

Motivating University Researchers

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This paper presents an empirical investigation into how universities approach the need and means for motivating university researchers through their management practices. The role of work motivation for this group deserves attention because pressures from outside and within the universities are said to have made university research less of a curiosity-driven activity and turned it more into ordinary work, with career opportunities and performance assessment connected with it. Interviews with research managers in the Business Administration discipline in The Netherlands have been analysed via the principles of a grounded theory approach. The analysis shows that the ways research managers deal with motivation issues cannot adequately be captured by how universities as employment systems define the typical core categories of work motivation theories, including goals, tasks, performance and competencies. A crucial role for understanding how motivation is — and is not — managed appears to lie in how individual and organizational understandings of work assessment, work processes and work context connect to the social mechanisms borrowed from the broader epistemic, discipline-specific communities outside the university.

Keywords: grounded theory approach; research management; university research; work motivation