Work motivations as predictors of academic and clinical performance and satisfaction with career choice in medical students

Submitted By

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

_________________________
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- Dedication -

To Iain Melville
for encouraging me to continually develop and follow my dreams

and

my three mentors,
David Powis, Miles Bore and Kim Colyvas
# Table of Contents

## Abstract

### Chapter One- Work motivations and medical student selection

- Current issues associated with the medical selection debate
- Current research and commentary on the `good doctor’
- Current selection processes
- The predictive ability of academic criteria in medical selection procedures
- The predictive validity of University Admission and Aptitude testing
- Personal attributes that may further explain medical student clinician performance
- A review of motivation in the medical literature
- What is Work motivation
- Contributors to Work Motivation
- Motivation theories
- Work Motivations and critical work outcomes
- Applications of work motivations: person- job fit and selection
- Current assessment of motivation in medical selection
- Specific work motivations and medical student outcomes
- Researching work motivations in medical students
Chapter Two - Measuring Work Motivation

Work Attitude and Motivational Profile (iWAM)

Background to the iWAM instrument

The basis of the iWAM motivation patterns

Background to metaprograms

Metaprograms and iWAM Work Motivations

The iWAM Patterns

Construction of the iWAM instrument

Reliability and validity studies on the iWAM instrument

Chapter 3 – Trialling the iWAM instrument with Applicants to the Bachelor of Medicine program

Study 1: Applicant Sample

Participants

Instruments

Procedure

Data analysis

Results

Discussion

Summary
Chapter 4 – Critical Work Motivations of medical students

Study 2: Medical student sample:

Introduction

Methodology

Participants

Instruments

The Satisfaction with the choice of medicine as a career questionnaire

Procedure

Medical student grades: academic and clinical performance data

Data analysis: medical student sample

Results

Research Question 1(a)

iWAM as a predictor of satisfaction

Relationships between individual satisfaction questions and iWAM

Satisfaction questionnaire factor analysis

Relationships between the satisfaction factors and iWAM

Critical metaprogams and relationships with satisfaction items

Research Question 1 (b)

iWAM as predictor of academic achievement

Correlations between iWAM metaprograms and academic achievement

Critical metaprograms for academic achievement for Years 2-4
Contents

Chapter 4 – Critical Work Motivations of medical students (cont.)

Question 1(c)

iWAM as predictor of clinical performance

Correlations between iWAM metaprograms and clinical performance

Critical metaprograms for clinical performance

Summary table of the critical metaprograms across the three outcome areas

Research Question 2:

Change in critical metaprograms over five year program

Research Question 3:

Critical metaprograms and demographic variables

Final models for satisfaction, academic achievement and clinical performance

Discussion

Summary of medical student study result

Chapter 5 – Implications for study findings

References
Appendices

Appendix A: Theoretical basis for each of the iWAM metaprogram categories

Appendix B: (iWAM) HR Summary Report

Appendix C: (iWAM) Information Analysis Report

Appendix D: (iWAM) Personal Graph

Appendix E: (iWAM) Attitude Sorter Wheel

Appendix F: Applicant sample consent form

Appendix G: Applicant invitation letter

Appendix H: Applicant email instruction letter

Appendix I: Medical student consent form

Appendix J: Medical student invitation letter to Years 1 to 3

Appendix K: Medical student email invitation letters to Years 4 and 5

Appendix L: The iWAM (hard copy) questionnaire

Appendix M: Satisfaction items and iWAM Work Motivations: Correlation matrix

Appendix N: Satisfaction factors and iWAM Work Motivations: Correlation matrix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Applicant sample and gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Applicant sample: country of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Applicant sample: Worked/Not Worked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>T tests of iWAM Work Motivations between Worked and Not Worked applicant sample groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>T test Worked and Not Worked groups for Question 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.6</td>
<td>T test Worked and Not Worked groups for Question 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.7</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of applicant explanation for how they answered the iWAM questions: Worked and Not Worked groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.8</td>
<td>Applicant Not Worked group: the basis on which the iWAM questions were answered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Study hours per week by year of the Bachelor of Medicine program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Study hours and working hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Country of origin of medical sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Significant correlations between satisfaction with career choice questions and iWAM Work Motivations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>The five factor solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>The relationship between the satisfaction with career choice items, their subscales and the five satisfaction factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7  Significant correlations between career choice satisfaction factors and iWAM Work Motivations

