

THESIS

UNDERSTANDING CALLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Submitted By

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WE HEARBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ISAAC L. HUNTER ENTITLED UNDERSTANDING CALLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
UNDERSTANDING CALLING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Definitions of the construct of “calling” in the context of work have broadened over time. However, prior to the present study, research has not investigated the accuracy of these definitions for college students. This qualitative study examined responses from 295 college students to questions related to the construct of calling in attempt to gain a better understanding of how calling is conceptualized at the present time. The results of this study found that calling was often described by students as: originating from external sources, having a component of unique fit and well-being, having altruistic features and extending to multiple life roles. These results provide support for how calling has been conceptualized by recent theorists in this area.

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Understanding Calling: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Definitions of the construct of “calling” in the context of work have broadened over time. However, prior to the present study, research has not investigated the accuracy of these definitions for college students. This qualitative study examined responses from 295 college students to questions related to the construct of calling in attempt to gain a better understanding of how calling is conceptualized at the present time. The results of this study found that calling was often described by students as: originating from external sources, having a component of unique fit and well-being, having altruistic features and extending to multiple life roles. These results provide support for how calling has been conceptualized by recent theorists in this area.

Understanding Calling: A Qualitative Study

At present, there is no consensus on any specific definition of the construct of calling which typically has pertained to approaching work roles with a sense of purpose and meaning, often with some reference to God, passion, or giftedness as a motivating source (Dik & Duffy, in press). This lack of consensus is especially salient because what calling means seems to have changed over time according to some scholars (Baumeister, 1991; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Schuurman, 2004). Although occupation and the work experience has been a highly researched area within the field of psychology, calling has been surprisingly underresearched, even though it is often thought of in the context of work. Similarly, there has been little research in counseling psychology on the roles that meaning and purpose play for individuals within the work domain (Dik & Duffy, in press). As having a sense of meaning and purpose in one's career has been associated with increased performance, commitment, well-being, and satisfaction (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Serow, Eaker & Cielchalski, 1992; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), it is of great benefit to make investigation in this area a greater priority. Researchers have demonstrated that the desire to find a meaningful job often is an important factor in making career decisions (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Young & Valach, 2004).

The present study primarily focuses on calling among college student participants, who are often in the throes of making career decisions. According to Arnett (2004), people in the age group of traditional college students (18 - 25) are going through a developmental stage called emerging adulthood. Arnett suggests this is a rather new stage that has primarily developed over the last few decades and is a product of greater amount

of years between adolescence and adulthood. This stage is relevant across cultures within the United States as well as many other developed countries throughout the world. There are subgroups that tend to marry earlier than others; however, as a whole, the age at which people get married in this country continues to rise. With this increased amount of time after adolescence and before married life comes an increase in time for exploration as well as a greater expressed desire for work that is meaningful compared to past generations (Arnett, 2004). Due to this increased interest in meaningful careers as well as being at an age where, for most, entry into the work world is right around the corner, this population seems the right place to start when attempting to gain a phenomenological understanding of calling at the present time.

Historically, the notion that occupations can be considered callings dates back to the Middle ages, possibly earlier (Weber, 1930). Prior to this time the occupations in which meaning or spirituality were acknowledged as being central were limited to those of a monastic nature. Work outside of religious devotion was considered devoid of any higher value. However, with the Protestant reformation some of these ideas began to change as society was beginning to accept the idea that “work of this world” could hold meaning in a spiritual sense (Hardy, 1990; Weber, 1930). In fact, Luther thought that to avoid or renounce temporal obligations was a sign of selfishness, and that the only way to fulfill God’s plan is by fulfillment of one’s calling in whichever type of labor it may lead. As history has made clear, the meaning of work is greatly impacted by the time and society in which it takes place. Due to its evolving nature it is a topic that must be reviewed and understood in an ongoing fashion (Ruiz Quintanilla & Wilpert, 1988). Some scholars have suggested that modern society has deemphasized work's

meaningfulness and placed more focus on economic outcomes (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986). However, very recently there has been increased focus and funding directed toward understanding spirituality and meaning in the workplace (Dik & Duffy, in press). Because of this, many scholars (e.g., Bellah et al., 1986; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Hardy, 1990; Schuurman, 2004; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) have suggested the need for increased attention on the construct of calling.

Contemporary Definitions of Calling

Recently, distinctions between job, career, and calling have been made, which has helped clarify how calling may differ from other ways people conceptualize their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Such studies suggest that with calling comes a sense of meaningfulness that the terms “career” and “job” lack. People having “jobs” are motivated by monetary gain, and the “job” is only a means to support the rest of one’s life. “Career” takes on more personal meaning in that career advancement, prestige and position in the organization begin to have significant importance, even if such positions do not bring increased earnings. “Calling” was found to be much more central in one’s life, and carried importance outside of status or monetary rewards. Similarly, Hall and Chandler (2005) defined calling as work that a person perceives as her or his purpose in life. This progress toward an understanding of how calling is differentiated from other constructs is important and has stimulated more scholarly attention in this area.

