

**THE MOTIVATIONAL POWER OF A PUBLIC SERVICE MISSION:
INFLUENCES ON ITS EFFECTIVENESS AMONG PUBLIC SECTOR
EMPLOYEES**

An Honors Thesis By,

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ABSTRACT

The literature on work motivation has argued that the public mission of an organization has the capacity to motivate individuals employed by these types of organizations. Nevertheless, there has been little work done that helps to clarify the process by which employees come to conceptualize an organization's mission and how this conceptualization will then be deemed motivating. In order to better understand this process, I conducted qualitative interviews with 10 informants at the University of Michigan. Findings reveal that two factors, subunit identity and professional position, impact the way the informants conceived of the University's mission. Furthermore, it was found that only certain informants reported gains in motivation from the conceived public service mission of the University. I discuss theoretical contributions to research on work motivation and public service motivation, as well as practical implications for public managers and organizations.

INTRODUCTION

[I am] motivated by the fact that we have a primary responsibility to our state of Michigan.

Member of the University of Michigan's central administration, December 2007

The University of Michigan was established in 1817 by an act of the territorial government of the State of Michigan. It has since occupied a space in the constitution of the State of Michigan as a public institution. More specifically, the Michigan constitution of 1963 holds that

The regents of the University of Michigan and their successors in office shall constitute a body corporate known as the Regents of the University of Michigan. [The] board shall have general supervision of its institution and the control and direction of all expenditures from the institution's funds.

With these words, the framers of Michigan's constitution gave the University a certain amount of constitutional autonomy. The board of regents, not the state legislature, is the governing body of the University. The regents are responsible for supervising the operations of the University and maintaining the integrity of its fiscal operations. Yet, insofar as the University is a public institution, the people of Michigan retain a certain amount of control through the election of members of the board in statewide elections.

Despite the existence of the board of regents, the University of Michigan occupies a unique position among the public agencies of the state of Michigan. While the legislature is charged with allocating public funds to the University, the regents and the

executive officers are generally separated from the everyday authority of the legislature. However, there is not universal agreement among all of the concerned parties as to how this relationship is actually supposed to work. In fact, there have been instances where state officials have attempted to compel the University to operate in specific ways or adopt certain policies. These attempts have largely failed, as the board of regents has continuously exerted its right to constitutional autonomy and separation from the control of the state legislature. Even though the University enjoys a great deal of independence from the control and influence of the state government, it still exists as a public institution that relies on a large sum of public money for its operation. As a result, University leaders have traditionally felt a responsibility to the people of the state of Michigan. Consider as evidence that in 1962 the faculty senate asserted that “the University has obligations to make available to the citizens of the state and nation that portion of its specialized knowledge which provides the necessary background for social decision, since it receives funds from... the state.” This statement reaffirmed the already-held institutional belief that the University was intimately connected with both the state and its people by act of the legislature of the state of Michigan.

In keeping this connection in mind, the University over the years has developed an institutional mission statement to guide its actions and decision-making processes.

The mission reads:

The mission of the University of Michigan is to serve the people of Michigan and the world through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future.

This formal mission statement conveys a strong commitment to the people of Michigan.

Public organizations and agencies, including the University of Michigan, provide crucial programming and services to the citizens of the United States. Many different kinds of organizations fall within the “public” category, including hospitals, police departments, social service agencies, and universities. By funding and creating these types of organizations and others, the federal, state and local governments have created millions of jobs that employ millions of workers. Yet of the millions of governmental employees in our country, large portions of them are there not because they wanted to work for a public organization, but because of a number of other reasons including compensation and lack of available other choices. In fact, many of the public jobs in America have little or no connection to the stated mission of the particular organization in which that job is housed. Consider, for example the custodian who is employed at the Department of State. While she may be an employee of the State Department, the custodian’s everyday work responsibilities do not obviously advance the mission of the department. Although these workers are employed by public organizations, they may have vastly different levels of knowledge and conceptions about the public mission of their organization than do workers whose jobs are more overtly connected with that mission.

Scholars have shown a relationship between knowledge of a public organization’s mission on the part of its employees and an increase in motivation (e.g., Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999). Scholars have also shown that increases in motivation can enhance productivity and happiness at work (e.g., Wright, 2004; Naff and Crum, 1999).

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the mission of a public organization to serve society in particular way may be motivating for some, but not all, of those employed by that organization. Moreover, variation among still other employees with regard to mission conception and mission salience may produce variation in the impact of a public service mission. Consequently, some employees may work harder and be more satisfied at work because of the public mission while others may not work harder and be more satisfied with their work because they lack an empowering knowledge of the mission.

However, little is known about just how these differences among public employees are produced. Public organizations cannot and do not exist as homogeneous entities. They are made up of individuals and subunits that contribute to the features of the overarching organization in many ways. An important part of an individual's set of identities within a public organization is his or her professional position. By professional position, I mean a category of job that exists throughout many different organizations while providing those who occupy it a means for understanding their work by opening up a network of influences that exist outside any one individual organization. Professional positions are embedded in their own incentive and reward structures that can transcend the framework created by the individual organizations. Therefore, professional positions present employees with a means to understand their work both by connecting them to others who occupy similar positions and by illustrating a reward system that is often unique to that position despite a potential divergence from that of the overarching organization. Is there something about the employee's professional position that affects whether or not he will conceive the mission of the university to be a commitment to

serving the public and whether or not he will find it motivating? For example, the university carpenter, whose job requires him to be far removed from the students who benefit from the university's education, may conceive of the mission differently from the dean of the liberal arts college whose job constantly requires him to engage with individuals outside of the university and the public mission.

Another possible source of variation among employees' conceptions of the mission of an organization may be the divergent subunit identities found throughout large organizations. Because of their size and complexity, public organizations are routinely divided into divisions and subunits. These divisions can be used to create groupings of employees who have similar responsibilities, levels of experience, interests, or geographic location. While these subunits remain a part of the overarching organization, in terms of identity they often diverge and create their own subunit identities. I define subunit identity as the characteristics that the employees of that subunit hold to be of a defining nature for the unit (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Even though organizational identity is often routinely meant to refer to the identity of the organization as a whole, complex organizations can give rise to multiple unit identities that may stand in opposition to the professed identity of the overarching organization. Consider a large public hospital in which the custodial department has failed to incorporate an engagement with the public service mission into its subunit identity. As a result, the custodians who work within the department may conceive of the mission of the hospital differently from a surgeon whose department fully embraces the public mission within its subunit identity.

It is important to note that organizational and subunit identities can be created by both a top down and a bottom up process. Organizational leaders may work to dictate the

values and characteristics they want incorporated into the identity of the organization, while employees throughout the organization may also exert pressure to form their own forms of identity. Consequently, employees grouped into subunits may create a subunit identity that they see as being the defining character of that particular subunit, even if that produced identity lacks important aspects of the overarching organizational identity. It is especially important to acknowledge that in a University setting many of the academic departments have long standing traditions of identity associated with the academic disciplines that they house. Accordingly, these academic disciplines encompass identities that are deeply engrained within the institutional history of the discipline. Resulting from this are discipline identities that have been developed over centuries, in some cases, which help define the type of identity the majority of people within that subunit subscribe to. Inside public organizations, subunits can possess identities that differ greatly in terms of the emphasis placed on the public service dimension of the organization, as compared to the overarching organizational identity. Accordingly, it is likely that these identities play both a moderating and facilitating role in the public mission's capacity to operate as a motivational tool. Nevertheless, little research has been done to explore how the identity of a particular unit can affect employees' knowledge and conception of the overarching organizational mission. Given that this knowledge and conception may have an important impact on employees' motivation, understanding the nature and source of intra-organizational differences in this area could be crucial for managers who seek to motivate their employees to engage with the public mission. Yet the research is still too unclear to readily understand what role unit identity plays in the capacity of the public mission to act as a motivator within public organizations.

To further our understanding of the relationships among organizational mission, professional position, individual unit identity, and work motivation, a study of a sample of workers employed within a wide variety of units at the University of Michigan was conducted. The aim was to better understand how each informant's professional position and unit identity influenced both their knowledge of and their specific conception of the University's public mission. It was hypothesized that professional position and unit identity would play both an important role in how employees would conceptualize of their organization's mission and whether or not the public mission would contribute positively to their work motivation. As expected, different unit identities and professional positions led to different conceptions of the University as a public entity, and with those conceptions came different levels of motivational force.

