Academic motivation: The role of a prestige economy

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Background: Academic work

- More permeable external boundaries
- Interdisciplinary and inter-professional working
- Third stream activity
- Growth in professional support staff
- Casualisation
- Diminished “shared understanding”
Background: Managerialism

- Customer and market orientation
- Strengthened right to manage - sometimes at a distance
- Growth of cross-institutional management
- Quality and accountability
- Weakening academic influence
Background: Surveying academic role

- Motivated by work not salary
- Work hours increasing, esp administration
- Satisfaction and security falling
- Late career most negative
- Mid-career most stressed
- Part-time and casual staff increasing
- New and established staff teach similarly
- New staff more research orientated

(McInnis, 2000)
Academic motivation: External rewards

- granting of tenure
- promotion
- merit pay
- travel provisions
- payment of incidental department and professional expenses
- clerical assistance
- special privileges

(Feldman & Paulsen, 1999)
Academic motivation: Internal rewards

- liking open-ended problem solving
- wanting to be helpful
- having a sense of making a difference (such as seeing students develop)
- feeling satisfaction from interacting with students
- feeling a sense of competence through increasing skill and knowledge
- having opportunities for learning and to use skills and knowledge
- having autonomy-independence (self-determination)

(Feldman & Paulsen, 1999)
Identity

- the community “provides the language in which individuals understand themselves and interpret their world”
  
  (Henkel, 2000)

- “a system of shared dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions”
  
  (Bourdieu, 1988) on habitus

- self identity “the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives”
  
  (Giddens, 1991)

the personal cannot be separated from the social
Identity, disciplines, interdisciplinarity

“any comparatively self-contained and isolated domain of human experience which possesses its own community of experts”

(Nissani, 1997)

Knowledge, methodology, community

“a means of solving problems and answering questions that cannot be satisfactorily addressed using single methods or approaches”

(Klein, 1990)

Requires integration
Prestige

- Concept of prestige- motivations within social systems rather than individuals in isolation
- “prestige economy” first used by anthropologists studying a wide range of cultures
- some actions could not be explained by the operation of a money, market or subsistence economy (Bascom, 1948; Herskovits, 1948; Val'terovich, 2005)
- academic prestige is a social phenomenon
On literary prizes:

“How is such prestige produced, and where does it reside? In people? In things? In relationships between people and things? What rules govern its circulation?”

(English, 2005)

prestige can at times be “cashed in” for money
Features of the prestige economy

- Ideas
- Publications
- Citations
- Exhibitions
- Keynotes
- Leading disciplinary / professional groups
- Expert status on reviews and other panels
- External examining
The project

Increasing calls for interdisciplinarity

But

- Structural
- Socio-cultural
- Epistemological differences

- Some leaders engage - why and how?
Methodology

- Literature review
- In-depth semi-structured interviews of interdisciplinary leaders at KCL and Melbourne
- Appreciative inquiry
  - why engage?
  - what works?
  - principles for effective practice
Findings: Motivations

- Things could be better …
- Mental frameworks – simplifying things
- Developing a strength
  e.g. environmental issues
- Making a difference in the world
- Ensuring school / department growth
Findings: Career stage

- Disciplinary before interdisciplinary?
- Some are in fields of study – inherently interdisciplinary
- Cutting edge
- But may be isolating
- Easier to take risks after tenure
Findings: Disciplines – handrail or handcuffs

“what it makes you appreciate is that within disciplines there are like minded people with whom you can have useful conversations, and I suppose it’s quite lonely, if you like, or not lonely, but you’re kept up in here, so … for all the disciplines, are sometimes frustrating, I wouldn’t underestimate the way they can be supportive, also.”
Findings: Field of study tensions

“I have a choice here. I can stay where I am and work with a load of other sociologists who are applying a sociological perspective to a variety of subject matters, or I could be the only, pretty much, bar one or two others, sociologists working on a variety of other disciplines, focusing on one subject.”
Intersecting economies

Academic structures

Monetary economy

Quest for knowledge

Academic habitus

Academic capitalism

Academic community

Prestige economy
Significance

- Performance-related pay may be an ineffective instrument
- Promotion and tenure criteria important for early career academics
- Ability to move sideways in the university and maintain status is crucial for all academics
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References

Thank you and questions

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