Protean Careers and the Performing Arts: Antecedents for Intrinsic Motivation

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that professional performing artists are motivated intrinsically, through the inherent challenge and/or enjoyment associated with performing, rather than by external rewards. This study examines the degree to which intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by factors such as affective organisational commitment, organisational identification and job satisfaction. Specifically targeted are artists who choose a ‘protean’ career, accepting a series of short-term engagements rather than seeking a lengthy career in a single organisation. Findings indicate that job satisfaction, identification with organisation and identification with colleagues act as antecedents for intrinsic motivation among these individuals. Affective organisational commitment, on the other hand, showed no such relationship.

INTRODUCTION

The professional performing arts industry is characterised by low wages, high levels of underemployment, and high job uncertainty (Bridgstock, 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, that researchers (e.g. Frey, 1997; Martin & Cutler, 2002) have sought to ascertain the reasons why individuals single-mindedly pursue the challenges of an artistic career over a potentially easier and more lucrative one.

Researchers have generally found this phenomenon to be inextricably linked with ‘intrinsic motivation’, a concept that can be defined as the “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than some separate consequence” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.72). Intrinsic motivation is seen as the most pervasive and important type of motivation as it leads to higher levels of performance, in terms of both quality and quantity, and has been found to be a key element in encouraging creativity (Amabile, 1985; Barron & Harrington, 1981; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Bridgstock (2005, p.44) suggests, the “driving force that attracts so many people to this [arts] industry is passion – a simple, yet complete, desire for the job”, while Frey (2000) goes as far as to state that intrinsic reward is the sole motivator of personal creativity.
Interestingly, many professional performing artists choose a precarious ‘protean’ career. That is to say they self-manage their career options, often moving from one organisation to another working under a series of short term contracts rather than spending extended periods in one organisation. Given that the reputation and continued viability of arts organisations rely heavily on the creativity and consistently high quality performance of all artistic employees, irrespective of the length of their contracts, it is extremely important for the managers of these organisations to create an environment that nurtures high levels of intrinsic motivation within artists. As far as can be ascertained, however, there have been no studies to date that focus specifically on the various factors that cultivate intrinsic motivation among casual and/or short-term artistic employees.

Previous research suggests that intrinsic motivation is influenced by factors such as affective organisational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), organisational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Frey, 1997; Osterloh, Frey, & Frost, 2001) and job satisfaction (Amabile, 1985). This study explores, in the context of the professional performing arts industry, the extent to which these three constructs influence the intrinsic motivation levels of artistic personnel, focusing specifically on that group of artists who can be considered to have a ‘protean’ career.

**Organisational Commitment**

Organisational commitment is often described in the literature using the three-component theory developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). This theory, which is seen as the “predominant conceptualisation of commitment among current researchers” (Clugston, 2000, p.478), comprises three components, namely, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. As short-term employees typically do not have a say over the continuance of their employment and thus are not likely to experience continuance or normative forms of commitment, this study focuses on affective commitment, which is the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organisation...
(Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment has been shown in earlier research to lead to
greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Mowday et al., 1979) and is a particularly prevalent
state of commitment in the early stages of an individual’s career development (Meyer,
Bobocel, & Allen, 1991; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

**Organisational Identification**

Organisational identification can be defined as the extent to which an individual will define
their self in terms of their organisation, that is, the “perceived oneness with the organisation”
(D Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006, p.572). The more an individual’s values, norms and
interests are aligned with that of the organisation, the greater the organisational identification.
Indeed, when employees strongly identified with an organisation they attained an intrinsic
satisfaction, as the goals and objectives of the organisation were effectively adopted by
employees as their personal goals and objectives (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970).

Mael and Ashforth (1992) provide some insight into how to improve levels of identification
within organisations, so as to positively influence the levels of intrinsic motivation of
employees. The first of these is distinctiveness; an organisation must provide a clear
definition of its position and its own identity, so as to enable its members to easily identity
with their organisation. The second antecedent is prestige. If an organisation consistently
displays high standards, employees are more inclined to identify with the organisation as they
experience greater self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The third antecedent, competition,
is similar in nature to distinctiveness and refers to an organisation’s ability to differentiate
itself from its competitors.