This research is important for both scholarly and practical reasons. First, the research was used to develop a model explaining how professional position and unit identity both facilitate and moderate the process by which the knowledge of the public mission affects an employee's work motivation. Coupled with further empirical study, this model may help both scholars and public managers better understand how the public mission of their organizations affects individual employees. Moreover, the model provides direction for future research that will seek to more fully explain why members of an organization hold different conceptions of an organization's mission and why these conceptions are differentially motivating. Next, practically speaking, public sector managers can employ the results to begin to tailor their use of the organization's mission as a motivational tool for different sets of employees. Public managers often resort to universal appeals to the public mission of the organization for each and every employee.

My study shows that a better approach is for managers to emphasize the public mission in interactions with employees located in units which have identities that incorporate the public mission. This method may better utilize the mission's motivational force because it seems that not every worker can find motivation from the mission. While employees may want to find the public mission motivating, their unit's identity may fail to incorporate the public mission, thus producing a barrier for the motivational force of the mission. With this knowledge, designing motivational pitches that are better tailored to the intended recipients may save time and resources. Moreover, if anything the study highlights the complexity surrounding the development of work motivation and the fact that "one size fits all" attempts to increase work motivation are destined to failure.

The research highlights the power that the reward systems of the varied professional positions within public organizations have to affect the ability of the public mission to remain motivating. The reward systems of some of the professional positions within the University's hierarchy have been fixed for many years. Nevertheless, it is worth considering amending these reward systems to provide better incentives for those employees who appreciate the public service mission of the University. Perhaps those employees who want to help serve the public but feel they cannot because of their professional position will be more inclined to do so if the reward system associated with their professional position better rewards it.

Last, the study presents a clear path for future research to follow by illuminating the potential importance of unit identity, conception of public mission, and professional position in the overall work motivation formulation. Clearly, more research is needed to better understand this complex relationship; however, this study has laid the theoretical

groundwork for future exploration. By understanding that the public mission's ability to motivate employees is affected by the employee's professional position, his unit's identity, and his own conception of the mission, future research can be developed to better understand these relationships. With the direction provided by this study, future studies can be sure to measure the conflicting forces of these three factors, with the hope that a more concrete assessment of the relative importance of each factor can be developed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the large body of scholarship that examines the importance of work motivation, little research has examined the relationship between an employee's conception of the organization's mission as a governmental organization and that employee's work motivation. Therefore, I will discuss three bodies of literature that begin to address this central question. First, the work motivation literature has developed a number of theories that point to the importance of motivation in employee satisfaction and productivity. This literature also offers a number of helpful insights as to how to design jobs in a way that will be most conducive to high levels of motivation. Nevertheless, this literature fails to effectively address how large and complex organizational environments can affect an individual's propensity to find motivation from the sources conventionally highlighted by researchers, including an identification with the organization's aims and goals (Knippenberg, 2000).

Next, I will examine the literature on work motivation in public organizations. This literature points to the existence of a special public service motivation that many

employees in these organizations possess; yet at the same time, this literature fails to effectively address how the specific structure of the organization can lead to different understandings of an organization's status as a governmental organization. While acknowledging the size and complexity of many public organizations, the literature does not attempt to explain how the differing subunit identities throughout the organization could affect the conceptions of the organization's mission and status. These differing conceptions may differentially affect the motivation of the organization's individual employees, yet this possibility has not been explored by the literature.

Finally, I will discuss organizational identity and how it affects the actions of those employed by that organization. I will point to the lack of work on differences in perceptions of organizational identity in subunits across organizations as a deficiency of the literature. Moreover, I highlight subunit identity as a prime candidate for the role of facilitator between work motivation and public mission. Below, I will discuss both the insights offered by these literatures and their failure to examine the effect employees' awareness of (1) their organization's status as a governmental organization and (2) their conception of the organization's mission has on their levels of work motivation.

Work Motivation

Work motivation has been described as the internal and external forces that serve as the catalyst for work behavior, and the force that helps to form the direction, intensity, and duration of this work behavior (Pinder, 1998, as cited in Ambrose and Kulik, 1999). While work motivation is only one of many factors that influence job performance, it serves a critical role in facilitating performance (Wright, 2004). One of the earliest

theories of work motivation, scientific management, contends that the workman desires and is motivated by, above everything else, high wages (Taylor, 1911). Subsequent research has shown that employers have generally turned to extrinsic rewards, such as higher wages and time off, to motivate their low-level employees (Gruenberg, 1980). While employees routinely claim that pay does not serve as a primary motivation, when it is tied to performance, pay serves as a very effective motivator (Rynes, Gerhart, and Minette, 2004). Despite this finding, empirical research has shown that other incentives and factors can contribute greatly to work motivation (Katzell and Thompson, 1990).

A number of theories have been developed to assist managers with increasing their employees' work motivation. It has been found, for example, that when individuals believe they can obtain an outcome that they want to achieve by engaging in a specified behavior, the probability that an individual will be motivated to engage in that behavior increases (Hackman and Lawler, 1971). Working from this idea, Hackman and Lawler hold that a job that (1) allows workers to develop a sense of personal responsibility for a meaningful portion of the work, (2) provides outcomes at work which are intrinsically meaningful and (3) provides feedback about employees' performance will provide workers with more motivation to work harder and more effectively (1971).

Based on Hackman and Lawler's theoretical approach, the job characteristics model of work motivation was developed to provide a practical application for the preceding work. In developing this model, Hackman and Oldham maintained that five characteristics of jobs can contribute positively or negatively to an employee's work motivation. Workers will be more likely to believe their work is meaningful if the design of the job encompasses (1) skill variety (the degree to which a number of different skills

must be used), (2) task identity (the ability to see a job completed from the beginning to the end), and (3) task significance (the degree to which the job has an impact on the lives of others) (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). If the job in question is high on these three factors, and (4) produces a sense of autonomy within the job and (5) the employee receives positive feedback about their contributions, then the “motivating potential score” of the job should be high (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). In fact, efforts to increase a job’s skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback significantly increased the intrinsic motivation of the people employed in that particular job (Orpen, 1979). While the model has been criticized, after much empirical study, the job characteristics model has been shown to be valid (Fried and Ferris, 1987).

In extending the job characteristics model, it has been argued that employees who gain intrinsic motivation from challenging, autonomous jobs in which they can gain feedback will be likely to attempt to create such a job by using the available environmental conditions (Arnold and House, 1980). Yet, it is not understood how employees with little knowledge of their environment are able to perform such an action. It is known that employees who experience different work environment experiences will evaluate their work situations differently, which will lead to divergent attitudes and levels of motivation (Newman, 1975). Yet the literature is silent on whether or not an individual’s knowledge of the overall legal status of the University and their awareness and engagement with the public mission will affect his motivation in a different way from someone located in a different unit within the same organization that is not aware of the public mission.

Next, it has been found that performance and motivation are affected by the “fit” of the individual’s personality with the environment they find themselves in (Pervin, 1968). While this approach acknowledges the potential effect environment can have on different individuals’ levels of motivation, it fails to consider that as a result of their massive size and complexity, some organizations have many different environments that their employees could be situated in. It is argued that behavior, and by extension motivation, is a function of the relationship between an individual and his environment (Pervin, 1968). Nevertheless, scholars have failed to ask how differing environments within the same organization will affect the salience for employees of a prime potential motivator. Indeed, one of the main shortcomings of the motivation literature has been its focus on the individual at the expense of attention to the overarching structure of the organization as a strong determinant of work motivation (Shamir, 1991).

Consequently, it has been argued that motivation results from the interaction between the characteristics of the job situation and the needs of the individual (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977). Indeed, expectancy theory argues that people will be motivated when the characteristics of their job allow them to expect to perform well, a need that many individuals highly value (Katzell and Thompson, 1990). It has been proposed that workers should be permitted to craft their job’s relational opportunities in order to satisfy the important need for high-quality relationships and interactions at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). It is clear that scholars have recognized the importance of workers’ needs; however, the literature remains largely silent on how a complex organization is able to individually tailor the message it sends to its employees about the status and mission of the organization. One must note that awareness of the public mission of an

organization can increase motivation, as detailed in later sections of this literature review. The difficult task of working to satisfy the employees' need for task significance and other needs is compounded further by the fact that the employees are located throughout complex organizations in a number of different units with different purposes and goals.

Although the literature is rife with theories as to how individuals find motivation in their work, it lacks a clear attempt at explaining how individuals located in different divisions within the same organization are able to take a common factor such as the mission or public/private status of the organization and use that as a motivator. It is clear that this gap in the literature has left us without a clear understanding of how leaders of large organizations can effectively motivate employees located in vastly different subunits using the conventional methods discussed above.

