 4, 5)
12. Bullshit Jobs	*This paper*	—

Paper	Title	Connection to This Paper
13. Economic Servitude	*Modern Extraction Mechanisms*	Why meaningless work persists: it serves the extraction of value from workers to shareholders. Bullshit jobs are not an accident; they are a feature of an economy designed to capture, not create, value. (Goal 2)
14. Health and Diet	*The Preventable Disease Burden*	Cancer is 90% preventable (Goal 14). The health system spends billions treating preventable disease while the food system (Goal 10) sells the substances that cause it. Same misallocation pattern as bullshit jobs.
15. Social Group Scaling	*The Ripple Model and Community Architecture*	Dunbar's 150 ceiling is discredited (Lindenfors et al. 2021: CI of 2-520). The Ripple model replaces it: accountability = 1/distance, everyone connected to 8 billion, weighted by physical proximity. No walls, just gradient. The 22-hour week returns time for the proximity-based community structures that make the Ripple work.
16. Grief-to-Design	*Methodology: From Lived Experience to System Design*	The methodology underlying all 32 theses. Each goal traces to a system that broke a real person. The bullshit jobs paper traces to every person who spent their life in an office doing nothing while their community fell apart.
17. Food Toxicology	*What Goes In Food and Why*	Goal 10: Food contains only things proven safe. The regulatory apparatus that allows unsafe additives while employing thousands in "food safety compliance" is textbook box-ticking.

Paper	Title	Connection to This Paper
18. Play Deprivation	*The Cost of Removing Play from Childhood*	Goal 11: Monkey bars at every bus stop. Children need play; adults need play. A 22-hour work week returns time for the physical activity that prevents the chronic disease the health system spends billions treating.
19. Screens and Attention Economy	*The Extraction of Human Attention*	The attention economy creates bullshit jobs (content moderators, engagement optimisers, growth hackers) while extracting the attention that people need for self-governance, community, and care.

The Convergence

Every paper in this series proves every other. If 40% of workers believe their jobs are meaningless, then the economy is not resource-constrained but allocation-constrained — and the resources currently wasted on pointless employment are precisely the resources Papers 2, 4, and 6 propose redirecting toward housing, prevention, and basic income.

The 14 goals are not 14 separate proposals. They are 14 consequences of the same structural reform: stop wasting human time and human resources on institutional self-perpetuation, and start investing them in human welfare. The bullshit jobs paper — this paper — is the economic proof that the resources exist. The other 18 papers document what those resources should be used for.

Appendix C: Australian Data Tables

Table C1: Employment by Industry, Australia, December 2025

Industry	Employment ('000)	% of Total
Healthcare and social assistance	1,932.4	13.1%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	1,291.2	8.7%
Education and training	1,156.7	7.8%
Construction	1,234.5	8.4%
Retail trade	1,198.6	8.1%
Accommodation and food services	948.3	6.4%
Administrative and support services	935.4	6.3%
Public administration and safety	880.6	6.0%
Manufacturing	856.2	5.8%

Industry	Employment ('000)	% of Total
Transport, postal, and warehousing	689.4	4.7%
Financial and insurance services	472.5	3.2%
Mining	298.3	2.0%
Other services	467.8	3.2%
All other	~2,400	~16.3%
Total	**~14,761**	**100%**

Source: ABS Labour Account, December 2025

Table C2: Public Sector Employment Growth vs. Population Growth

Metric	2024	2025	Growth
Public sector employees	~2,515,000	~2,598,000	3.3%
Public admin & safety	~849,100	~880,600	3.7%
Australian population	~27.0M	~27.4M	~1.6%
Ratio (public sector : population growth)	—	—	**2.1x**

Sources: ABS 2025b; IPA 2025

Table C3: University Staff Ratios

Metric	2022	2023	Change
Student-to-academic-staff ratio	21.83	22.10	+1.2%
Onshore student growth	—	—	+3.2%
Academic teaching staff growth	—	—	+0.5%

Source: Department of Education, 2024

Table C4: Healthcare Workforce Growth, 2013-2022

Workforce Category	Growth
Allied health professions	+67%
Medical practitioners	+41%
Nurses and midwives	+26%
Nurse-to-doctor ratio (2013)	4:1
Nurse-to-doctor ratio (2022)	3.33:1

Source: AIHW, 2024

Table C5: Justice System Costs

Component	Annual Cost (AUD)
Policing	~$17 billion
Corrections	~$7 billion
Courts	~$2.67 billion
Total direct government spending	**~$26.5 billion**
Total system cost (AIC estimate)	~$32 billion
Serious & organised crime costs	$35.5-$82.3 billion
— of which illicit drugs	~$19 billion (39.5%)
Per-prisoner cost (annual)	$110,000-$200,000
Recidivism rate (2 years)	~45%
Recidivism rate (5 years)	~60-70%
Norway recidivism rate	~20%

Sources: AIC 2019; AIC 2024; ROGS 2025

Series Context

This paper is No. 12 in the OMXUS Research Series (32 theses). It provides evidence for Conclusions #8 (The money exists), #2 (Prevention beats punishment), and #3 (The justice system punishes the wrong people).

Full series index: CONCLUSIONS.md

This paper is part of the OMXUS Research Series. For the full series, see the Cross-References Appendix above or visit omxus.com.