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Keywords
Film Industry, Motivation, Grounded Theory, Motion Picture

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ABSTRACT

The Australian Film Industry operates in an environment which is uniquely challenging. Workers in the industry continuously face hardships which outweigh the benefits. This research seeks to understand how workers overcome the hardships and apparently consistently invest inequitable proportions of labour and skills to maximise their performance. Whether people will work hard or not bears strongly on their level of motivation. Motivation in the Australian Film Industry is determined by three sets of identified factors. These are modifiers which stem from the producer's influence and internal and external drivers which arise from the individual. Using Grounded Theory this research will explicate a substantive theory explaining why people work so hard in an industry that seems to reward them so poorly.

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INTRODUCTION

People who work in the Australian Film Industry face conditions and challenges which are not commonly experienced in other industries, these factors contribute to a high level of stress in the industry. Discussing a survey in 2000, Jones and Kirsch (2004: 3) state that:

> Various employment issues emerge as ongoing areas of concern. Of the directors who responded to the survey almost half (46%) earned less than $20,000 per year, and only 18 percent were able to claim they had full time employment, with a third (30%) relying on financial subsidies from their partner".

In addition, there are many aspects of the duties that workers undertake that collectively assemble to make their task a difficult one. Some of the attributes that characterise these additional stresses are: long hours; irregular work; poor pay; changing environments and conditions; high pressure and short deadlines; large and tightly controlled budgets; creative, volatile and passionate personalities, and more. As one Producer put it:

> There's probably few companies that are working in such an erratic environment … I would say the most challenging part is people, and given that you are in an environment which is full of flux and change, and you're coming from nothing … there's a lot of stresses, there's a lot of tensions, there's a lot of demands, there's a lot of responsibilities on all the people (Alice-Producer 2004).

There has been very little academic interest in regards to management research in the domain of film production, especially in Australia: "Current managerial and organisational research has tended to bypass this area of business with only a few research programs taking any interest (Blair 2000; Starkey, Barnatt and Tempest 2000; Cunningham 2002)" (Jones and Kirsch 2004: 5)

This study seeks to understand what drives people who work in the Australian Film Industry to consistently work hard to achieve exceptional outcomes under exceptional circumstances. Following the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), a study was undertaken in the Australian Film Industry. The study initially focussed on gaining an understanding of the management practices of film production. However, as the process of analysis and theoretical sampling (Glaser 1978) led the researcher to examine the process at continuingly deeper levels, it became evident that there was a basic social process occurring in regard to how workers are motivated to maximise their performance and how the film producer helps to facilitate the achievement of organisational goals through the development of high motivational conditions. As with the concepts of theoretical discovery advised by Grounded Theory (Glaser 1978), this paper will first present the empirical evidence focussing on the basic social process of worker motivation, and then enter into a brief discussion to provide theoretical grounding for the basic social process discovered.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory has been used in this study because it provides the researcher with an opportunity to discover what is happening in any given situation without experiencing the bias of *a priori* knowledge. This provides the advantage of reserving the need for the researcher to conceive preliminary hypotheses, thus ensuring greater freedom to explore the research area and allow issues to emerge (Glaser 1978; Glaser 1992; Glaser 1998; Ardern 1999; Glaser 2001; Bryant 2002). Grounded Theory "is an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data" (Martin and Taylor 1986: 141).

Given the distinct absence of research interest, and the consequent lack of current information on the field, the use of Grounded Theory is an ideal methodological framework providing value from a methodological, academic and practical point of view. The aim of Grounded Theory is to discover

theory: "grounded theorists want to know what is going on. They look at areas that have either never been studied before or those that are inundated with disparate theories" (Yee 2001). The paucity of 'management' research in this area and the consequent scarcity of developed theories and literature, provides an ideal opportunity for this style of research, allowing the researcher to question 'what is going on' with an open mind.

Grounded Theory takes a research approach, which is contrary to most of the more conventional research models. Data collection, coding and analysis occur immediately, concurrently, and throughout. The process is not impeded by the development of research problems, theoretical understanding or literature review. Instead, the researcher is granted the freedom to enter the field and discover the main concerns of participants and analyse ways they resolve these problems. Grounded Theory is founded on the conceptualisation of data through coding, using a method of constant comparison. Data, mainly in the form of transcripts, observations or literature, are fractured into conceptual codes, which during the process of comparison, combine to form meaningful categories, which then, through a process of abstraction, eventually become substantive theories or conceptual hypotheses (Glaser and Holton 2004). Rigorous application of the Grounded Theory method yields a set of categories – usually a core-category, coupled with some sub-categories – which explain concisely and comprehensively the problem that is being studied (Glaser 1978).