Hall and Chandler (2005) also made clear distinctions between objective and subjective experience in regard to calling. The means by which society or outside sources may judge success are not capable of adequately capturing the construct of subjective

success, which is unique to the individual and can be obtained prior to objective success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This subjective success, or psychological success, seems to be based on personal, meaningful goals that one accomplishes (Lewin, 1936; Locke, 1990a, 1990b). Similarly, it is thought that those identifying themselves as having a calling would be more intrinsically motivated than those who identify as having careers or jobs (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Another way in which the construct of calling has evolved is that it has become much more secular. Early in the twentieth century, Weber (1930) described calling as being a divine inspiration to do morally responsible work. This provides a clear example of the religious nature from which calling has evolved. The modern conceptualizations of calling are much broader and do not necessarily exclude divine inspiration, but acknowledge that inspiration may come from non-divine, internal sources as well. These internal sources may come from goals outside of personal gain and often are directed toward helping society (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Some scholars have argued that calling is distinct from career and job in that it can extend to other life roles outside of work (Sellers, Thomas, Batts, & Ostman, 2005; Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997; Serow, Eaker & Cielchalski, 1992). There are many people who are not paid employees, yet are not excluded from this emerging definition of calling. Conceptually, many life roles can be approached as a calling, and in order to encompass and respect the diversity of human life, this should not be overlooked when defining this construct.

Dik and Duffy (in press) established a working definition that attempts to capture the various complexities of what calling means. Their work is based on an extensive and

thorough review of the existing literature in this area and encompasses the various ways calling has been represented in recent literature. To facilitate and unify further research in this area, and they aspired to present a clear, measurable definition of the construct. The definition proposed by Dik and Duffy is as follows:

A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 4).

Within this definition are three primary dimensions: a summons beyond the self, pursuing or experiencing purpose and meaning, and having other-oriented values as motivation. This definition purposely uses the term *life roles* to indicate that calling is not limited to paid work, or even what would be considered work in general. The first dimension refers to the degree to which external forces (e.g. God, a salient social need, a family legacy) compel and motivate a person in a certain direction. The second dimension focuses on being aware of how a particular life role contributes to sense of meaning and purpose either in that role specifically, or in one's life as a whole. The third dimension is important in that it differentiates self-focus from other-oriented focus as a source of motivation.

Although the recent literature seems to be well covered by this three part definition, it has yet to be seen how well that actually represents the thoughts of people at the present time. As mentioned before, the word calling has carried with it numerous meanings throughout time. With the modern push for greater understanding in this area should come a modern, accurate definition that effectively captures how the term is

currently understood by those for whom it may be most relevant. Furthermore, in order for research progress in this area to continue efficiently this construct needs to be measured and examined thoroughly. This necessitates a definition that is clear enough to inform psychometrically sound measurement that will potentially help unify research concerning this construct. In summary, gaining an understanding of what calling means is the first foundational step toward beneficial research into this area. This study attempts to begin building this foundation of understanding and will be useful in testing how well the current literature and definitions represent the actual perceptions of the attitudes of young adults attending college. Rather than relying solely on past literature, it is prudent to gain a fresh representation of the current construct in question (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This is especially important when doing the foundational work in a new area, to insure that measurement, comparison and quantification is informed by organic definitions generated by participants drawn from the population of interest. Therefore, this qualitative study examines responses to questions about the definition of calling, how it impacts a person's life, and in what roles calling is applicable.

There have been relatively few qualitative studies on this topic, most of which have studied small groups of individuals that provided interesting variation in how calling was interpreted. One qualitative study found that many African American undergraduates reported doing God's work through their careers. In some of these cases the word calling was used to describe this approach to integrating spirituality and work to something more than just a career (Constantine et al., 2006). Two other studies comprised of mainly White Christian mothers employed as academic faculty found that calling applied to both their role of motherhood as well as to their careers. Furthermore, these studies showed

calling to be a beneficial way to conceptualize work and provided a way by which they could better deal with the stress of the multiple demands placed upon them by various roles (Oates, Hall & Anderson, 2005; Sellers et al. 2005). One final study showed that although unable to get their ideal jobs, a group of African American women nevertheless identified their occupations in education as callings, and were able to find meaning in doing work they had been pushed toward because of societal limitations (Loder, 2005). Overall, these studies support the diverse ways in which calling can be conceptualized, and illustrate the need to gain an understanding of this construct that satisfactorily addresses these various components that calling means for different people in different circumstances. As the current study uses a pool of students enrolled in psychology classes from three colleges it also suffers from the inability to be completely generalizable. However, this study does benefit from having a much larger sample size than previous qualitative studies, as well as an exploratory method of understanding how this population defines calling. The previous studies relied on an interview format and although calling was mentioned, it was never the point of these studies to attempt to define what it means. The present study differs in that the questions are specifically related to how “calling” is defined by a large sample of students who are making plans and decisions related to what type of work they hope to be doing.

