

Working with academic motivation: Sharing expertise

Change within universities is often viewed as problematic and hard to achieve. Staff and educational developers in universities report concerns over the nature and purpose of development (McWilliam, 2002; Blackmore, 2009) and the difficulties in working closely with colleagues in academic roles across the university if they are to be successful in achieving change. This can be challenging – the gap between academic departments and central support can be wide. Attempts to produce change through financially driven extrinsic motivators have been critiqued as largely unsuccessful (Guest and Clinton, 2007). Discipline-related variations in attitudes and behaviours (Jenkins, 1996), contested ideas in themselves (Becher and Trowler, 2002), appear to add complexity in a number of areas, including leadership and management (Blackmore, 2007). Recent research (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2012a) identified academic departments as a key level for working and explored patterns of motivation within a range of departments. The project illuminated the importance of the department or centre in shaping attitudes and behaviours, making use of the concept of a prestige economy (Bascom, 1948; Herskovits, 1948; English, 2005), as a means of moving beyond accounts of motivation that tend to stress intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and into a more contextually situated account of patterns of motivation (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2012b).

Work to date on prestige economies has centred on the central importance of academic context as a means by which academic and research staff understand and actively develop their sense of identity in relation to their colleagues and often in contrast to other groups. Discussion of identity has drawn from Giddens (1991), Henkel (2000) and others. Of central importance has been the notion of forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – as being significant in illuminating many aspects of positioning and relationships in academic life. Bourdieu (1988) has, of course, an important bearing on this, for these conceptions of capital, but also field and habitus.

A current research study, funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, has sought to build on our initial work into prestige economies in academic life, by exploring the experiences of some of those in higher education who, because of their cross-institutional role, their function as boundary spanners (Hoe, 2006) and their formal commitment to the facilitation of change as part of their role, are likely to have useful insights that can be used to triangulate with the many other sources of perceptions that have been used to date. The project therefore seeks to identify some of the successful attributes and behaviours of highly experienced staff and educational developers, when working with academic departments. Through focus groups and individual interviews, aspects have been explored in relation to disciplinary orientation and a range of other motivational issues. Using a series of case studies as stimuli, project team members have drawn out the salient features of the situation, as perceived by role holders, and the ways of working that they recommend. This has been triangulated with the use of critical incident technique, inviting participants to identify examples drawn from their own experience that have been successful – or unsuccessful. Responses have been captured through brief written accounts analysed for key attributes and behaviours. A series of interviews has also been undertaken with successful and

experienced staff developers, gathering more detailed data concerning the above aspects and focusing on the learning process that they perceive has led to the individual's expertise.

The project has aimed to produce insights that are of value in continuing work on prestige economies in academic life, as well as enabling the development of soundly based and properly theorised advice and guidance that will assist staff developers in their engagements with academic communities. Specifically, it aims to achieve better understanding of academic motivation, leading to more effective engagement by staff developers, and development communities better equipped to understand academic motivation and thus facilitate change.

The context, processes and emergent outcomes of the project will be reviewed, together with the implications for development policy and practice and for a continuing research agenda in relation to prestige economies in academic life.

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