Work Motivation in Public Sector Organizations

Public sector organizations operate under different conditions from private organizations. Employees within these organizations face high levels of public scrutiny because of the nature of their work, which requires them to be accountable to the media, legislative bodies, and others. As a consequence, they are expected to work hard while generally receiving low levels of pecuniary motivation (Rainey, Backoff, and Levine, 1976). As a result of this criticism, many of our society's most talented individuals have chosen to eschew the public sector for the private sector, where a larger income and less public scrutiny is more routine (Holzer and Rabin, 1987). Yet government organizations still employ hundreds of thousands of people throughout the entire country.

One explanation for this phenomenon is that some individuals in our society are particularly benevolent and patriotic (Perry and Wise, 1990). Accordingly, some are predisposed to have a high level of public service motivation, that is, a strong desire to serve the public interest, with a strong sense of loyalty to the government and a hope for equality among their fellow citizens in terms of access to quality services and programs (Perry & and Wise, 1990). Empirical research has shown that those who find themselves employed in the public sector value “meaningful public service” as a motivator more than those located in the private sector (Rainey, 1982). Moreover, it has been shown that those employed in the public sector are more likely to be motivated by the intrinsic reward of the feeling that their work is important to society, while private sector employees place more importance on extrinsic factors such as higher pay and shorter hours (Houston, 2000).

Yet the knowledge of the existence of a public service motivation does little to help us understand what kinds of individuals possess this motivation and why. Additional scholarship has shown that public service motivation is greater in highly educated females than in people with lower levels of education and males (Bright, 2005). Yet the literature is unclear as to exactly what those located within public organizations actually value most about their jobs. While some studies claim that those with high levels of public service motivation are likely to value “worthwhile service to society” more than those with low levels of public service motivation located in private sector jobs, this is not always the case (Jurkiewicz, Massey and Brown, 1998). Consequently, there are doubts as to whether there are consistently large internal motivational

differences between those located in public sector jobs and those located in private sector jobs (Jurkiewicz, Massey and Brown, 1998).

For this reason, a number of new proposals have led some public managers to begin to use methods to motivate their employees other than traditional appeals to their intrinsic need for meaningful public service. One model, pay-for-performance, stresses monetary incentives for public employees who perform at high levels. This model has been met with some level of success in the agencies that have adopted it (Ingraham, 1993). Even though many employees will report that pay is not an important motivator as compared to other factors, the research shows that it is in fact one of the most important motivators for a large majority of the working population (Rynes, Gerhart and Minette, 2004).

Despite the apparent discrepancies in the literature regarding public service motivation, those who score high on measures of public service motivation work harder, are happier at work, and intend to stay with the government longer than those with low scores (Naff and Crum, 1999). Nevertheless, this finding does little to help us understand which employees, located in which subunits are more predisposed to benefit motivationally from an engagement with the public mission of the organization. It is known that the characteristics of a public sector job—that is, what the employee does on an everyday basis—and the work environment of the job—that is, who the employees interacts with on the job—can affect motivation in important ways (Perry and Porter, 1982).

Nonetheless, we know little about how individual employees are affected by their knowledge of the organization's status as a governmental organization. Remember it is

hypothesized that employees who occupy different units may view the mission of an organization differently. This is argued because unit identity varies from unit to unit and with that variation comes different attitudes and beliefs about the mission. Yet, a review of the literature found surprisingly little work on the effect that an individual's position in an organizational structure has on his or her attitudes and behaviors (James and Jones, 1976). With such little available research, it is impossible to know how individuals' levels of public service motivation are affected by their organization's structure. While the attraction-selection framework claims that employees' personal attributes are the main mediator between organizational structure and affected motivation (Oldham and Hackman, 1981), this model does little to explain how organizational factors in public organizations can affect employees differently.

It must be noted that some research has attempted to explain the peculiarities of work motivation in public organizations. It has been argued that since governmental managers often lack the high levels of organizational commitment that private managers exhibit, their motivation is adversely affected (Buchanan, 1974). Moreover, contrary to the assumption that public managers would be more involved and immersed in their jobs than their private counterparts, empirical research supports just the opposite (Buchanan, 1975). Clearly public sector employees' motivational levels and other behaviors are being affected in some way by the features of their organizations, as displayed by the above research, yet the explanations for these differences from private sector employees are few and underdeveloped.

One explanation advanced in the literature can be viewed from both the structural and personal contexts. Public organizations are often characterized as facilitating weak

connections between the employees and the organizational outcomes and successes, which could lead to low levels of motivation and commitment (Perry & Porter, 1982). Surprisingly, we know little about how the variation in jobs throughout a public organization can affect this connection between work and outcomes. Feedback regarding the importance of one's work, central to motivational levels as explained by the work redesign model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), is perceived as lacking by many governmental employees (Wright and Davis, 2003). Unfortunately, the literature does not explore the structural reasons for this perceived feedback deficiency.

Perhaps an explanation for this feedback deficiency could be that on the whole, many of a governmental organization's employees are located within jobs that neither require nor encourage a complete understanding of the organization's status as government or its goals and successes. It is possible that this situation is inherent to the structure of a large governmental organization, in which many of its employees' daily work goals have nothing to do with the overall mission of the organization in which they work. In fact, research confirms that public organizations are filled with workers with a vast number of daily work goals, some which include the central mission of the organization and others to which that mission is less salient (Perry and Porter, 1982).

For the attainment of a goal to have a positive motivational effect, the worker must be fully committed to the goal (Ambrose and Kulik, 1999). More specifically, the highest levels of performance can be expected from workers who are the most committed to a difficult goal (Tubbs, 1993). Nonetheless, a large portion of the employees within a public organization may feel little connection either to the organization's status as a unit of government or to its goals. Accordingly, the difficulty of the goals and the

motivational boost expected from achieving them could be lost on a substantial portion of public sector employees. Regrettably, the literature does not develop a comprehensive examination of the possibility of a disconnect between public sector employees and the goals of their organizations.

It is recognized that public organizations stress the importance of their missions frequently on their websites and in public statements by their leaders. Yet it is not known just how completely all the employees of these public organizations understand the importance of the mission. To be sure, many governmental employees, insofar as they are committed to public service, are motivated to contribute positively to the mission of their agency (Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999). Nevertheless, many of the employees located in public organizations lack both the awareness and the ability to contribute in a meaningful way to the fulfillment of the organization's mission. This could be a result of the characteristics of these individuals' jobs or a reliance on other factors for motivation. Regardless of the reason, as a result of the complexity and the differing purposes of the different units located within governmental organizations, the potential motivating value of a demanding public service mission is lost on a large number of the employees.

Clearly the prevailing notion in the literature is that a public service motivation exists as an important part of many public sector employees' overall work motivation. However, a clear understanding of how this public service motivation is affected by individual employees' knowledge of their organization's mission and actual status as units of government is lacking. Moreover, the differences between public sector workers and private sector workers on such issues as organizational commitment and identification with organizational goals have not been pursued from the angle of

individual workers' knowledge of mission and status. For these reasons, additional work needs to be done to better understand how knowledge of status and mission can affect public service motivation. Furthermore, the scholarship must begin to attempt to explain how any such motivation can be found in those employees with low levels of knowledge of public status and mission.

Organizational Identity

Organizations possess identities that their members believe to be its central and defining character (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Organizational issues are the events, developments, attitudes, and trends that are perceived as having some sort of effect on the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Consequently, organizational identity compels individuals within the organization to participate in, and receive satisfaction from behaviors associated with this identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) in addressing organizational issues. Moreover, it is known that an organization's identity helps form the organizational members' conceptualizations of and responses to arising issues (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). As a result, an organization's identity plays a key role in how its members respond to both everyday and non-routine organizational issues.

While large public organizations often employ thousands of individuals, there can be stark differences between the identities of those located within the organization and the organization itself. In fact, some claim that organizational identity can be and is often fundamentally different from the collective identity of those located within the organization (Whetten, 2006). One school of thought surrounding organizational identity claims that identity is fully formulated by organizational leaders without much input from

individuals throughout the organization (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). On the other hand, some argue that organizational identity is created by the shared beliefs of the individuals within the organization that attempt to understand the central features and purposes of an organization (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Stemming from these competing explanations, a lack of certainty as to the source of organizational identity exists.

Accordingly, the identity of an organization may or may not fully align with the identities of the each individual worker and or each individual unit of the organization. In fact, instances of “identity threats” can occur when events threaten individual conceptions of the long-held organizational identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Nevertheless, little work has been done regarding differences in the conceptions of organizational identity across sub-units located within the organization. As a consequence, the literature lacks the ability to effectively argue how the competing identities of sub-units contribute towards the overall identity of the organization and the fight against identity threats. While some contend that organizational identity is formed by a hybrid of an individual’s external image of self and an organization’s culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2002), it is not fully understood how individual workers and units contribute to the overall identity of the organization.