Using a qualitative method called emergent qualitative document analysis (QDA, also known as ethnographic content analysis or ECA) the present investigation analyzed the responses to open-ended survey questions to identify the themes that emerge from the data in regard to calling. This method was selected due to its open, exploratory nature which makes it ideal for validating or modifying theories or for uncovering new

information (Altheide, 1978; Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese & Schneider, 2008). Rather than attempting to fit the data into predefined categories, as is the strategy in Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA), QDA is focused on discovery of concepts that emerge during analysis. Forcing responses into predetermined theoretical categories leaves no room for data to support anything but a prespecified theory, as no matter how disparate the responses are, they are limited by the concepts already created prior to the study. Therefore, it is logical to use QDA instead of QCA to allow the information to speak for itself. QDA is a “purer” qualitative method and is a less biased way of identifying the meaning inherent in a set of responses. QCA is a method better suited for verification of previous theories and is therefore somewhat inappropriate to use in the present study due to the need to discover rather than confirm (Altheide, 1987). Due to the nascent state at which research on calling currently exists, it would be presumptuous to not use an exploratory method in defining calling. As constructs change over time, it is unknown if definitions derived from past literature adequately or accurately describe calling. Once themes have emerged from this study they can then be used to compare with what others have proposed as the meaning of calling. Only through this approach through which bias is minimized can we see if and how well the current proposed definitions of calling are supported by the concepts that come forth in the current study.

The population under examination in this study is undergraduate college students. 75% of the student sample in the present study comes from a large public university, with the other 25% coming from two smaller private Christian colleges. As calling has had religious meaning attached to it in the past it seemed appropriate to get a diverse sample in this regard to ensure all dimensions of calling would be represented in the data.

Although lacking much experience in the work field, or perhaps in other autonomous life roles, this population is unique in that they are presumably making choices toward what sort of life roles they hope to have. How they approach their education, and other interests, likely impacts what options will be available to them. Calling is an important factor in career decision making for many undergraduate students (Dik & Steger, 2005). The study of calling should not be limited to such a narrow population, but it is certainly an interesting age group to examine as people are actively preparing to enter into many new and diverse roles.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 340 undergraduate students at a large Western research university and 95 undergraduate students from two Midwestern Christian colleges. Of the 435 respondents 74% identified as female, with an overall mean age of 18.9 years and standard deviation of 1.48. The reported ethnicity is as follows: 82.3% White/European, 6.2% Latino/Hispanic, 4.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.0% Native American, 2.8% Black/African and 3.4% Other/Omitted. The reported religious affiliation is as follows: 51.3% Christian/Protestant, 17.9%, Nonreligious/Omitted, 16.5% Catholic, 3.0% Atheist, 2.6% Agnostic and finally 9.3% who identified as Latter Day Saints (LDS), Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Christian Scientist or 'other' (no specific group being over 1%). Of the 295 respondents who responded to the qualitative questions (see below), 77% identified as female, with a mean age of 19.0 years and standard deviation of 1.54. The reported ethnicity is as follows: 86.8% White/European, 5.4% Latino/Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.0% Native American, 1.7% Black/African and 2.0%

Other/Omitted. The reported religious affiliation is as follows: 56.0%

Christian/Protestant, 14.0% Nonreligious/Omitted, 14.0% Catholic, 2.0% Atheist, 1.4% Agnostic, 1.0% LDS and finally 10.2% who identified as Jewish, Buddhist, Christian Scientist, or 'other' (no specific group being over 1%). Participants were selected from undergraduate psychology courses that give credit for research participation.

Procedures

Students expressed an interest in participating by sending an email to an account established solely for the purpose of conducting this study. These volunteers were then emailed a link to a secured website they could access to take the survey. The first question on the survey pertained to informed consent, with which participants had to agree to before continuing. This online agreement ensured participants were aware of the nature of the survey and that they accepted the conditions of participation as communicated in the cover letter. The qualitative questions used in the current study were included as part of a larger survey of work attitudes, which contained many quantitative measures as well as basic demographic information. The open-ended questions were presented prior to the quantitative scales to minimize the potential for order effects in which exposure to items on measures of work attitudes could influence responses to the open-ended questions.

Instruments

The following three questions were used to limit the sample to participants for whom "calling" was a relevant consideration in their career development.

"As you think about your career, do you consider yourself as having a calling?"

"Are you looking for a calling in your career?"

“Is the term “calling” relevant to you as you think about your career?”

Four open-ended questions were administered to all students who responded “Yes” to at least one of the above questions, which was 68% of the original sample. Responses were typed, with no limits on length or time. The questions are as follows:

“As it applies to your career, how do you define the word “calling”?”

“What, specifically, does it mean for you to approach your career as a calling?”

“Does the word “calling” apply to areas of your life other than work? Please explain.”

A final question was added after the data from the large Western Research University had been collected, and therefore responses were obtained from the 89 students from Christian colleges.

“How does (or how will) having a calling make a difference in your career, compared to people who have a career but who don't approach it as a calling?”

