Doing the right thing- but for who? A qualitative study of Australian Academics
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Abstract
This paper sought to assess how internal market orientation (IMO) can be used to improve employee public service motivation (PSM) and performance for academic staff at Australian universities with a view to improve employee performance and service quality. Consideration of a link between IMO and PSM has yet to be made in the literature. This paper presents results from a qualitative study, consisting of 20 semi-structured interviews of academics from Australian universities. The results indicate that relationships between the aforementioned variables appear to be present. The performance measures examined may also affect the attraction and retention of students and government funding, both of which are essential for the survival of a university, particularly in an environment which is becoming increasingly competitive. The increasing use of rankings of universities and greater transparency of outcomes as evidenced by the My University website and Universities Good Guide, means employee performance is vital.

Introduction
Australian universities are facing challenging times. They are currently facing large cuts in funding from the federal budget (Matchett, 2013), as well as reduced numbers of international student visas. This, combined with the global nature of competition for students (Li & Zhang, 2011), the impending removal of the cap on student places (Narushima, 2011), and increased competition for funding (Gillard, 2009), has meant that they are under increased pressure to improve service quality.

One way to attract consumers, in this context students, to a service provider is to promote the quality of the service. To achieve this, organisations, including those in the public sector, may benefit from employing strategies which improve general measures of employee performance (Lings & Greenley, 2005). Such strategies may include employing an internal market orientation (IMO) which focuses on improving interaction with employees, as well as employee motivation. This, in turn, should improve employee and organisational performance and make the organisation more attractive to potential and existing students. IMO has been found to have both a direct and an indirect positive influence on perceived service quality from both a customer (student) and employee perspective (Gounaris, Vassilikopoulou & Chatzipanagiotou, 2010). In addition to this, motivation and, more specifically, Public Service Motivation (PSM) is examined.

Key Literature
This section will examine the key pieces of literature with regards to the three variables from this study; Internal Market Orientation (IMO), PSM and employee performance.

IMO takes the market orientation concept and shifts its focus to an organisation’s internal ‘customers’; its employees, through a set of managerial behaviours which aim to improve the employee experience with management (Piercy, Harris and Lane, 2002) and the attraction,
development, motivation and retention of qualified employees (Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithaml, 1994). It “involves the generation and dissemination of intelligence pertaining to the wants and needs of employees, and the design and implementation of appropriate responses to meet these wants and needs.” (Lings & Greenley, 2005: p.291).

Adopting an internal market orientation is one part of implementing internal marketing in an organisation. It involves the culture of generation, dissemination and responsiveness to information within an organisation. This alone, however, may not lead to improved performance. The individual levels of employee motivation may be connected to the application of IMO in the workplace.

Motivation is concerned with the activation and persistence of behaviour (Bandura, 1977). An individual is said to be motivated when they strive for satisfaction, intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, or seek to avoid negative consequences that are likely to be encountered as a result of performance of a particular task (Bolles, 1972). Over the years, three general types of motivation have been studied; intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Studies of motivation, however, have not been limited to these general types. One type of motivation which may be relevant to academic staff at Australian universities is Public Service Motivation.

The definition of Public Service Motivation (PSM) has evolved over time. Earlier work led it being defined as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisations” (Perry & Wise, 1990 p. 368). More recently, a number of alternate definitions have arisen including "General, altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind" (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999 p. 20) and "the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful... public, community and social service." (Brewer & Selden, 1998 p. 417).

Previous research on Public Service Motivation (PSM) indicates that some individuals are more likely than others to perform, or have a desire to perform, public service (Brewer, Selden & Facer, 2000). Kim, Vandenabeele, Wright, Anderesen, Cerase, Christensen, Desmarais, Koumenta, Leisink, Liu, Palidaiskaite, Pedersen, Perry, Ritz, Taylor & De Vivo (2013) have refined this relationship and confirmed its applicability to individuals from a variety of different countries, including Australia. Deci (1992) states that theories used to explain motivation should address issues such as employee development, which is considered in IMO, as they have been found to affect performance. Further, as employee satisfaction levels increase and their opinions are being considered and responded to, employees with higher levels of PSM are likely to experience increased motivation. Wright, Moynihan & Pandey (2012) also report that clear communication regarding organisational goals may increase employee motivation, which may indicate the presence of a relationship between these two variables.

Employee performance is essential for the success of all organisations (Andersen, Cooper, & Zhu, 2007; Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004). This is particularly true for service-sector organisations (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gounaris, 2008) which rely on staff rather than goods as their product offering and as a means of creating value for the customer. In the case of universities, employee performance has been found to have a significant impact on the reputation and performance of universities, as well as their ability to attract research funding (Rowley, 1996).
An almost infinite number of variables can be used to measure the performance of an individual employee. These measures include job satisfaction and staff attitudes (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Lings & Greenley, 2005), retention (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Taylor, 2006) and compliance (Piercy & Morgan, 1990; Lings & Greenley, 2005; Wallace & de Chernatony, 2009), all of which are applicable to a wide variety of organisations, including universities.

Relying solely on the measures of employee performance stated above may not necessarily give a complete picture of employee performance. In addition to the aforementioned variables, context-specific performance measures are also of interest. Context-specific performance measures for academic staff in a university may include teacher ratings (Ramsden, 1991), research output (Wood, 1990) and community service (Winefield, Boyd, Saebel, & Pignata, 2008).