Nonetheless, organizational members care about the identity of the organizations they work for. Organizational members make judgments regarding the actions of their organization because outsiders use these actions to assess the character of the organization and those located within it (Alvesson, 1990). Thus, employees are motivated to behave in a way that will repair the issues that are damaging to their organization’s image (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Yet, this does not answer the question of

whether or not individuals will be motivated to work towards fulfilling the organization's identity if their unit's identity diverges from that of the overall one.

As a result of this unanswered question, other scholars have attempted to understand the motivational value of the organization's identity as a whole. It is believed that individuals are motivated to direct organizational action in a way that is consistent with what they believe the organization to be (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). However, this falls short of explaining how an individual will cope with a disparity between the overarching organizational identity and the identity of their subunit. Perhaps the differences in subunit identity across the organization can contribute to the different conceptions and knowledge levels of the organization's mission and purpose throughout the organization's workforce of employees.

As an extension, it is possible that the differences between subunit identity and the overall organizational identity can influence whether or not that identity can serve as a motivational factor for those located in the divergent units. In any case, organizational identities, both at the most senior level and throughout the entire organization, struggle to find supporters among the workforce (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Remember that even managerial conceptions of the organizational identity are not always accepted by the individuals throughout the organization (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). It is important to acknowledge that empirical research has shown that top leaders of public organizations are not always able to dictate culture to all sub-groups of the organization (Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines, 1991). While organizational culture differs from organizational identity slightly, these results point to the fact that management is not always able to successfully dictate their policies to every segment of the organization. All in all, more

research needs to be done to better understand how individual units can diverge from the overall identity because, in fact, one identity does not encompass entire public organizations.

It is known that organizational identity is able to affect individual employee's motivation. Yet, it is not known how the identities of the different units throughout the organization can influence the motivation of their workers when said identities diverge from the overarching organization's identity. Moreover, it is not understood whether or not differences between the overarching organization's identity and the sub units' identities affect individual employees' abilities to be motivated by the mission. Furthermore, little work has been done to understand how sub-unit identity affects the overall organizational identity. As a consequence, our understanding of the ability of the sub-unit identity to affect work motivation is severely limited. More work needs to be done before we are able to assert with certainty that the subunits' identities are responsible for the different sets of workers having different conceptions of the mission and its motivational power.

Despite this, we do know that the official organizational culture, and by extension, identity can be modified by groups of employees. In most cases, the official organizational culture is dictated to the organization by the top management of the organization (Brown, 1978). Departmental groupings are known to be able to produce sub-cultures that either exist in opposition to the official organizational culture or move in parallel directions (Jermier, Slocum, Fry and Gaines, 1991). Even with this information, we still do not know what effect these differences among departments have on the motivational capabilities of the official culture. For the answers to this and other

important gaps in the literature, further research is needed to better understand just how these influences affect motivation.

METHODS

Ten informants at the University of Michigan were interviewed over approximately a two-month period. The informants were sampled from a large cross-section of the University. Administrators from the central administration and the college of LSA and the Business School were among the sample. Additionally, both junior and senior faculty members from a wide variety of departments across campus were interviewed. These informants were chosen in order to encompass a wide variety of departmental identities in the study.

The informants were recruited using a variety of methods. I utilized personal relationships developed over the course of my career at Michigan to gain access to some of the higher-level administrators who participated in the study. As for the faculty participants, they were recruited based on prior interactions with me or with my thesis advisor, Dr. Victoria Johnson.

By interviewing administrators and faculty I was able to analyze the statements of people with vastly different conceptions and levels of knowledge surrounding the University's public mission. This was an important aspect of the study design because the entire theoretical model centers on the idea that knowledge and conception of mission differs according to one's subunit and professional position.

Each of the informants was asked the same set of questions, which aimed to produce an unbiased, unprimed representation of their understanding of their own work

motivation. I asked them what factors motivated them most at work, if they would feel differently about their work in a number of different situations, and how their knowledge of the University's status as a governmental organization affected their work motivation. (See Appendix 1.) Their answers to these questions were used to develop a coding scheme that highlighted their differences in work motivation and conception of public mission and status. The interviews were analyzed by two separate coders to increase the reliability of the process.

Coding for Work Motivation

The process for coding work motivation in the study considered three dimensions. The first dimension dealt with an internal energy that influences employees' behaviors and attitudes at work. Examples include "fire in the belly" and "I love what I do." This dimension was designed to encompass reported motivators that do not exist in reality as a tangible object or factor. By utilizing this dimension, the coding scheme was able to pick up on a number of internal motivators that would have been left out had it not be included. The next dimension examined for was positive motivators that the informants perceived in their work environment. Examples included pay, the public mission to serve the state of Michigan, complexity, fun, etc. The last dimension considered were negative motivators that the informants perceived in their work environment. Examples included deadlines, public mission, and the forced withholding of seats for in-state students. It is important to note that the negative motivator dimension was coded with the intention of including only those factors that the informants considered to be demotivating at work.

TABLE 1

Factors Affecting Self- Reported Work Motivation

| Factor | Explanation | Illustrations |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Internal energy | Intrinsic, non-tangible factors reported by informants as motivating them at work. | <p>“You have to have a fire in the bell to do this, and the day that you don’t have the fire in the belly anymore is the day you have... you give it up.” (Senior Biology Professor)</p> <p>“I think one factor that motivates me on an everyday basis is just an intrinsic drive to make my organization better because I think...that commitment comes from believing that I’m doing something important...” (Business School Dean)</p> |
| Positive motivators | Tangible factors that increase an informant’s work motivation. | <p>“I spend more time obviously thinking about the fact that we have a mission to serve a certain public. But that...I think it’s fine, I think it’s actually a positive factor for me” (Member, LSA Dean’s Office)</p> <p>“I get paid very well and I’m very happy about my salary...” (Member, Business School Dean’s Office)</p> |
| Negative motivators | Tangible factors that decrease an informant’s work motivation. | <p>“Because we’re part of this university, and it’s a public university, and the government has, you know, say, they have the right to make this claim on us... So its unfortunate from a self-</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | <p>interested point-of-view.” (Member, Business School Dean’s Office)</p> <p>“That the president should decide what the university will be doing... the motivation to build the university and to work for the university is much reduced.” (Senior Biology Professor)</p> |
|--|--|--|

Coding for Mission/Status of the University

In order to understand how each informant conceptualizes the University’s status and mission the interviews were coded with four dimensions in mind. First, any mention of career advancement was considered. Examples include tenure, promotion, prestige, etc. Second, any mention of the state-oriented public mission was noted. Examples include “a quality public education for Michigan students” and helping Michigan with economic development. Third, mentions of the University as a part of the government were considered in the analysis. Examples included the fact that the regents are elected, that the university is tax payer supported, and that the citizens of Michigan are constituents of the University. Lastly, any mention of the University’s work benefiting society as a whole was noted. Examples included quality education, jobs, and creating knowledge.

The last category was included to distinguish between factors unique to a public institution like the University of Michigan and private universities. This distinction is important because the study is interested not in the contributions to society any university can produce, but instead, is focused on contributions derived from the public nature and

mission of Michigan. Accordingly, the “state oriented public mission” category was used to gather mentions of a conception of the University’s mission that centers on service to the state of Michigan, its citizens, and its development. Conversely, the “benefiting society as a whole” category was created to catch mentions of the University’s role in producing benefits on a larger scale.

Moreover, it was important to include the career advancement category in this part of the coding because we hypothesized that those who conceptualized the University’s purpose in this way would be most unlikely to also hold that a main purpose of the University was to serve the public. Without the career advancement category, a number of important conceptualizations would have been lost, particularly among the junior faculty members who routinely expressed their view that the University, at this point in their careers, stands mainly as a vehicle for their own career advancement. To be sure, it is possible that all of the informants think about career advancement, yet only a select few mentioned it as one of the primary purposes of the University.