Coding

The responses to the four questions of interest typically ranged from one to three sentences and were coded individually using an abbreviated form of Grounded Theory (Willig, 2001). The development of themes followed the practice of qualitative document analysis (QDA; Altheide et al., 2008). Two trained undergraduate research assistants and the present author independently used open coding to label each participant's response in a brief but descriptive way. Subsequent responses were either listed under labels already created, or were used to create new labels if they did not neatly fall into ones which were previously created. Once saturation of labels had been achieved, we did not continue analyzing new responses. Saturation was determined to have been reached after a number

of responses no longer necessitated the creation of new labels and it was determined that nothing new was emerging from the data that was adding uniquely to existing labels. To ensure inter-coder consensus researchers met together to compare and discuss the various labels obtained through open coding. Through this method of peer debriefing and examination the researchers were able to help ensure that the labels were in fact grounded in the responses and not merely products of individual biases. Any disagreements and coding discrepancies were discussed until all three researchers had reached consensus. Once peer consensus on initial labels had been reached, selective coding was used to form broad themes or categories through which multiple labels were represented. Selective coding consists of grouping similar labels and then creating descriptive themes which represent them. These core themes also were discussed until all researchers had come to a point of consensus.

Results

The outcomes of this study are organized by the broad themes which were created through individual coding and peer examination. Each broad theme was established by combining and organizing similar labels which emerged from the original data in a response-by-response fashion. The broad themes are listed below in order of how frequently they were represented in the data. Again, it should be noted that saturation resulted in a small number of responses not being coded. Because of this, the presented order of themes and labels reflects an approximation of the frequency with which the labels were represented in the data. As this study is exploring the meaning of a construct, the emergent themes provide the essential information; precise numerical representation of responses is unnecessary in QDA (Altheide et al, 2008). Within each theme's section,

the peer-examined and agreed-upon labels will be listed as well as selected quotations from participant responses to help elucidate how the labels and the themes emerged. The following sections correspond, in order, to the four open-ended response questions used in the present study (see methods section).

Definitions of Calling

The primary objective of this study is to understand calling and therefore a natural starting point is to inquire about the definition of calling. Specifically, this section presents results drawn from participant responses to the first question: “As it applies to your career, how do you define the word ‘calling’?” Responses varied from a couple of simple words to detailed answers that were a few sentences long. Some responses contained multiple ideas which were coded by the researchers into multiple labels; likewise, some labels fit into more than one theme. From the initial 13 labels we found there to be 3 primary themes which emerged. The themes, in order of frequency in the data, are as follows: *External Force*, *Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being*, and *Altruism* (see Table 1).

External Force. The most frequent response in defining calling was some reference to a divine plan or will for humans to follow a certain path. For example, Participant 10 defined calling this way: “A ‘calling’ refers to accepting and following a path God has laid out for my life.” There were also a large number of participants that referenced destiny as central to calling, in that people should be active agents in trying to fulfill their own destinies. For instance, Participant 425 responded: “something in your career field that makes you believe that you were destined to do.” A smaller portion of participants cited a general driven feeling as salient to describing calling. For example,

Participant 384 said “A natural instinct or pull towards a certain field or career. A career that you have an unexplainable passion for.” Further illustrations of labels in this theme are as follows: Utilizing God’s gifts, Participant 33: “These are gifts God has given me that will allow me to have a career that fulfills both my job and earth and also help further the Kingdom of God.” Outside force, Participant 135: “A calling means that I have a higher power directing or guiding in the way that I should lead my life whether that be with a career decision or not.” Unique purpose, Participant 182: “The purpose that is for me in my life.”

Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being. This second theme suggests that calling is also commonly understood to be a career that has a precise fit with a person which leads to enjoyment, motivation and personal growth. Most frequently there was some reference to strengths and abilities. Participant 302 referred to calling in this way: “Something you are naturally good at.” Similarly, fit and positive outcomes were frequently mentioned such as this response from Participant 273: “A ‘calling’ is when you find a career that really fits you as a person with your personality, and you feel like you can give something special to the field.” As can be seen in Table 1, the rest of this theme is supported by responses that centered on the following: Enjoyment, Participant 375: “The career that will bring happiness in your life and others.” Motivation, Participant 306: “A calling is what motivates you to achieve more in your career, something you feel you were meant to do, something that is fulfilling.” Personal Growth, Participant 278: “It is a feeling that I can't explain, a feeling to be a part of something to better myself and others.” Having a Clear Idea, Participant 23: “Having a clear thought about what you want to do in life.”

Table 1 - *Definitions of Calling*

| Theme | Label |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| External Force | God's Will/Plan Fulfill Destiny Driven Feeling God's Gifts Outside Force Unique Purpose |
| Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being | Strengths/Abilities Fit/Positive Outcome Enjoyment Interest/Motivation Unique Purpose Personal Growth Having a Clear Idea |
| Altruism | Fit/Positive Outcome Positive Impact on Others |

Altruism. This final theme was also frequently present among respondents' definitions of calling. The labels that this theme emerged from focused on helping others and positive outcomes in others as well as society. An example of this can be seen in Participant 241's response: "What will make me happiest and what I can do that will initiate the most positive change in the world." An example of positive impact from Participant 79 is "Being led to do something because it helps others, not only myself."