Table 4.8  Regression models between the career choice satisfaction questionnaire items and the iWAM Work Motivations

Table 4.9  Critical Work Motivations and satisfaction with career choice factors

Table 4.10  Critical Work Motivations for predicting career choice satisfaction in the Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.11  Academic scores by year of the Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.12  Correlations between academic achievement Years 1 to 4 and iWAM Work Motivations

Table 4.13  Correlations of iWAM Work Motivations with Years 2 to 4 academic achievement scores

Table 4.14  Critical Work Motivations for academic achievement Years 2 to 4

Table 4.15  Clinical performance by year, Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.16  Significant correlations clinical performance (Years 2 to 5) and iWAM Work Motivations

Table 4.17  Regression model clinical performance (Years 2 to 5) and the 48 iWAM Work Motivations

Table 4.18  Summary of critical Work Motivations for the three outcome areas

Table 4.19  Final model predicting career choice satisfaction in the Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.20  Final model predicting academic achievement in Bachelor of Medicine program
Table 4.21 Final model predicting clinical performance in the Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.22 Summary of predictors for career choice satisfaction academic achievement and clinical performance in the Bachelor of Medicine program

Table 4.23 Changes in critical Work Motivations for career choice satisfaction, academic achievement and clinical performance from Years 1 to 5

Table 4.24 Comparison of the means of Indifference (N2) for Years 1 to 5

Table 4.25 Comparison of means of Convinced by Consistency (Co7) for Years 1 to 5

Table 4.26 Comparison of the means of Convinced by Reading (Co3) for Years 1 to 5

Table 4.27 Comparison of the means of Present (TP2) for Years 1 to 5
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>The Feedback Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Medical sample participants by year of the Bachelor of Medicine program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Gender and working hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3</td>
<td>Study hours and gender (Years 1 to 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.4</td>
<td>Scree plot for the iWAM factor analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.5</td>
<td>Spread of academic marks (Years 1 to 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.6</td>
<td>Spread of clinical performance scores (Years 2 to 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Abstract –

Understanding and predicting human behaviour and subsequent performance constitutes a large part of organisational literature and at the heart of organisational behaviour lies human motivation. Work motivation, which has been previously demonstrated to be predictive of work performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and longevity in a role is applied to a new context in this study, that of the selection and training of future medical doctors.

The application of work motivations to the medical role is contextualised within the ongoing medical selection debate, where current approaches to recognising and selecting the best applicants to be future doctors are critically evaluated. Here, cognitive testing (including academic marks and aptitude testing) which is used as the primary method for medical selection, has been found to be moderately predictive of academic performance, but poorly predictive of clinical performance and later practitioner performance and satisfaction. Research efforts to further define personal attributes associated with good student outcomes have revealed a plethora of traits, with the Conscientiousness dimension of the ‘Big 5 traits’ achieving high levels of predictive validity. However, while a strong predictor of academic performance, it also has been unable to predict clinical performance in medical students. Therefore, while current selection methods have been demonstrated to be moderately effective, predictors of clinical performance and practitioner satisfaction are poorly covered in the research. Additionally, the medical literature reveals a significant gap in understanding and applying current motivation research to the prediction of medical student outcomes.

This study addressed the research question of whether specific clusters of work motivations may be predictive of clinical and academic performance outcomes and career choice satisfaction in medical students. It also trialled a work motivational screening instrument for its capability to identify complex sets of motivations associated with medical school performance and for its validity for use with both applicants to medical school and existing medical students.

The results of the study have demonstrated that specific clusters of work motivation patterns do exist in medical students which are able to predict both good and poor performance in clinical and academic areas and career choice satisfaction. Additionally, the instrument (inventory for Work Attitudes and Motivations) has been
found to be a valid instrument to identify and measure work motivations in both medical school applicants and medical students.

The identified critical Work Motivations for each of the outcome areas are discussed and applied to medical selection, education and practice, including offering specific advice to medical educators on how to coach students in critical motivations that impact upon student outcomes. Overall, this study has demonstrated that a more targeted testing of specific motivations, shown to be associated with good and poor outcomes in the medical program, may further refine current medical selection procedures.