Making reference to social identity theory, which is commonly used when exploring an
individual’s sense of self in relation to the group and to the organisation, Ashforth and Mael
(1989) found that high levels of organisational identification resulted in group loyalty and
cohesion, concepts that are similar to those identified by Frey (1997) and Osterloh et al.
(2001) as antecedents for intrinsic motivation.
Job Satisfaction

Cramer (1996, p.389) defined job satisfaction as “the extent to which an employee has a positive affective orientation or attitude towards their job, either in general or towards specific facets of it”. Job satisfaction can either be examined as a global concept, referring to an overall satisfaction relating to the job in its entirety, or as a facet-specific concept, meaning satisfaction is derived from particular aspects of the job, such as pay or supervision (Curry, Price, Wakefield, & Mueller, 1986).

Factors such as high levels of feedback, close supervision and communication between supervisors and subordinates have been found to positively influence perceived job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993), as have challenging and interesting tasks. A positive relationship has also been found between role clarity and job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993), while other role variables such as role ambiguity and role conflict have been found to negatively correlate with job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Haynes, 1979; Spector, 1997, p.39).

Research indicates that high levels of job satisfaction leads to greater performance (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001) and that motivation is considered to be one of the three key aspects associated with performance, the other two being role clarity and ability (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p.35). While several studies have examined the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance as a complete construct (Judge et al., 2001; Lawler & Porter, 1967; Locke & Latham, 1990), the present study investigates the degree to which job satisfaction acts as an antecedent to the motivation aspect of performance, more specifically, the impact that job satisfaction has on intrinsic motivation.

To summarise, previous studies have suggested that affective commitment, organisational identification and job satisfaction lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation. This study
aims to test the following hypotheses among a group of professional performing artists who have chosen a self-managed, protean career:

**H1** – higher levels of affective organisational commitment will lead to an increased level of intrinsic motivation;

**H2** – higher levels of organisational identification will lead to an increased level of intrinsic motivation;

**H3** – higher levels of job satisfaction will lead to an increased level of intrinsic motivation.

**METHOD**

**Data Collection and Sample**

A survey was administered among the artistic personnel of 19 performing arts organisations that satisfied the following criteria: 1) they were recognised as professional, rather than amateur; 2) they were not-for-profit, that is, they relied to some extent on government funding; 3) they maintained an ongoing performance schedule; and 4) they employed at least some artistic personnel on short-term contracts or on a casual basis. A total of 507 questionnaires were specifically distributed to short-term artistic employees, with 60 usable questionnaires returned, representing a response rate of 12%.

Of the 60 respondents, 51.7% were employed in opera companies, 20% were from theatre companies, 18.4% were from orchestras and 6.7% from dance organisations, including both classical (ballet) and contemporary dance. Most of the respondents (58.3%) were employed on a casual or sessional basis, while the others were employed on contracts of no longer than 12 months duration. Approximately 60% of respondents were female and 40% were male. Some 17% of the respondents were under the age of 24, 42% were aged between 25 and 34, 28% were aged 35 to 44 and 10% were aged 45-54. There were no respondents over the age of 54.
All constructs in the questionnaire were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, with possible responses ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). Where necessary, small changes were made to the wording of individual items to suit the performing arts industry context. Negatively worded items were reverse coded, so that larger scores indicated stronger attitudes in all cases. Cronbach’s alpha scores were calculated in order to assess internal consistency and reliability of each scale.

**Affective Commitment**

Affective Commitment was measured using a 5-item scale (e.g. I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organisation) developed by Meyer and Allen (1991), which has been used in a number of earlier studies. An exploratory factor analysis found this scale to be unidimensional. This scale achieved a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82, which was well above the minimum of 0.70 that Nunnally (1978) suggested was necessary in order to be considered reliable.

**Organisational Identification**

Organisational Identification was measured using Cameron’s (2004) twelve-item ‘social identity’ scale (e.g. in general, being a member of this organisation is an important part of my self-image). While this scale was originally designed to measure social identity as a unidimensional construct, an exploratory factor analysis revealed the presence of two separate subscales. The first clearly focuses on identification with the organisation (seven items; \( \alpha = 0.83 \)), the other focuses on identification with colleagues (four items; \( \alpha = 0.77 \)). In subsequent analyses, therefore, the two forms of organisational identification were treated as individual constructs. One item was removed as it loaded onto both factors.