Behavioral Implications of Calling

This section examines the way one might approach one's career as a calling through responses to the following question: "What, specifically, does it mean for you to approach your career as a calling?" As we found previously, responses varied in length and complexity. Four themes emerged from the initial 16 labels and are as follows (listed in order of prevalence): *Follow External Forces, Pursue Interests/Talents/Meaning,*

Display Altruism and Effortful Dedication (see Table 2).

Pursue External Forces. The most frequent response to explaining how one approaches her or his career as a calling related to pursuing or responding to external forces. Responses focused on following God's plan and fulfilling some sense of destiny make up the bulk of this theme. An example of the former from Participant 105 is "God has planned what will happen in our life already and by approaching our career as a calling, we our fulfilling what God has planned for us." A common response citing destiny as central to having a calling by Participant 356 is as follows, "It means that I feel that I am meant to do what I do for a reason that I may or may not know." Further examples of responses are as follows: Find Unique Purpose, Participant 406: "To feel in your career that you actually are doing what you are supposed to be doing in life." Utilize God's Gifts, Participant 83: "It means that I need to look at the areas in which God has gifted me, then look at what areas need my talents. Where these two areas meet is most likely where God is calling me to go." Follow Should/Driven Feeling, Participant 160: "For me, it means that it's something that I should or need to do in my life."

Pursue Interests/Talents/Meaning. The second theme, that describes how one approaches calling, is based on pursuing interests, enjoyment and having meaningful work. The decision to make this theme was based on how much meaning is derived from positive outcomes, fit and happiness. The most frequent responses cited meaning, enjoyment, positive outcomes, and utilizing strengths and talents. Participant 373 said this about finding meaning, "A career should not just merely be something a person does, but it should help to define that person and add importance to their life."

Table 2 - *Behavioral Implications of Calling*

| Theme | Label |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Pursue External Forces | Follow/Glorify God Fulfill Destiny Find Unique Purpose Utilize God's Gifts Follow Should/Driven Feeling |
| Pursue Interests/Talents/ Meaning | Find Importance/Meaning Find Enjoyment Have Positive Outcomes/Fit Use Strengths/Abilities Interests and Motivation Find Unique Purpose Follow Clear Ideas Find Personal Growth Openness to Anything |
| Pursue Altruism | Positive Impact on Others Have Positive Outcomes/Fit |
| Effortful Dedication | Dedication at Work |

An example of enjoyment and utilizing strengths and abilities, given by Participant 54, is "It means developing all my talents and abilities, but especially honing in on the subject matter that I am especially gifted in and enjoy doing." A sample response for Have Positive Outcomes/Fit from Participant 291 is "It means that I will be good at what I do and be happy with my choice." An example of Find Unique Purpose was listed above. Further responses are: Follow Clear Ideas, Participant 312: "Approaching and knowing that the certain career that I chose is the one that I know and want to do." Find Personal Growth, Participant 473: "Refine my skills and expand my knowledge to pursue what makes me happy." Openness to Anything, Participant 78: "Approach it with an open mind willing to work at your calling with your whole heart once you find out what that calling is."

Pursue Altruism. Helping others was also a frequently mentioned behavioral aspect of those having a calling. This was sometimes referenced directly and other times more indirectly through mention of positive outcomes. Participant 126 responded with “Help everyone and anyone I can.” A more general pro-social response from Participant 142 was “It means that I will actually feel I am making a difference rather than just making money.”

Effortful Dedication. A final theme that emerged from participant responses referred to the presence of calling as something that increases one’s effort and dedication at work. Participant 171 illustrates this through this response: “It means I must approach it with my best of efforts.”

Scope of Calling

This section pertains to the pervasiveness of calling throughout other domains aside from work. Labels and themes emerged from analysis of the following question: “Does the word ‘calling’ apply to areas of your life other than work? Please explain.” Five themes emerged through our discussions of the initial 14 labels. Listed in order of prevalence; they are as follows: *Meaningful Relationships/Interactions*; *Meaningful Activities*; *Yes, Everything*; *No, Nothing* and *Lifestyle/Character* (See Table 3). As can be seen by the order of themes, a large majority of participants defined the scope of calling as broader than traditional work.

Meaningful Interactions/Relationships. Of the majority of respondents that viewed calling as extending beyond work, the most commonly cited area was close meaningful relationships and family. An example coded under this label, by Participant 209, was “Yes, I feel called in all areas of my life, whether it’s with friends or family, I

feel called to care for others around me. It's important to have a calling because of its intimate, personal roots.” Helping others through various forms of service was also a commonly referenced area in which calling was thought to pertain. Participant 400’s answer supported this label with the following response: “Yes, you can be called to do community service, to reach out to help certain organizations, etc.” Further examples are as follows: God’s Plans, Participant 20: “Yes, a calling is anything God has planned for you” Religion/Church, Participant 132: “Yes, religion, I feel God has called me to do certain things in every area of life because of the career I feel called to.”