TABLE 2

Self-Reported Conceptualizations of the Mission and Status of the University

| Conceptualization | Explanation | Illustration |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Career advancement | Instances when informants believe the primary purpose of the University is to advance their own individual careers. | <p>“My own success because I am still an assistant professor, so I need to get up.” (Junior Astronomy Professor)</p> <p>“This tenure review...and the one way to do that is.. the chief way to do that is through research and publications” (Junior Ford School of Public Policy Professor)</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>State-oriented public mission</p> | <p>Instances when informants believe the primary purpose of the University is to contribute positively to the State of Michigan.</p> | <p>“I think we have a huge economic development role to play in the state of Michigan” (University of Michigan Central Administrator)</p> <p>“I think that related to the fact that we are a public institution... to believe in the idea that... education lifting up people, that they’ll rise from one’s social class and hopefully making it to another over the long haul... so I do think the public mission figures into it” (Member, LSA Dean’s Office)</p> |
| <p>University as a public agency in Michigan</p> | <p>Instances when informants acknowledge and detail their own understanding of the University’s legal status as a public entity in the State of Michigan.</p> | <p>“Here in Michigan, the regents are an independent branch of government, they’re the fourth branch of government.” (Senior Biology Professor)</p> <p>“So you really can’t afford to forget that, you’re a public institution because you’re so connected to the outcomes of public decision making” (University of Michigan Central Administrator)</p> |
| <p>Benefiting society</p> | <p>Instances when informants believe the primary purpose of the University is to produce benefits for society as a whole, not limited just to the people of the state of Michigan.</p> | <p>“Giving back some of the knowledge that I’ve learned” (Junior Astronomy Professor)</p> <p>“The love of creating new knowledge... disseminating that knowledge” (Member, Business School Dean’s office)</p> |

Coding for Subunit Identity

To make inferences regarding the identities of the various units of the informants in the study, the websites of these units were consulted. It must be noted that a unit's website is but one of a number of expressions of its identity and is not necessarily the sole determining factor of perceived unit identity for those within the unit. However, the website does represent an official statement by the leaders of that unit. Thus, the unit websites were used as a proxy for developing at least a sense of what the unit's publicly declared identity is comprised of. The process of examining the websites was conducted with three important dimensions guiding the analysis. The first dimension centered on any mentions of the public service mission of the unit/university. Examples included outreach to Michigan public officials, outreach to Michigan students, and protecting our democracy. The next dimension that was considered during the analysis of the unit websites was any mention of the unit's production of knowledge mission. Examples of this dimension included research to solve diseases and to improve our understanding of the universe. Lastly, any mention of a unit's mission to develop its faculty's careers was noted. Examples of this dimension included research nurturance and the prestigious national reputation of the department for faculty recruitment.

RESULTS

What Motivates People at Work?

The sample of employees at the University of Michigan were asked questions that were designed to elicit an unbiased representation of the kinds of factors that motivate them at work. After analyzing the data, it was clear that the informants repeatedly

referenced aspects of the job that could be categorized into three different overarching categories of motivational tools.

Extrinsic Rewards

Extrinsic motivation is produced by factors that exist outside of any one individual (Brehm, Kassin and Fein, 2005). During the interviews the informants routinely pointed towards the extrinsic rewards and incentives that their jobs provided them as being motivating. First, some of the informants listed the monetary incentives associated with their jobs as a motivating factor. Consider the MCD Biology professor, who finds motivation from his job's "stable salary." Another informant, a member of the Business School Dean's office, when asked how she finds herself motivated at work, responded, "I get paid well." Responses such as these represent the clear motivational qualities that some of the informants assigned to the monetary incentives that the University provides its employees with in exchange for their services.

Next, a number of the informants listed the prestige associated with their jobs at the University as a factor that motivates them to give it their all at work. For example, a member of the LSA Dean's office stated, "It's very motivating to be involved in administering a university which is so highly ranked." For this administrator, the prestige of the University's high rankings in national polls provided that additional dose of motivation he needed to go the extra length for the University. Additionally, a central administrator remarked that since "the University of Michigan is a terrific institution," she could garner motivation from its reputation. These examples demonstrate that a number of the informants experience the prestige associated with their jobs as motivating.

Lastly, the opportunity to teach and do research functioned as an important extrinsic motivator for a number of the informants. One astronomy professor remarked that she found motivation in the process of “making sure students are having a good experience and learning something.” In the same way, the MCD Biology professor remarked that he “love[s] to teach... [and]... to do research.” Since some of the informants’ jobs allowed them to teach and research, they were able to draw motivation from this job characteristic if they found such activities motivating.

Intrinsic Rewards

Intrinsic motivation comes from factors that exist solely inside a person (Brehm, Kassin and Fein, 2005). When the informants were asked about which factors help to increase their motivation at work, a substantial portion of them mentioned at least some form of intrinsic aspect unique to their jobs. First, a number of informants pointed to their allegiance to the institution as an intrinsic motivational tool. One member of the Business School Dean’s office stated that she had an “intrinsic drive to make my organization better because I think I have a strong commitment with this organization.” A central administrator held that since she “was a graduate from Michigan” she was intrinsically motivated to make it better. These examples represent a larger section of the sample that mentioned an intrinsic motivation stemming from their commitment to the University.

Finally, a group of the informants alluded to the fact that they derived intrinsic motivation from the internal satisfaction they received from the complexity of their jobs. A central administrator mentioned that she had “a lot of internal motivation to come here

and work. I like the complexity of the job.” Another example of this dimension presented itself when an EE Biology professor stated that he was motivated by the fact that “scientists find out new [complex] things and tells people about them.”

Public Service

A portion of the informants, when asked about the motivational features of their jobs, pointed to the public service aspects of their work. In responding to a question about the University’s constitutional status as a public university, a member of the LSA Dean’s office stated that “we have a mission to serve a certain public... it’s actually a positive [motivational] factor for me.” To further illustrate, a central administrator remarked, when asked the same question as the LSA Dean, that she is “motivated by the fact that we have a primary responsibility to our state of Michigan.” These informants counted the ability to positively affect the people of the state of Michigan as a motivating feature of their jobs. Other employees held that providing a public education for students was a particularly motivating aspect of their jobs. An EE Biology professor proclaimed that, “providing the uncommon education for the common man... is a wonderful thing to aspire to” and that this was a motivating aspect of his work. A central administrator alluded to the role the University plays in influencing secondary education as a motivating factor for her.

Varying Conceptions of the University’s Status and Mission

Since I wanted to explore the connection between ways of thinking about the public mission, on the one hand, and work motivation on the other, I asked questions

designed to elicit responses from the informants that would help me better understand how they conceived of the mission and legal status of the University. Analysis of the informants' responses showed four distinct categories of conceptions emerging from the data, suggesting important differences among how informants conceive of the University's legal status and mission. To be sure, I do not mean to imply that none of the informants fell into more than one category; in fact, this happened on more than one occasion. I will discuss these trends in greater detail after I have described the four categories that emerged from the data analysis. In what follows, I will provide details of the four categories of conceptions and give examples that illustrate the conceptions.

Career Advancement

A subset of the sampled employees viewed the University's mission primarily in terms of their own career advancement. In other words, these informants seemed to answer my questions in ways that suggested that the University's primary purpose was to be a vehicle for them to pursue their career goals. An assistant professor in the astronomy department remarked that her time spent at the University is really about her "own success because [she] is still an assistant professor so [she] need[s] to get up." Furthermore, an assistant professor in the Ford School of Public Policy repeatedly returned to his upcoming tenure review as the primary focus of his effort at work. Both employees represent the idea that the University exists for the informant to increase their standing or career trajectory by existing within the framework provided by their job in the organization.

State-Oriented Public Mission

When asked about the University's legal status as a public institution, several informants went on to describe the University's mission primarily in terms of serving the state of Michigan. This was an important dimension for a number of the informants, who repeatedly described the University's mission as intricately connected with the state of Michigan and its citizens. This dimension, as expressed by some of the informants, is important because it represents an important part of the University's official mission statement. Nevertheless, not every informant spoke about the state-oriented public mission when interviewed. In fact, only a select grouping of informants spoke of this part of the mission.¹ Consider the central administrator who stated that the University's mission is "a responsibility to educate the high school graduates in Michigan... we also have a responsibility to help make sure that the schools in Michigan are high quality... I think we have a huge economic development role to play in the state of Michigan..." She went on to describe all of the services that the University provides to the people of the state and how integral these services are to its mission. In the same way, a member of the LSA Dean's office held "that our job [and mission] is to serve all of the people of the state." Clearly for these informants and a number of others, the state-oriented public mission represents an important part of their conceptualization of the University's purpose.

¹ Reasons for this finding will be analyzed in the discussion portion of the paper.

The University as a Public Agency

When asked about the legal, constitutional status of the University of Michigan, the informants provided a varied set of responses. Some believed I meant the status associated with the prestige of the University, while others thought I meant the University's status as an institution of higher education. However, most of the informants were able to detail their conception of the University as some form of public agency in the state of Michigan, as prescribed by the state's constitution. Although it is acknowledged that the University is arguably largely independent from any other part of the government in the state, it still accepts public money and remains a constitutionally created entity. For this reason, I wanted to better understand how the informants conceive of the University's legal status. On one hand, some of the informants repeatedly emphasized the University's fairly autonomous relationship with the state. Consider the assistant professor in the Ford School of Public policy who said, "I think of [Michigan] as being a more autonomous public institution and it's sort of in some ways state owned in name only..." On the other hand, some of the informants thought of the University's status as a public institution in a stronger way, including the central administrator who remarked, "the whole environment in which the [university operates] is where the publicness gets exposed... so you really can't afford to forget that you're a public institution because you are so connected to the outcomes of public decision making." Obviously, the informants provided a wide range of responses when asked about the legal status of the University of Michigan. Nonetheless, a grouping of the informants did convey a detailed understanding of the intricacies of the University's status as a public institution.