THE STUDY

Research was conducted in the Australian Film Industry over a period of eighteen months. During this period sixteen interviews were conducted or compiled which covered a range of crew and executive workers who worked on feature films in Australian and overseas productions. Results of the research show that motivation in the Australian Film Industry can be divided into three spheres of influence: the Producer's Influence, External Drivers, and Internal Drivers. Figure 1 illustrates these as they have been informed by the empirical research. These three spheres interact to provide a motivational context which encourages workers to maximise their performance while on the film project.

The producer's role is to manage the film, including everything from managing the budget through to managing the people. As part of their role good producers will encourage people to perform at their best, and will do all they can to motivate the staff under their control. Some of the things a producer does will be briefly discussed below. Ultimately however, it is the internal and external drivers which will have the most influence on how much effort a worker will put into their work. It is these influences that will be discussed in most detail in this paper.

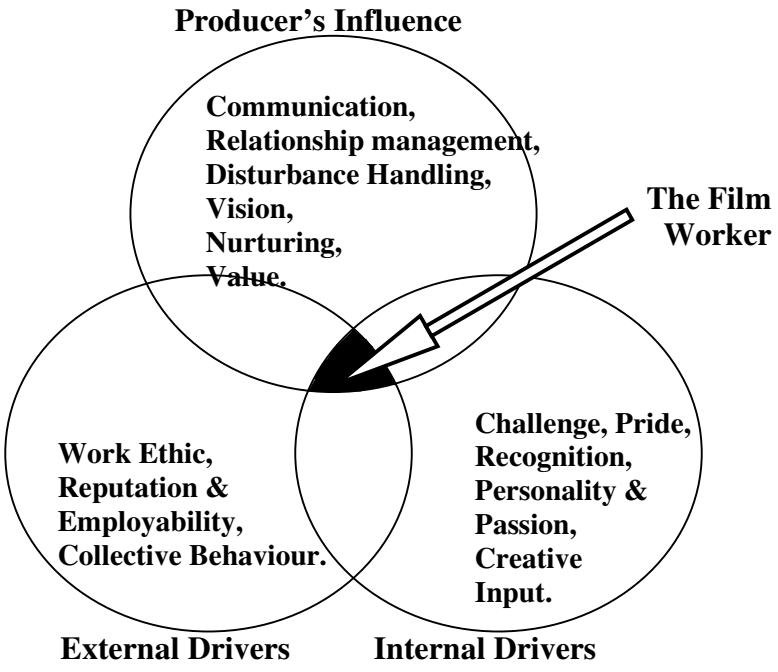

Figure 1. The three spheres of influence on the film worker

THE PRODUCERS INFLUENCE

A producer is in control of all of the resources, human and otherwise, and it is entirely up to this person to ensure that these resources are utilised efficiently and effectively. People can only do their best when working conditions are at their optimum. One of the producer's major roles then is to prepare an optimum environment, one where people can work well together and communicate with each other without distractions. "In production it's all about management; about time management, money management and people management – keeping people happy – keeping people knowing

what's going" (Sara-Line-Producer 2004). In conventional business, it is among the manager's many functions to motivate the staff. In film however, the producer's ability to motivate is hindered because of the structure of the hierarchical system and the level of creative professionalism within each department. Most departments are self-managed and autonomous. Therefore motivation, from the producer's point of view, is more along the lines of Herzberg's traditional 'Two-Factor' theory of motivation (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman 1959), where the Producer ensures the provision of hygiene factors, and the industry provides the motivational factors – incentives and rewards – which tend to be more implicit values which drive people to work harder. In developing 'hygiene factors' the producer aims to establish an environment which facilitates easy communication between people, and which, through careful selection, enables the formation of collaborative relationships. The producer also endeavours to remove distractions, which may divert people from their core functions. Overall, the producer aims to build a nurturing environment, and tries to value people and treat them well.