Table 3 - *Scope of Calling*

| Theme | Label |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Meaningful Interactions/Relationships | Relationships/Family Helping/Serving Others God’s Plans Religion/Church |
| Meaningful Activities | Hobbies/Interests/Athletics Education Anything done with Passion Using Talents/Gifts |
| Yes, Everything | Everything/Anything/Life |
| Lifestyle/Character | Personality/Character/Actions Location/Area Personal Growth/Improvement Spirituality |
| No, Only Work | No, Calling refers to Work |

Meaningful Activities. Being happily engaged in a variety of interests and endeavors was the second most common response. Some responses which were coded into this theme are as follows: Participant 368 wrote “Yes, it applies to the areas that I enjoy doing such as mountain biking, camping, hunting, fishing, etc.” Education, Participant 17: “Yes - I felt ‘called’ to go to the college I attend; I also felt ‘called’ to

work at a Bible camp, and study abroad for a year.” Anything Done With Passion, Participant 135: “Yes it does because I have to love the job that I do and feel that there is a reason for what I am doing.”

Yes, Everything. Some responses to this question were less specific, but did support that calling applied to areas beyond work. A typical answer coded into this theme from Participant 382 is “Yes. It can apply to anything in my opinion. Anything you feel drawn to do for some reason explainable or not.”

Lifestyle/Character. Another important theme that emerged from participant responses referred to character, choices, growth and spirituality. Rather than a specific domain, how one approaches life seemed to be key to these responses. An example from Participant 266 is “Yes, it applies to the way I see the world. By saying that I have a calling I look at things around me as new possibilities.” More specific domains included the following: Location/Area, Participant 398: “Yes, other things such as where to live and where to go to school.” Personal Growth/Improvement, Participant 260: “Yes I would like to believe so. I believe that it is what drives me to do things in my everyday life. Things that may help someone else out or make me a better person.” Spirituality, Participant 253: “Yes, it interrelates with personal beliefs or spirituality.”

No, Only Work. A final theme which emerged from responses to this question was simply that calling did not apply to areas other than traditional work. Responses of this nature were not frequent and were usually either a one word response or something like what Participant 318 stated: “No, the word calling does not apply to areas of my life other than work.”

Outcomes of Calling

The final question was administered to only the Christian colleges and therefore draws from a less diverse pool of respondents. The aim of the following question was to understand the outcomes of having a calling rather than just a career: “How does (or how will) having a calling make a difference in your career, compared to people who have a career but who don't approach it as a calling?” Three main themes emerged from an initial 16 peer reviewed labels and are as follows, listed in order of prevalence:

Satisfaction/Motivation/Positive Approach, Purpose Fulfillment and Benefiting Others (See Table 4).

Satisfaction/Motivation/Positive Approach. The most common response to outcomes of having calling centered around increased satisfaction, motivation and a general positive outlook on things. They were grouped into one theme because they were frequently linked in participant responses. Participant 66 responded as follows “I will enjoy it more and find greater fulfillment as I pursue my career.” Further examples are: *Passionate/Motivated*, Participant 18: “I think it will make me more excited and more motivated knowing that there is a higher purpose for what I'm doing.” *Increased Dedication*, Participant 5: “I think that you will take it more seriously and possibly approach your career as something that is really important” *Peace/Content*, Participant 27: “It will give me a joy and peace that others will not get from a day to day job.” *Positive Outcomes*, Participant 58: “I will enjoy the job more and maybe be blessed more through it.” I will be happy and excited about going to work and my skills will be used.” *Positive Attitude*, Participant 81: “I will approach everything I am given to do with a positive attitude and give God the glory.” *Personal Growth*, Participant 87: “I think that

having a calling will make me a harder worker and more likely to view my career as a positive aspect of my life. A person who doesn't approach their career as a calling might not be as willing to fully invest themselves in it.” Open Mindedness, Participant 3: “You will be open minded when it comes to your career. You are excited to go to work and get stuff done cause you know it is benefiting others and what you are suppose to be doing with your life.”

