

Paul Blackmore

King's College London, UK

Motivation: The role of prestige in academic life (0176)

What motivates academics to work in university settings? How are departmental cultures created, sustained and improved? How do motivating factors change over the course of an academic career? How do academics balance their varied roles, including teaching, research and service? What drives many academics to work well beyond working hours, into nights and weekends, for modest pay and few additional financial incentives?

Although the extrinsic motivator of money is widely used in many societies, there is *prima facie* evidence that some academic work is not motivated principally in this way. Much academic activity is not financially advantageous, including many collegial activities (Bergquist, 1991; McNay, 1995), such as reviewing journal articles and research grant applications (Lamont, 2009). This is not to deny a possible relationship with money, a point returned to later.

It is often said that the main loyalty of a member of faculty is to discipline before institution (Jenkins, 1996), despite the institution being the employer and direct source of promotion and a number of other incentives and rewards. Whilst academic determinism is not sustainable (Becher and Trowler, 2003), links are sometimes made between disciplinary affiliations and some beliefs, values and behaviours.

At times of budgetary cutbacks, increasing workloads and associated stress, an understanding of academic motivation seems vital. An account of faculty motivation must therefore move beyond conventional accounts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and find ways of capturing the social aspects of motivation that are associated with the disciplinary and professional groups within which faculty are located.

In a Leadership Foundation Small Development Project funded study of over two dozen academics in five departments in universities across England, many heartening stories emerged. However a number of worrying trends surfaced as well. Our account of faculty motivation moved beyond conventional accounts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and found ways of capturing the social aspects of motivation associated with disciplinary and professional groups.

The study is based on a model of academic motivation framed as 'overlapping' and 'associated' economies. Central to this is the idea of a 'prestige economy', an anthropological term describing organised patterns of exchange which stand outside a conventional market economy (Bascom 1948; Grinev 2005; Herskovits 1948). This study extends previous international research that focused on notions of motivation in relation to interdisciplinary work, which provided initial theoretical development of the prestige economy in academic life.

Despite many current worries about a crisis of purpose in higher education, most academics we interviewed spoke of being motivated by creating new knowledge through research and by sharing knowledge and discovery through teaching and working with colleagues. However, the encroachment of the monetary economy, and particularly the growing trend of academic

capitalism (the shift in higher education to market-like behaviour), was often considered a demotivating factor, or at least a time-consuming drain, on academic work.

Aspects of prestige and peer recognition played a central role in academics' career trajectories. For some academics there were definitive markers of prestige - such as grants won, journal publication and disciplinary awards - and these were constant across individual, departmental and institutional levels. Other academics noted personal prestige markers - such as teaching awards, feedback from students and a strong disciplinary reputation - which often differed from more financially-orientated ones at the departmental and institutional levels.

Academics found it challenging, in their own work and in leading and managing others, to negotiate competing reward schemes. For example, at one institution's promotion criteria included the number of journal publications. This contrasted with the RAE/REF process which rewards the quality of a limited number of publications. Academics in humanities and social science fields felt pressured by promotion criteria to apply for research grants, but felt they did not need the money to conduct research and write up their ideas. A more considered and thoughtful alignment of academic behaviours and reward schemes is necessary, particularly in light of a changing higher education environment. This need is strongest for junior academics, who are often consumed by stress and overwhelmed by all they feel they need to do to get ahead in disciplinary, departmental, and institutional contexts.

A surprising message was the possibility that increased student tuition fees could work to correct the balance of reward for teaching and research in universities. Many academics were hopeful that the increased fees would bring attention to issues of teaching and learning, to the benefit of both students and academics.

Prestige-seeking and prestige-granting activities varied across the departments and disciplines studied, with differences seen in the relation of the department to the external world—whether it was contracting clients for research, scientific development, or undergraduate student recruitment. There were also differences in approaches to prestige from academics within the same department. This highlights issues for leadership and management at all levels. For Heads of Department, there are important lessons for how roles and duties are delegated within the department. At the level of Head of School/College, there are key differences in how departments and disciplines seek and gain prestige and how this impacts on broader goals. For senior leaders, there are opportunities to be strategic in how individual and group prestige seeking can enhance institutional prestige and align with the institutional vision and goals.

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