PERSONAL DRIVERS

The other, more significant, side to motivation concerns the various drivers within the individual which cause him or her to strive for maximum performance. These drivers, which influence a person's psychology and social behaviour, provide an understanding as to why workers in this industry work so hard given their poor pay and work conditions. Personal drivers are influences that affect performance which are fundamentally within the person, or within their control. There are two dimensions to personal drivers; there are those which present an external influence to the individual, where influences are generally exogenous, and those which arise as an internal psychological response to external stimuli, with endogenous causes (Doyle 2003).

EXTERNAL DRIVERS

The first external driver is work ethic. Within the workers there is a strong work ethic which dictates that you must work, no matter what. This stems from the competitive environment in which they

work – they have little choice about the intensity they put into the job because its 'work hard, or don't work at all'. As a producer states:

> The work ethic is that people put in, you just can't survive on under a hundred percent because there are so many people that are vying for jobs all the time. If you don't perform in each job then you just won't be picked for the next one. You're only as good as your last job which is horrible but it's true. (Lyn-Production-Manager 2005)

Work ethic extends to being aware of the commitments that are made to the film, and the resources that are being expended, and endeavouring to get the job right first time and on time, because a second chance in the film industry is "incredibly expensive. You can't not have something ready, whether you have to stay up all night to get it done" (Vera-Production-Manager 2005).

A second driver is reputation and employability. Workers are primarily driven to work hard and to maximise performance because they need to develop a reputation that would be highly prized by future employers, and they need to protect this reputation once it has been established. Reputation is "important because you hear by word of mouth what people are doing, what's the next project coming up, you solely believe that you're only as good as your last job" (Simon-Gaffer 2005).

Collective behaviour is a third external driver. There is such a strong team identity, where no individual wants to disadvantage the group. Therefore each person will do their utmost to ensure a positive outcome, even when that means they will need to put in an extraordinary effort. Group pressure is so strong that even when people are ill, they will still come to work:

> If you don't come to work, … it's either going to be [painful] to find somebody at six o'clock in the morning to replace you, or your co-workers will work extra hard without you being there. So people don't have sickies in the film industry, they just don't do it. (Lyn-Production-Manager 2005)

Workers in the Australian Film Industry are motivated by these external factors which drive them to strive harder than people would work in similar positions in other industries:

> I mean they put themselves out, partly out of professionalism, partly out of desire to further their careers which is all part of the job, but also partly because they know that they're at the centre of quite a substantial collective effort, and they're doing it for everybody around them as well as themselves. (Alice-Producer 2004)

These external drivers motivate individuals to work harder because of the fear that the individual has against effecting negative outcomes as a result of destabilising the external environment in some way. For example, if the film worker does not work as hard as he or she can, there may be negative implications when they go looking for the next job, or their colleagues may impose sanctions that would invoke negative consequences.

INTERNAL DRIVERS

The first internal driver is challenge. The very nature of the work, its difficulty, its frequent need for creative solutions and techniques arouses within film workers a feeling of challenge and a desire to beat the odds and come out on top: "There's excitement in it too. It's a challenge you know. It's that thing of having to work at it. If you've got to fix something, you have got to fix it quickly all the time so your brain has to keep working the whole time" (Vera-Production-Manager 2005). It is possible that the unique combination of elements film offers drives people to achieve at a level that is otherwise extraordinary.

A second driver is pride and recognition. People who work in the Australian Film Industry are proud of what they do and proud of what they achieve. There is a glory in being recognised as a participant in the industry, and as a component of the film. A Line Producer compared the film industry to other industries and observed that in other jobs you are only really a cog in the machine, but in film you get the chance to work hard and do a good job and it is recognised and rewarded and it has immediate consequences on the next job. So rewards and incentives are directly and immediately linked to work behaviour and effort in the film industry. (Vera-Production-Manager 2005)

A third driver is personality and passion. There are distinct personality types which seem attracted to the industry and who are successful in it, and a big part of this is passion, and the ability to become passionate about the job: "you're dealing with something that is someone's absolute passion, which it

has to be if you want to work in the film industry, it has to be your raw passion [too] otherwise you just won't keep going in it" (Sara-Line-Producer 2004).

The final internal driver is creative input. While it is not always possible for all workers to have creative input, when they do they will worker harder due to the sense of ownership the input provides them:

> So it's great if someone wants to listen to your ideas. It makes you feel good. And it's interesting watching directors who are willing to include everybody, whether it's the seventh grip who suddenly has an idea and you kind of think oh that's great. … If people know that if they come up with ideas, someone's going to listen to them, that's a buzz for them too. It really is, I think recognition of your ideas is great. (Vera-Production-Manager 2005).