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction was measured using four items from a scale adapted from Curry et al. (1986) (e.g. I find real enjoyment in my job). This scale achieved a Cronbach alpha of 0.77 hence
internal reliability was considered sound and exploratory factor analysis confirmed unidimensionality.

*Intrinsic Motivation*

The dependent variable, intrinsic motivation, was measured using two separate scales. The first was a six-item scale developed by Warr et al. (1979) (e.g. I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when I do this job well, the second was a four-item scale devised by Kuvaaas (2006, p.506) (e.g. The tasks that I do at work are enjoyable). An exploratory factor analysis conducted on both of these scales produced a single dimension, hence intrinsic motivation was measured with an amalgam of the two scales which comprised seven items after cross-loadings were deleted. The combined scale was reliable, achieving a Cronbach alpha of 0.85.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 represents the means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations for the variables under investigation in the study. As can be seen in this table, perceptions of short-term employees in relation to the variables investigated were generally positive, with mean scores ranging from 4.8 to 6.1. Particularly high mean scores were achieved for job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation which, for professional performing artists, is in line with expectations. Standard deviations were relatively low (0.7 to 1.2), indicating a high degree of consensus.

***INSERT TABLE 1 HERE***

Table 2 shows the results of a stepwise regression analysis, including only those independent variables (IVs) that made significant contributions to the variance in the dependent variable (DV). An inspection of the adjusted $R^2$ indicates three of the four IVs explained a substantial amount (58.4%) of the variance in the DV. Job Satisfaction was the largest contributor, explaining 52% of the variance, while Identification with Colleagues and Identification with Organisation and explained a further 5% and 3% of the variance, respectively.
As can be seen in Figure 1, Job Satisfaction was found to have the largest influence on intrinsic motivation, with a beta coefficient of 0.56 ($p < 0.01$). Identification with Organisation had a beta coefficient of 0.21 ($p = 0.04$) while Identification with Colleagues had a beta coefficient of 0.20 ($p = 0.03$). Affective Commitment did not have a significant relationship with Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta = 0.08; p = 0.48$).

DISCUSSION

Of the three predictor variables, job satisfaction was found to have the strongest causal relationship with the dependent variable, suggesting that the level of intrinsic motivation among short-term artistic employees is likely to increase if they perceive their jobs as satisfying. The managers of arts organisations, therefore, need to take steps to nurture positive perceptions of job satisfaction by ensuring that the roles of these individuals are clearly and unambiguously defined (Brown & Peterson, 1993), and that the tasks they are assigned are challenging and interesting. Strong positive relationships with supervisors, frequent feedback and good communication are also consistent with high levels of job satisfaction, therefore, managers should work towards fostering strong relationships with their short-term artistic personnel, perhaps through holding regular meetings, group feedback sessions and maintaining ongoing communication.

Managers should also ensure that factors such as such as pay and conditions are in line with the expectations of short-term staff, although they should bear in mind that external rewards can have a negative impact upon levels of intrinsic motivation in certain circumstances.
Identification with Organisation was also found to have significant and positive relationships with intrinsic motivation. Arts Managers, therefore, need to ensure that short-term artistic employees identify as strongly as possible with their organisation, as was suggested by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Managers should ensure that their organisations project a *distinctiveness*, providing artistic employees with clarity of purpose and a unique identity. They should aspire toward *prestige*; if they are recognised within the arts community as presenting works of a consistently high quality, artists are likely to identify with the organisation as their self-esteem is enhanced. Arts managers also need to be aware of their *competition*; employed in arts organisations that are able to differentiate themselves from competitors, particularly those involved in the same artform, artists will be able to clearly identify with the values and norms of their employer, and not be confused by those of other organisations. This is particularly pertinent in situations where artists are employed by more than one organisation at a time.

