

Factors that Motivate Academic Staff to Conduct Research and Influence Research Productivity in Chinese Project 211 Universities

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Abstract

Universities and other academic institutions have constantly served as feeder institutions in the overall development of nations through scientific research (Uzoka, 2008). National governments and a number of organizations have invested huge amounts of money in the development of research in universities. Some countries rank higher education institutions according to their research performance (Williams & Van Dyke, 2008). The staff of higher education institutions are considered to be the key research resource. Academic staff, in particular, account for a significant component of the budget of higher education institutions and have played an important role in achieving the objectives of the institution (Rowley, 1996). Well-motivated academic staff can build a national and international reputation for themselves and the university. Such a profile may have a significant impact on the ability of the university to attract more students, research funds and consultancy contracts.

To face the national and international challenges and competition, the Chinese Ministry of Education and leaders in Chinese universities are trying a number of different approaches to motivate academic staff with the aim being to improve their research performance. Project 211 is the State's only key construction project in the area of education during the "Ninth Five-Year Plan" and "Tenth Five-Year Plan" period. Inclusion in the project means that the Chinese government periodically invests a huge amount of money in the 100 Chinese key universities in the 21st century with the aim of facilitating their teaching and research development.

In the context of education, many factors impact on academic staff motivation: working conditions, reward and pay, chance of promotion, and so on. Within one organization, academic staff may demonstrate a diversity of personality. Some may show high performance by being given decent pay; others may be eager to get recognized by management, colleagues and society. The implementation of performance reviews has worked to create a competitive atmosphere among staff.

On the other hand, motivators are intrinsic to the job itself. They are closely linked to job content such as desire for achievement, sense of responsibility, performance recognition, job potential, job significance and personal growth. These two distinct factors have different effects on people's motivation at work.

Based on the literature review, the external factors and internal factors are quite relevant to academic staff motivation of doing research work. But few researchers have done the analysis of the differences of those factors at different academic levels in Chinese Project 211 Universities. A Mixed methodology was used to find the answers to the two main research questions:

What are the main factors that motivate academic staff at different academic levels to conduct research?

What are the main factors that may influence individual research productivity at different academic levels?

By using self-report questionnaires and focus group interviews with academics, this thesis examines the differences of those factors at each academic level.

The main purpose of this study is to probe the insights of motivation, especially in the Project 211 universities in China, to provide a better understanding of the behavioural intention (motivation) of staff's devotion to research at different professional levels, and the main factors that influence research productivity of academic staff. Recommendations can be suggested to policy makers in Chinese universities in terms of developing a long term effective motivation strategy. The findings could also potentially contribute to improve the competitive capacity of educational organizations.

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Abbreviations

ANOVA:	Analysis of Variance
CME:	Chinese Ministry of Education
ECUST:	East China University of Science and Technology
EI:	Engineering Index
FR:	Financial Rewards
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HELs:	Higher Education Institutions
HNU:	Henan University
HR:	Human Resources
HRM:	Human Resources Management
ISTP :	Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, Perception
LZU:	Lanzhou University
MOE:	Ministry of Education
NAATI:	Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NEE:	National Entrance Examination
OECD:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA:	Performance Appraisal
PHD:	Philosophy Doctor
RDO:	Research Development Office
R&D:	Research and Development
RMB:	Renminbi
SCI:	Science Citation Index
UC:	University of Canberra
UCCEHR:	University of Canberra Committee for Ethics in Human Research
US:	United States
USA:	United States of America
U.S.S.R:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
XJU:	Xinjiang University