These internal drivers urge people to maximise their performance as a result of psychological influences which trigger self-esteem and dignity. In those select individuals who work in film, these four drivers present psychological needs which must be satisfied. The two sides of these drivers, external and internal, combine to provide strong impetus for workers to overcome personal and environmental hardships and to strive for maximum performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings above are based on the empirical data derived from the study, while this study is still in a relatively early stage, the following theoretical discussion is provided to locate the study and provide some theoretical support.

Research on motivation began in earnest when the corporation took control over people's work effort, and a great deal of knowledge was generated in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century (Baldamus 1951; Carlson 1951; Maslow 1954; Carter, Haythorn, Shriver and Lanzetta 1958; Herzberg, Mausner et al. 1959; Cyert and March 1963; Vroom 1964; Adams 1965; Wainer and Rubin 1969; Deci 1975; Becker 1976; Salancik 1977; Trist 1981; Kotter 1982; Ulrich 1984). However, motivation, like film, has moved beyond the corporation. Motivating a workforce has become more difficult and more complex, money and job security no longer work as the sole sources of motivation

in this new employment era. Therefore, new methods of motivating workers need to be found. Recently there has been a re-emergence of contemporary work discussing motivation in this new age, especially with regard to Generation X, and Generation Y (Hays 1999; Amar 2004), as well as other research (Doyle 2003; Porter, Bigley and Steers 2003; van Marrewijk and Hardjono 2003; Haslam 2004). This research supports the empirical evidence found in this study.

Fundamentally, there is a new value system at work today, workers have different goals and new priorities. People marry older, but are charged with responsibility younger. Family is now more important than work, and a career is no longer wrapped up in a single firm, but is a portable concept, where individual effort goes into career security and progression rather than into the current job. (Cunningham 2001; van Marrewijk and Hardjono 2003; Amar 2004). Hence we can see that workers in the Australian Film Industry are driven to excel at work to benefit their career and their future – this provides support for the evidence which emphasises the importance *reputation and employability*.

Self-esteem, self-regard and potentiality have come to supplant the traditional fulcrum of money. Managers need to indulge this aspect of workers psychology to create sustainable motivation (Cunningham 2001; Amar 2004). Workers in the Australian Film Industry are inspired by their ability to invest creative energy into a project with which they can identify and be identified – this aspect of motivation is drawn out in the research through the inherent value of *pride and recognition*.

Workers now look for, and work best in, jobs which accommodate a psychological need for pleasure and excitement. "If one has a job from which one wants to run away, there is no way a manager can do anything to keep him or her motivated to do well in it in the long-run. The most the manager can do in such a case is to keep the employee in the job" (Amar 2004: 94). Allowing more worker control and autonomy, engaging employees at a higher mental level, and making tasks more meaningful with greater outcome visibility and ownership can achieve pleasure and excitement (Katzell and Thompson 1990). Workers in the Australian Film Industry are motivated through the mental engagement of challenge, and revel in the opportunity to provide creative input, which gives a feeling of ownership,

achievement and control – this emphasises the importance of *challenge* and *creative input* in the work of film crews.

Amar found that work sharing and teamwork were also supportive toward workplace motivation, as this allows each individual a chance to make a difference in the operation of the project, and to display their unique talents and skills, "they want to somehow influence their work environment" (2004:98). Collaboration and teamwork is an elemental attribute of work in the Australian Film Industry, the engagement of which drives people to work harder due to the fear of damaging team cohesion – *collective behaviour* then is also an important element in work motivation. Katzell and Thompson (1990) discuss the importance of hiring workers who exhibit a good fit between personal motives and values to those of the organisation. This suggests that workers who have the right personality, and who are passionate about the work they do will have greater motivation in the workplace – this links to *personality and passion*.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the findings of a Grounded Theory research study into the management of the Australian Film Industry. The study has highlighted worker motivation as a basic social process which was a concern to interviewees. The three interconnecting elements of motivation of film workers – Producer's Influence, External Drivers, and Internal Drivers, work together to enable workers to maximise their work performance and achieve organisational goals, in this case the production of feature films. Initial theoretical support tends to validate these findings.

By understanding how and why workers are motivated to work in the Australian Film Industry, key management executives like executive producers, producers and directors can better tailor the work environment to get the most out of their crew by maintaining conditions which are better geared to the needs of their workforce.

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