Identification with Colleagues was the third factor found in this study to be positively and significantly related to intrinsic motivation. This is in keeping with theory suggested by Van Knippenberg (D. Van Knippenberg, 2000), which holds that strong social identification can lead to high levels of motivation and task performance if: a) social identity is considered salient; and b) high performance is in the group’s best interests. Individual’s who identify strongly with a group of colleagues are more likely to adhere to group norms (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999), which is of particular relevance to short-term artists as they must rely on cues from their fellow musicians or cast members as to which behaviours are accepted by the group, not having the luxury of time to make their own judgements.

Given that short-term artistic employees, like any other other employee, will typically strive to achieve and maintain identification with their colleagues (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), arts
managers can nurture a strong cohesive group by acknowledging the value of the unique skills and attributes these individuals bring to the particular artistic project they are hired for and stressing their importance in the production process. This may not be a concern if the entire cast of players is comprised of short-term employees, as is often the case in smaller arts organisations, for example, most theatre and contemporary dance companies. However, in larger organisations such as orchestras, in which short-term employees have been hired specifically to augment a full-time ensemble for a specific undertaking, it is important for managers to create a culture that promotes social integration between full-time artists and their short-term counterparts, while minimising exclusionary behaviours. The inclusion of short-term staff in regular arts activities, such as cast parties and soirees that are frequently organised by foundations and/or 'friends' associations, would perhaps go some way towards achieving this.

While in earlier studies a positive, significant relationship has been found to exist between affective commitment and motivation (Mowday et al., 1979), this study did not arrive at the same conclusion. This is not entirely surprising as among the antecedents for affective commitment are such factors as the desire to remain a member of an organisation (Steers, 1977), provision for growth and security of tenure (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). As the study focused specifically on artistic personnel who have specifically chosen a protean career, characterised by casual or short-term engagements, these factors are neither required nor desired. This being the case, it could be contended that hypothesising a positive relationship between affective commitment and intrinsic motivation is spurious, perhaps even redundant.

It is important to note, though, that many artists are consistently re-engaged by the same organisation and it is not uncommon for an artist to have an association with a given organisation spanning a number of years while never having a contract exceeding 12 months duration at any single point in time. On this basis, testing the relationship between affective commitment and intrinsic motivation was considered a worthwhile exercise.
The study was not without its limitations, the major concern being the disappointing response rate of 12%. Although over 500 questionnaires were distributed Australia-wide, only 60 of these were returned and, while this was enough data to gain a sense of the relationships between the independent variables and intrinsic motivation and produced results that were reasonably in line with expectations, some caution needs to be exercised when interpreting the findings. A second limitation was that the art forms explored in the study only covered a finite number of arts organisations from specific sectors, hence results may not be generalised to other arts organisations, particularly those not involved in the theatre, opera, dance or orchestra sectors.

The potential for common method variance, can be a problem when conducting behavioural research using self-report data (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, as Schwab (2005, p.41) points out, constructs measuring the internal mental states of participants, as was the case in this study, can only be accurately measured by the participants themselves. Although measures were taken to reduce the effect of common method variance (i.e. negatively wording a number of questions), some statistical error due to common method variance may figure in the results. Future research should perhaps be wider in scope, with data collected from a number of sources so as to eliminate the potential for response bias.
References


Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

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<tr>
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<th>JobSat</th>
<th>ID (with org)</th>
<th>ID (with coll's)</th>
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<td>.41(**)</td>
<td>.52(**)</td>
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<td>0.97</td>
<td>.48(**)</td>
<td>.52(**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.48(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.17</td>
<td>.68(**)</td>
<td>.28(*)</td>
<td>.31(*)</td>
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<td>.72(**)</td>
<td>.57(**)</td>
<td>.42(**)</td>
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Table 2: Model Summary

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<th>Adj. R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Change Statistics</th>
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<td>.511</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>R Square Change</td>
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<td>ID (Org.)</td>
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<td>.584</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.03</td>
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</table>
Figure 1: Summary of Relationships

- Affective Commitment
- Identification with Colleagues
- Identification with Organisation
- Job Satisfaction

0.08 NS
0.20*
0.21*
0.56**

0.58

*p = < 0.05
**p = < 0.01
NS = Not Significant