Benefiting Society as a Whole

I wanted to be able to distinguish between those who understood the mission of the University to center primarily on serving the people of the state of Michigan and those who believed the mission to be more about producing benefits for all of society. Therefore, I took note of when an informant spoke of the mission in terms of producing benefits for society in general as opposed to producing benefits that are intended to benefit the state of Michigan first and foremost. The University of Michigan was established by an act of the government of the state of Michigan, and it receives a large portion of its funding from the tax payers of Michigan. Accordingly, a distinction must be drawn between a mission of producing benefits for Michigan, on the one hand, and a mission of producing benefits for society, on the other. Among those informants who spoke of the University's mission in terms of producing benefits for society was the MCD Biology professor who, when asked about the mission of the University remarked, "I would like to think that somewhere among the three, four thousand students who passed through [my course on AIDS], I will have saved a life or two." Additionally, an assistant professor in the department of astronomy suggested that the University exists in part to help her in "giving back some of the knowledge I've learned and the skills I've developed..." For these informants and others, the University's mission was one of producing value for society as a whole, not just for the people of the state of Michigan.

Analyzing Subunit Identity

What is Subunit Identity?

Consider a large public hospital that is organized into numerous different divisions and subunits. These subunits might include, among others, emergency medicine, surgery, the security department, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff. The leaders of the entire hospital will likely have decided which features of the organization they believe should constitute its identity. Therefore, they may have developed a version of its organizational identity, the characteristics of the hospital that they believe are central to its character and success, through a top-down approach. At the same time, however, members of each of the subunits likely also contributed to the formation of subunit identities that may emphasize characteristics of that subunit that differ from those emphasized in the leadership's understanding of the hospital's overarching identity. For instance, the leaders of the hospital may have articulated a mission that emphasizes the hospital's commitment to keeping the local community's residents healthy, but members of the custodial department could have generated a subunit identity that centers on the value of cleanliness rather than the public service dimension of the greater organizational identity. Thus differences between subunit identity and organizational identity can result from a subunit that serves a purpose that differs from that of the organization's primary function. When this occurs, members of the subunit can, and often do, devise a subunit identity that coincides with their view of the key characteristics of their unit.

Subunit Identity at the University of Michigan

In the case of a large, complex, public university like Michigan, an extremely large number of subunits have been created to better allocate the resources and services of the University. On the academic side of the University, these subunits include 19 schools and colleges and countless academic departments, centers, and institutes. On the operational side of the University, countless subunits have been created to provide such services as custodial, law-enforcement, maintenance, and construction among others. These subunits, while a part of the University, exist as independent centers that provide both a unit for producing services and a location for employment. Although all subunits of the University must exist within the operational and institutional framework of the University, they are given the ability to determine how they will operate in order to achieve the tasks that have been assigned to them.

Consequently, I wanted to understand how the informants thought about the identities of their subunits. Subunits are expected to maintain a baseline level of consistency with the ideals set forth by the central administration of the University. Yet it is possible that the employees located throughout the various subunits may differ in the conceptions of their unit's identity, despite directives and suggestions from the University. Moreover, some subunits may have nothing to do with the University's identity as a public institution of higher education. A situation like this could be a result of the primary purposes of such subunits, in which they are expected to provide services that do not advance the educational mission of the University. An example of such a situation could be the University's grounds department, which works to keep the grounds tidy and attractive. Clearly the grounds department's purpose is not to advance the

educational mission of the University. It was hypothesized that in such subunits, employees would produce a subunit identity that differs from that of the University. Moreover, it was believed that informants located within subunits that lacked a clear public service dimension to its identity would lack this conception of the University's mission.

For this reason, I surveyed the websites of the informants' subunits to better understand how the subunits defined their identities in a public forum.² I found that many of these websites did not contain any mention of the public service mission within their own mission statements. For example, the department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, in their mission statement, state that

the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology embraces education and research on all aspects of biodiversity, including the history of life on earth, the evolutionary mechanisms that generate diversity, the ecological context in which all life has evolved, and the consequences of interactions among organisms, including humans.

This statement is devoid of any mention of a devotion to public service within the state of Michigan or in greater society.

Another example of a subunit that lacked any mention of a devotion to engaging in the public service mission of the University was the Ross School of Business. In their promotional material for prospective students, the school states that "graduates of the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan are leaders in thought

² While identities are the joint product of formal and informal action from both organizational leaders and workers, the websites of the informants' units were a proxy meant to capture at least one version of the subunit identity. A more comprehensive investigation of units' identities would have been beyond the scope of the investigation

and action.” While the statement alludes to the fact that a dimension of the Business School’s proclaimed identity is leadership, no specifics are provided as to what kinds of leadership fulfills this dimension. Is it leadership in hostile corporate takeovers? Or perhaps leadership in non-profit management? Both are among the possibilities, but because the statement is ambiguous, the Business School lacks a clear public service content in their stated mission.

Within the sample of informants’ websites, there were several that did include mentions of public service in their statements of mission and descriptions of their activities. An example of a subunit identity that encompasses this dimension is the Ford School of Public Policy, which reads:

Our mission, as a school, is to offer outstanding education for leadership in public policy analysis and public management and to excel in social science research that illuminates public policy issues and promotes better public policy... the research carried out by our faculty – covering an extensive array of policy topics – enriches the education we provide and guides our direct contributions to public service.

Clearly, this mission statement reveals a strong alignment with the public service mission of the university.

An additional example of a subunit with an identity that contains a public service dimension is the College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts, whose website reads:

LSA exists and flourishes within the rich intellectual milieu of a premier research university. Here, the frontiers of science are explored and tested. New understandings of national policy and world economics are formulated. The enduring legacies of the great works of literature and art are maintained and reinterpreted. In LSA's 25 academic departments, 30

programs and institutes, museums and field stations discoveries are made, knowledge is generated, and the world—ultimately—is changed.

The college strives to make public service a central part of its identity as evidenced by this statement of purpose on their website. These statements stand as two instances of the number of subunit websites that include a statement of identity that contains a public service dimension.

Emerging Trends

After a thorough analysis of the data, a number of trends can be seen. First, it is quite clear that employees throughout the University of Michigan have extremely divergent levels of knowledge and conceptions about both the public status and mission of the University. Based on the interviews that were conducted, one can conclude that none of the informants thinks about the public mission of the University in quite the same way as any of the other informants. Nevertheless, there was some level of similarity between those informants whose professional positions were at similar levels in the university hierarchy. More specifically, both the central administrators of the University and the members of the LSA Dean's office repeatedly referred to the public mission of the University as the overarching purpose of the institution. They also conveyed clear understandings of the constitutionally established status of the University as a publicly supported educational institution with an elected board of regents serving as the governing authority.

Differences emerged when comparing the professors at different positions within the professional hierarchy; however, similarities were found between those informants

located within the same professional position. Senior faculty members understood the mission of the University to be centered mainly around the production of knowledge, education of students, and personal research. They perceived the University as a public entity but often argued that the constitutional autonomy of the University insulated it from overt political pressures. Conversely, both of the junior faculty members conceptualized the University's mission primarily in terms of their own career advancement. Both assistant professors pointed to their upcoming tenure reviews as the reason for such professional activities as research and service to the University. While both junior faculty members understood the legal status of the University, they pointed to the slowing economy of the state as the main reason for their sometimes negative attitude towards this legal status.

As hypothesized, each informant's conception of the University as a public organization and how important the public mission of the University was to that individual seemed to have an important effect on their self-reported instances of work motivation. Those informants who conceptualized the University's mission as one that served the public and the state of Michigan primarily were likely to report the public status and mission of the University as motivating for them at work. This finding can be seen in the central administrators, who both listed the public status and mission of the University as a primary motivator at work. As reported above, both of these individuals conceptualized the University's mission in terms of its commitment to the state of Michigan and helping the state's citizens succeed. Also falling into this category were the LSA deans, who listed the public mission and status as highly motivating. Both of the LSA deans reported high levels of motivation stemming from their interactions with

in-state students, the knowledge that they were helping Michigan succeed, and the public status of the institution as a whole.