Consideration must also be given to the direct connection between IMO and performance. When managerial behaviours of IMO are practised, it would be expected that employee performance is enhanced (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Sanchez-Hernandez & Miranda, 2011). Increased employee performance as demonstrated in increased involvement in community service activities, increased research output and higher teaching ratings (Black & Gergersen, 1997; French, Kay & Meyer, 1966; Sahi, Lonial, Gupta & Seli, 2013). Increases in teaching ratings may be reflective of improved student satisfaction levels, which is the overarching goal. IMO has been demonstrated to improve employee performance in many contexts, however in the current literature no previous studies have considered how PSM may indeed be an enabler to further enhance employee performance in a university setting. This study considers the connections between these three variables, as is depicted in Figure 1, below.

![Figure 1- Hypothesised Model](image)

**Method**

A qualitative study was conducted in order to explore and confirm relationships between the aforementioned variables. Twenty interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to two hours in length, were conducted by a single interviewer with members of academic staff from Australian universities using a semi-structured interview guide. Academics came from five universities in both regional and metropolitan areas of two states.

Members of academic staff were approached to participate via email and then contacted by phone to arrange an appointment. These staff members had varying levels of experience ranging from five to over 30 years work as an academic, and were from associate lecturer up to Professor. The sample consisted of both male and female participants over the age of 30. Both full and part time employees were surveyed. All interviewees had been working at their current university for at least 12 months, to ensure they were familiar with the policies and procedures in place and were able to discuss them. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were entered into NVivo and coded for analysis.
Results and Discussion
The relationship between IMO and employee performance, as reflected by retention and satisfaction, appeared to be present. When asked why they continued to work for their university, Participant 8 replied: "I'm empowered with the ability to be flexible with my time and scheduling."

When asked about management responsiveness to employee desires for empowerment and autonomy, one respondent indicated that the flexibility of the manager allowed for flexible work hours: "Most weeks I work 6-7 days a week, but sometimes you can't write and you just spend the day out in the garden. My head of school understands that. You can't force it, it's a creative process. I doubt you'd get that elsewhere." (Participant 16). Another respondent supported this: "When you have a family the flexibility is enormous." (Participant 1).

This responsiveness to employees' needs and wants is reflected in employee performance, specifically retention of staff. "I've had opportunities to leave. I mean, I've had offers. I could have gone, but my daughter's sick and where I am I can take her to the doctor. My head of school knows... It's not a big deal, I just do it." (Participant 12).

This attitude suggests that the positive relationship between responsiveness of the organisation (a factor of IMO) impacts on satisfaction and staff retention (factors of performance). The finding supports previous research conducted by both Gounaris (2006; 2008) and Lings & Greenley (2005).

There were a limited number of respondents who indicated the existence of IMO in their organisation enhancing their motivation, and more specifically, PSM, in the workplace.

"There are policies that have developed in the Faculty and at the university level, that articulate what the usual expectation is on individuals, in terms of what a normal workload looks like. [They allow] for variation in different circumstances, they will usually always be determined for an individual with their supervisor... I love the teaching. I love some parts of the research... I'm playing to my strengths and I'm letting the rest just go. I feel quite comfortable doing that now. I'm good enough at the things that I do that I'm not questioned on those, and they let me keep doing it."
- Participant 19

This employee was more motivated at work due to the responsiveness of the organisation to adjust workloads to reflect their interests and motives. In addition, evidence of PSM moderating the relationship between IMO and performance is provided by the same participant, who said: "I've picked up university teaching awards and national teaching awards. I've been sent on International Teaching Programs, so I've benefited from that." (Participant 19). Not only is motivation high but also enhanced performance on the job where students can expect excellence in teaching.

The relationship between PSM and employee performance, as measured by retention, was also identified. When asked why they stayed working as an academic, Participant 5 said: "The pay. And the super. I need the money... I also love supervising my post-grad students."
When asked if there was anything that motivated them to continue working at their university, another individual stated: "My students. A lot of students here are the first generation in their family to go to university. I like feeling like I'm contributing to their lives... I want to make a difference." (Participant 3).

This may assist in starting a discussion around claims that individuals with high levels of PSM are more motivated by altruism than financial incentives, as implied in the PSM literature (e.g. Perry, 1996). Interestingly, the directionality of the relationship between PSM and compliance (as a measure of performance), as recorded in the literature was contradicted during some interviews. The relationship between PSM and compliance, as a measure of employee performance, proved to be a complicated one.

"I like the stealth and subversion. I think 'how can I introduce them to this, even though it's not in the learning guide?'! Hopefully nobody will audit my lecture and as 'why were you talking to them about... Homeless people, for example, and why it is such a social problem'. It's not in the unit guide... I love the subversive stealth by which I can introduce topics like that... The students I teach are stewards of the future... These are the people who will be making significant decisions about community."

- Participant 1

Although this suggests the individual has a high degree of PSM, in their commitment to the public interest, civic duty and self-sacrifice, the participants' efforts to not comply with university regulations oppose findings by Kim (2006) indicating that individuals with high levels of PSM tend to be more compliant. This indeed may not always be true.

**Conclusion**

There is evidence to suggest that relationships between IMO, PSM and employee performance exist. Future work may build on this study by empirically testing the relationships between these variables in a quantitative study to measure the strength and directionality of these relationships. In addition, other factors may indeed come into play. Other contexts may also be tested in other government or not-for-profit settings.

**References**