Table 4 - *Outcomes of Calling*

| Theme | Label |
|---|---|
| Satisfaction/Motivation/ Positive Approach | Enjoyment/Happiness Personal Importance/Meaning Passionate/Motivated Increased Dedication Peace/Content Positive Outcomes Positive Attitude Personal Growth Open Mindedness |
| Purpose Fulfillment | Follow/Glorifies God Fulfill Unique Purpose Clear Direction/Idea Fulfill Destiny Utilize Strengths/Abilities Driven Feeling |
| Benefiting Others | Positive Impact on Others |

Purpose Fulfillment. Another theme that emerged cited things like following God’s plan and fulfilling destiny or purpose. An example of the first two labels can be found in this response from Participant 72 “I will feel like I’m fulfilling God’s chosen path for my life as compared to someone who isn’t.” Participant 113 captured destiny and direction when they stated “I will feel more security in what I am doing and be able to know for sure that I am where I am supposed to be. That feeling of doubt will be left out

of the equation in my career.” Other examples of responses are as follows: Clear Direction/Idea, Participant 39: “Give me a direction.” Utilize Strengths/Abilities, Participant 86: “If you have a calling then you have the right talents for what needs to be done.” Driven Feeling, Participant 54: “I feel I will work harder at something that I believe I am called to do. Instead of merely doing something because I have to, I will be doing something because it serves a higher purpose to both me and this world.”

Benefiting Others. The final response theme that emerged in this section had to do with the presence of calling being something that would have a positive impact on others. An example from Participant 112 states: “Feeling of accomplishment, contribution to a greater good.”

Discussion

This purpose of this study was to help gain a richer understanding of the construct of calling. This was accomplished through the qualitative investigation of participant responses to four questions. Through a process of peer examined coding, descriptive themes emerged from the data. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, there were no a priori hypotheses as to what the coding process would reveal. However, the literature reviewed suggested certain components of calling that could be compared with the themes that emerged in this study. In this sense, other authors have made predictions and statements that can provide a framework for how these results can be discussed.

Overall, results were consistent and supportive of many of the ways calling is conceptualized in the literature, but themes also were found that have received less support or attention in the literature. The responses of this study provide support for how much the construct of calling has evolved over the years and how beneficial and

important the construct seems to be for a large portion of our student sample.

Definition

As seen in Table 1, the themes that emerged in the present study were: External Force, Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being and Altruism. The External Force portion corresponds well with the idea of a transcendent summons from beyond the self that was proposed as a central component of calling by Dik and Duffy (in press). The notion of a drive or force coming from some external source was very strongly represented in participant responses. Among these, references to God were common, but there were also many responses that did not reference calling as being connected to a deity. This movement toward a more secular construct also is something that has received attention in recent literature (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Clearly, this construct has broadened beyond its monastic roots into something that is conceptualized as being much more inclusive.

A second defining theme of calling which emerged in the present study was Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being. This theme primarily developed from responses that cited strengths, interests, positive outcomes and an overall sense of well-being. Enjoyment, motivation, purpose and positive outcomes were often attributed to this idea of optimal fit between person and career. Here we see some difference from the literature which primarily emphasizes meaning (Dik & Duffy, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Locke, 1990a, 1990b), yet also some overlap. The primary difference seems to be the idea of strengths, talents, abilities and a general sense of 'fit' being important to calling. Most literature has focused on meaning and purpose as being defining characteristics of calling. One question this suggests is what exactly is included in the concept of meaning. In the present study, references to enjoyment, motivation and purpose seem to support the

idea of meaningfulness being important to defining calling. However, strengths and abilities seem to be outside of meaning, at least directly, in that simply having strengths or abilities is not typically considered as having meaning. However, responses commonly included references to strengths and abilities as well as increased success. This success is somewhat similar to the idea of subjective success one experiences after accomplishing personal, meaningful goals (Lewin, 1936; Locke, 1990a, 1990b). Hence, one's personal strengths and abilities can lead to positive outcomes which extend beyond simple accomplishment. Furthermore, personal success is frequently linked with enjoyment and motivation. A common example is "Calling is something I am good at, put effort into and enjoy doing." Through analysis of how terms are often clumped together it seems that having 'fit' may often be related to ideas of positive outcomes and meaningfulness. If this was the case, virtually all aspects of the Personal Fit theme could in some way be linked to meaningfulness which would be interesting to investigate further. Regardless, the notion of personal fit suggests individual factors that meaningfulness does not fully seem to capture directly. Because of this, it seems most accurate to use Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being rather than focus specifically on meaning, although meaning clearly is part of it.

The final theme that emerged in defining calling was Altruism. This theme is something that has also received support in the literature as discussed earlier. The third part of Dik and Duffy's (in press) definition, "holds other-oriented values," corresponds well with this theme of altruism in that a non-self-centered agenda is central to both. Similar themes of calling present in the literature include: caring for a child (Oates, et al., 2005; Sellers et al. 2005); external rewards being less important (Wrzesniewski et al.

1997), and goals often directed toward helping society (Hall & Chandler, 2005). An example of such a response from Participant 190 illustrates this altruistic theme neatly: “Approaching my calling in my career I look forward to helping others.” For this participant helping others seems to be completely central to the notion of having a calling. It is clear that a pro-social approach is a central and stable factor within the construct of calling.

Behavioral Implications of Calling

The specific responses to how one might approach their career as a calling suggests that the construct of calling may translate into real behaviors. This has important implications for the function of calling as it seems to be much more than an idea or a feeling. The results suggest that many participants feel there is an active component in having a calling.