On the other hand, the informants who understood the mission of the University in terms of other pursuits besides serving the public and the state of Michigan were almost uniformly similar in lacking a self-reported motivational boost from the public mission of the University. Both the junior and senior faculty failed to mention the public mission and status of the University in anything more than a passing fashion when asked to describe the motivating features of their jobs. Other factors, including compensation, curiosity, and tenure review dominated their self-reported motivational aspects of the job. Strikingly, the Business School deans actually reported that the public mission and status of the University work to demotivate them. They pointed to the public demands and lack of funding as problems, even going so far as to claim that the University and in particular the Business School would benefit from cutting ties with the state.

Accordingly, the results of the interviews point towards a distinction between those who perceive the University's public status and mission positively, and those who differ in their perception of the University's mission. A correlation was found between the informants describing the University's mission as primarily geared towards the public and those same employees reporting that the public mission was a strong motivator. In the same way, a correlation was discovered between the informants describing the University's mission as something other than public and those same employees listing their motivational factors as something other than the public mission and status of the University.

Next, the data analysis suggests that both the professional position of each individual and their unit's projected identity correlate with how each individual perceives the University's status and mission. Those individuals located within units that place a strong emphasis on the public status of the University and its public mission contend that the status and mission positively affects their work motivation. For example, the central administrations' websites include statements proclaiming the significance of the public mission of the University. Accordingly, the two informants sampled from the central administration counted the public status and the mission of the University as motivating. In the same way, the informants from the LSA dean's office, where the public mission plays a prominent role on the website, also expressed the motivational force of the public mission and status. These results suggest a number of important implications, discussed later in the paper.

Conversely, informants located within units that did not stress the public nature of the University on their websites rarely if ever gave reason to believe that the public mission served as a motivator for them at work. In fact, some argued that the public status of the University was a negative arrangement that presented more of a burden than a positive factor for work motivation. This was most evident in the responses of the Business School deans, whose website never mentions a public service mission of the school nor the University as a whole.

Overall, then, the data support the finding that the public status and mission of the university serves as a strong motivator for a subsection of the organization's employees. Yet the data also show just how varied each individual employee's conception and knowledge level of the public mission and public status of the University actually are. In

much the same way, each individual unit of the informants varies in their publicly stated purpose and mission.

DISCUSSION

The data seem to point towards a number of relationships that affect the work motivation of the informants at the University of Michigan. In order to explain the differences among the informants on their conceptualization of the mission and their self reported motivation factors, a thorough understanding of the relationships among the different factors must be developed.

Connection between Mission Conceptualization and its Motivational Power

First, it seems that particular levels of knowledge of and particular conceptions of the public mission influence its power to serve as a motivational factor for a number of the informants. This is exemplified by the informants who perceived the University's mission in public terms and the status of the University as an institution of government. These informants were the ones who self-reported the public mission to be one of the factors that motivated them at work. Conversely, the informants whose conception of the University's mission had nothing to do with helping the public did not list the public mission as motivating. This is striking because the literature suggests that public employees, regardless of their conception of the mission, are in fact motivated by the public nature of their institution. My findings suggest otherwise, namely, that an employee's individual conception of the mission plays a strong role in the motivational

power of the mission. That being said, the process by which an employee's conception of the mission is formed needs to be understood. The results of this study suggest that there are two key factors about an employee's job within an organization that affects his conception of this mission. In the following sections, I will discuss first the effects of subunit identity on employee conceptions, and then next, I will discuss the effect of professional position.

Effect of Subunit Identity

It is necessary to attempt to understand how an employee's conception of the mission and status of the University is formed and influenced. The data from this study seem to point towards the ability of the individual subunits of the University to influence the informant's conceptions. While the University of Michigan as a whole stresses the organization's public mission, the same can not be said for all of the individual sub-units of the University. In fact, many of the subunits of the informants failed to mention the public mission at all on their websites. Although the websites serve only as a proxy for the actual unit identities, it is clear that some units stress the public mission, just as others do not.

As a consequence, those within units that have identities made up of other factors besides the public mission seem to be less likely to report the mission as a motivating force. This is important because it highlights the mistaken belief that each and every employee of a public organization can be motivated by the sheer fact that the organization is public and has a public mission. In reality, it seems that within organizations, subunits can create a barrier that effectively diminishes the public

mission's capacity for motivational energy. It appears that even individuals who value public service are sometimes unable to find motivation from the public mission when their unit does not incorporate the mission into its identity.

It is possible that those within units that fail to use the mission in its identity have chosen to craft it that way. This seems to be more likely than individual informants self-selecting into units that fit their own personal needs because many of the informants were located in departmental units because of academic specialization. As a consequence, it seems that the conventional wisdom regarding the ability of the umbrella organization to direct the organization's multiple identities by fiat has been greatly overestimated. What appears to be the case is that individual subunits are able to craft identities that are perhaps entirely different from the one projected by the umbrella organization. Keep in mind that subunit leaders must approve of the content that is placed on their websites. Accordingly, subunit identities, as expressed by the websites, exist as another means for employees to begin to understand their work within the context of their organization. For this reason, individual informants in the study were able to draw from their unit's identities when they failed to count the public mission of the University as a motivational force (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Without the unit identity competing with the University's identity as a force for public good and development, more of the informants might have listed the public mission as motivating. Resulting from the differences in unit identity as compared to the University's identity, the motivational force from the public mission was lost for a number of the informants.

Effect of Professional Position

Although the informants' unit identities clearly affect the ability of the public status and mission of the University to motivate, their professional positions also play an important role. The most striking example of this finding was the junior professor housed in the Ford School of Public Policy. While his unit's identity is grounded in a strong commitment to the public mission of the University, he reported deriving no personal motivation from the publicness of the University at work. This discrepancy seems to be a product of his position as a junior faculty member. As an assistant professor, the reward structure that he works within does not provide incentive to produce benefits for the citizens of the state of Michigan. Instead, he is rewarded based on the number of research credits he can produce among other factors. Consequently, despite belonging to a unit with an identity encompassing public service, his professional position has moderated both the effect of his unit's identity and the public service mission of the University. Surprisingly, the assistant professor in the Ford School reports a concern for welfare of Michigan in his personal life, just not at work. He even went as far as to buy a Ford automobile instead of a foreign car that he liked more, just so he could support a company headquartered in Michigan.

To further illustrate the power of professional positions, there are examples of informants who, while located in units that do not profess to identify with the public mission, still find the mission to hold a number of motivational qualities. For example, the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology department makes no mention of the University's public service mission on their website. Nevertheless, the senior professor informant from the department pointed to the ability of the University to create, in a public

atmosphere, an “uncommon education for the common man” as motivating. This break with his unit’s identity could be explained by the reward structure of his professional position. As a senior professor, as opposed to a junior faculty member, organizational leaders provide him incentive to examine his wider impact on society and the public. Therefore, the public mission can motivate him, even though his unit’s identity does not incorporate it because he derives rewards from considering the public application of his duties and responsibilities.

My study has identified two factors that influence the conceptualization of the public status and mission of the University. Once an employee has conceptualized the mission, the likelihood that the mission will serve as motivating is either increased or decreased. As shown above, none of the factors can operate in a vacuum, meaning that each one of them is interconnected. Resulting from this, informants who seemingly would not be motivated by the public mission, read the Biology professor whose unit identity does not incorporate the public mission, can find motivation in the publicness of the University as a result of his professional position. Nevertheless, it appears that unit identity plays a strong role in the ability of the public mission to serve as motivating. Those informants whose units incorporated the public mission into their identities reported hands down more motivation stemming from the mission than those informants whose units did not use the public mission.

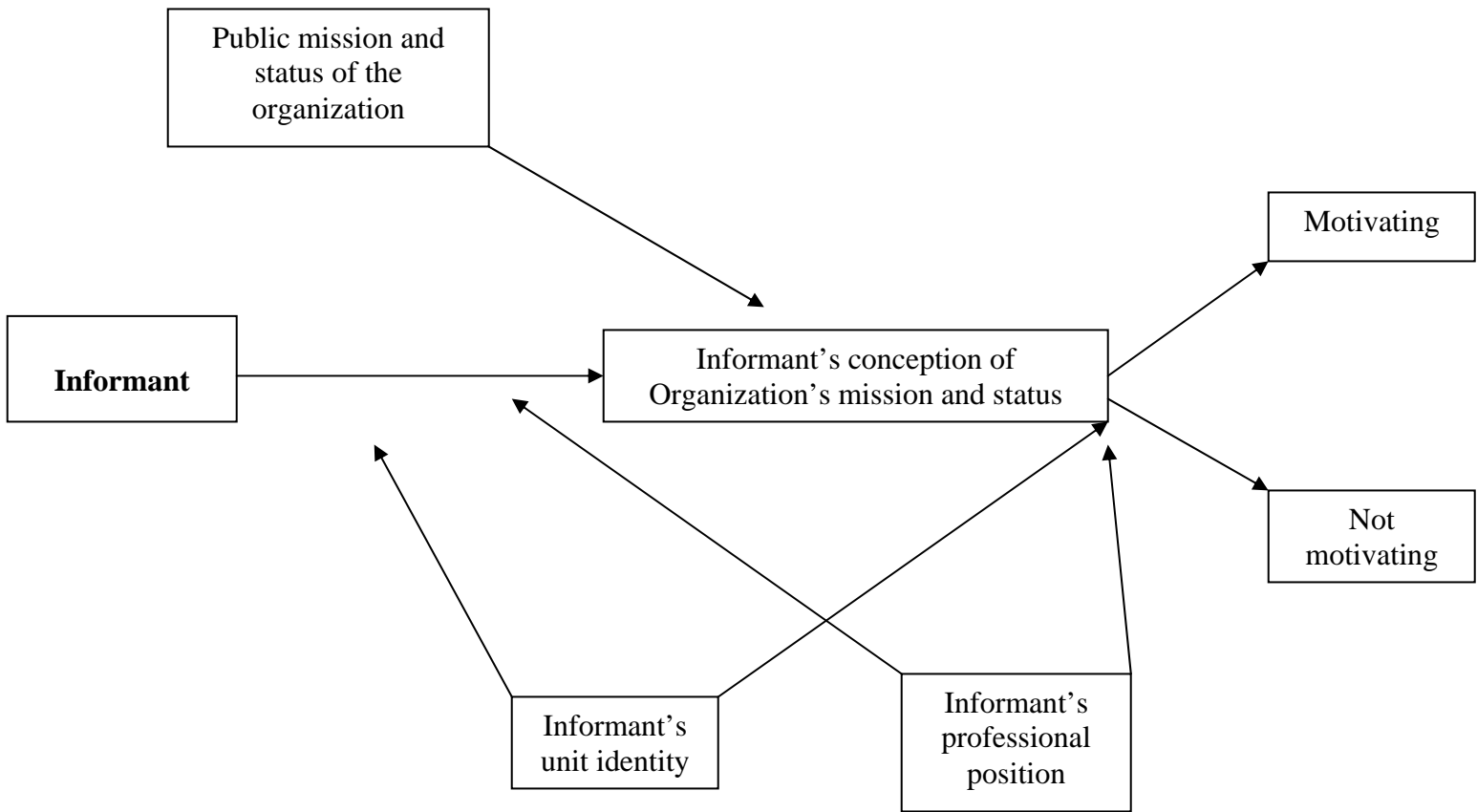
At What Point Do These Factors Matter?

As a result of this study, we can begin to see where the above-identified factors influence whether or not the mission of the University will provide motivation for the

informants. The results present multiple points at which unit identity and professional position influence both the conception of the mission and the ability of the public mission to motivate. First, it seems that the unit identity and the professional position affect the informants' ideas surrounding the mission. This is illustrated by their differing conceptions of the purpose of the University. Although the University's espoused mission is to serve the people of the state of Michigan, unit identity and professional position interact with this mission to produce each individual employee's own conception of the mission.

Next, both factors act again to influence each employee's decision as to whether or not to report their conception of the mission as a motivator. This is a very important part of the process because it seems to have the highest amount of determining value. The results of the study seem to show that informants, after they conceptualized the purpose of the University, make a decision as to whether or not it was motivating. This decision seems to again be highly influenced by both unit identity and professional position.

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Model



Limitations

It is key to note that my study has some limitations. First, qualitative interviews cannot help to determine cause and effect. My study did not produce quantitative results that would have allowed me to make more causal claims. Without these types of results, my study is limited in the types of claims it can make. Also, the study treats the informants' self-reported answers as true representations of the expressed quality; however, people do not always give truthful or complete answers to interview questions. In order to account for this, the questions were constructed in the least threatening and

leading way possible. As a result, I am confident that the responses of the informants are reliable portrayals of their true feelings.

Another limitation arises from the small sample size, which hurts the ability of the study to be extrapolated to other public organizations. Furthermore, as discussed above, the unit's websites can only serve as a proxy for identity. It is quite possible that a majority of the informants have never even read the information contained on their unit's website. The information on the website may not be the conception of the unit identity held by all of the employees within the unit; however, it seems to be the best source available to make an inference from. Although these limitations exist, the study was designed in a manner that attempts to ensure the validity of the conclusions made above.

Contributions to the Literature

While the current state of the work motivation literature lacks a clear set of research that attempts to explain how employees located across different subunits will differ in their conceptions of the organization's mission. My study begins to explain that the differences in subunit identity and professional position will have a large impact on an employee's conception of the mission. Accordingly, we now can begin to understand one potential reason for the variation amongst employee conceptions of the mission. Moreover, the study begins to fill the gap in the current literature that fails to explain if organizations should tailor their appeals to their mission differently for individual employees. As a result of the study, we know that individual employees think about the mission of their organization differently than other employees located in different

subunits. These findings begin to answer questions left unanswered by the current work motivation literature.

In addition, this study contributes to the public service motivation literature in a number of ways. First, this study helps us to better understand why public organizations' missions possess motivational force, which was not fully investigated by the literature. Next, the study helps to fill gaps in our understanding of how and why organizational subunits can affect employees' capacity for public service motivation. Lastly, the study helps to clarify which employees are more likely than others to be affected by public service motivation, a key limitation of the current literature. These contributions and others begin to fill spaces in the literature that affected how we understood key parts of life within organizations.

CONCLUSION

My results show that the public mission and status of the University of Michigan positively affects a number of employees' work motivation. This seems to affirm the findings of the vast literature on public service mission by providing another empirical example of the motivational power of the ability to serve the public in a governmental organization. However, more important is the fact that the study highlights the different conceptions of the public status and mission of the University that can pervade a complex institution like the one studied. As a result of these different conceptions, motivation was affected in different and interesting ways. While some employees, as a result of their professional position and the subunit identity of their division, can gain motivation from

the public mission of an organization, it seems that others will be less than likely to receive similar types of benefits.

This finding is important for a number of reasons. First, managers in public organizations must be aware of the motivational limitations of the public mission for certain sets of employees. Managers, who will now have greater reason to acknowledge that stressing the public mission to some sets of individuals may not be a successful way to increase work motivation, could save valuable amounts of time and other organizational resources. Furthermore, managers should now be able to concentrate on stressing the public mission to those whose unit identity already encompasses the public mission. This will help to increase work motivation for workers who are more than likely to benefit from an increased awareness of the public mission.

At the present, the University and the College of LSA has begun to hold a number of focus groups to better understand how they can motivate the faculty to engage in the public service mission of the University. This study could contribute an important guiding principle to these discussions, in that the results of this study highlight the conundrum that some faculty members face regarding the public mission of the University. As explained above, while they may feel a personal allegiance to the public mission, the reward system associated with many employees' professional positions prevents them from making any meaningful attempt at garnering work motivation from the mission. Accordingly, if the University's leaders want to help junior faculty engage in and derive motivation from the public mission, they should explore ways to increase the incentives surrounding an engagement in public service. Otherwise, their efforts may be thwarted by the junior faculty's professional position, which exists within a reward

system that does not place much emphasis on an appreciation or an application of the University's public service mission.

Our nation's public organizations provide countless numbers of jobs and an unimaginable number of services to the people of this great nation. Our country's public and governmental agencies exist to serve the public and for many of their employees, this mission can and should be extremely motivating. It is my hope that this study will begin to help the leaders of public organizations better utilize their mission's motivational qualities. After all, our public servants go to work every day to try to help deliver crucial services to the people of this country. Therefore, it is in our best interest to see to it that these people are as motivated as possible on the job. This study has produced a number of suggestions for increasing public employees' motivation. Perhaps, the results of this study can begin to break down the barriers that are preventing a number of our public employees from deriving motivation from their organization's mission, a benefit that will not only positively affect them but will also greatly benefit our nation.

Appendix 1

The following questions were asked to the informants who participated in the study.

- 1). What are some of the factors that motivate you to do your job each day?
- 2). Do you think you would feel differently about your job if you were working at a private university?
- 3). Do you think you would feel differently about your job if you were working at a for-profit corporation?
- 4). Do you ever think about the fact that Michigan is a state university? If so, in what work situations? How often?
- 5). How do you think your awareness of the University's status as a governmental organization affects your motivation at work?
- 6). What does it mean for the university to be a governmental organization?

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