The behavioral themes that emerged largely resemble those that came forth in the definition question with a few small exceptions. The first theme that emerged as a behavioral aspect of calling was again related to pursuing some external force. This external force was described as God’s will, destiny, purpose and a general driven feeling. The pursuit of meaning emerged in this question more so than when participants were providing definitions of the construct. Apparently this question stimulated thoughts about calling which lead to the emergence of thoughts about meaning. This emergence of meaning lends increasing support for the definitions derived from the literature (Dik & Duffy, in press; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997) in which meaning often is suggested to play a central role in calling. Perhaps when asked to think about calling more concretely, participants referenced meaning as more important which caused

responses to differ from in the second question, whereas defining it in a more abstract manner yielded results more centered on fit and well-being. Having the behavioral aspects of calling in mind may necessitate more thought as to what motivations are driving the pursuit of a calling outcome. Furthermore, as happiness, satisfaction and motivation were referenced in responses to the definition of calling it is possible that these outcomes come to mind more readily than meaning, although as discussed earlier they might essentially have some degree of overlap. Pursuing altruism was also a theme which was not surprising as it was also a key component in the definition portion.

A final theme, which was not fully captured in the way the sample defined calling, referenced the approach toward calling as something that increases one's effort and dedication. This might be expected naturally when one is finding more enjoyment and has increased motivation, but again may be thought of more as a behavioral implication than a defining quality even though it is closely linked to enjoyment and motivation. Outcomes relating to dedication have been found in the literature showing that having meaning and purpose is associated with increased performance and satisfaction (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Overall it seems that, although not a frequently cited component, this idea that calling has ties to performance and dedication has support from participant responses as well as past research.

Scope of Calling

The purpose of this question was to examine the degree to which calling is perceived as extending beyond traditional work roles. As noted earlier, this is another area of proposed change for calling within some of the literature. Originally it was

thought to pertain exclusively to work roles, but a number of studies (Oates, et al., 2005; Sellers, et al., 2005; Serow, 1994) have suggested that it is moving to a broader sense of life roles in general. The results from the present study strongly support this shift in scope. Anything from meaningful relationships, activities, character, and life in general were cited as having the potential to be a calling. This supports Dik and Duffy's (in press) decision to use the term "life role" rather than exclusively referencing traditional work in their definition. The responses citing relationships as important support the research reviewed previously that suggested motherhood and career could be conceptualized as a calling (Sellers et al. 2005). Participant responses suggesting that calling can pertain to multiple life roles is an area also supported in the literature (Oates, et al., 2005). Finally, the notion that virtually anything can be a calling is supported by Hall and Chandler's (2005) definition that calling can be anything a person perceives as his or her purpose in life.

An important issue these results raise is whether our questions regarding calling should have been phrased in reference to career. The present investigation's results support the use of a more inclusive reference to calling outside of paid employment to enable respondents to conceptualize it within the context of any life role. Although this result was anticipated from past literature (Oates, et al., 2005; Sellers, et al., 2005; Serow, 1994; Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997) we decided to frame calling around career for three of the four questions. The reason for this is the traditionally strong roots calling has in the career domain. The question pertaining to scope prompted participants to specifically think about the domains in which calling can exist beyond the work role. This allowed for a detailed understanding of the scope of calling while still focusing on calling as a career

in the other questions. However, it would have been interesting to see how responses may have differed if life roles other than career (e.g. parent, significant other, friend, leisurite) were referenced. Overall, this again is an area where the results show strong support of the literature (Oates, et al., 2005; Sellers, et al., 2005; Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997; Serow, 1994) suggesting a broader scope of calling beyond paid employment.

Outcomes of Calling

This last question was directed specifically at the outcomes one might experience from having a calling rather than just a career. The participant responses in this study showed strong support for a variety of positive outcomes resulting from a person approaching work as a calling. Happiness, meaning, motivation and passion were among the most common responses. These individual outcomes support Hall and Chandler's (2005) model of calling and career success where both objective and subjective success are thought to be the results of calling and effort. With subjective success one is thought to have a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment which go beyond external rewards (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In conjunction with this model, we rarely found participant references to distinct external successes such as money or fame when defining the results of having calling. Increased motivation also was an outcome of approaching work as a calling which is both supported in the literature as well as the results of this present study (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997).

Other reported outcomes of calling included fulfillment of God's plan or destiny, as well as having a positive impact on others. Although not stated specifically, feeling that one has fulfilled something one was meant to do would likely provide further support to the idea that calling provides a sense of meaning and enjoyment. Positive outcomes

could be both individual as well as be linked with the altruistic/pro-social theme which has emerged elsewhere in the present study as well as in the literature (Dik & Duffy, in press; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Implications for Future Research and Counseling Practice

The results from this study are promising and suggest a number of directions for further exploration in this area. Although a college population was an appropriate starting point for this line of research, a population of older employed or non-employed adults would be the logical next step. It would be difficult to predict the outcomes for individuals who had either worked for many years or who hadn't worked at all as calling could easily be more or less relevant for them. College students are at a time where future choices are very salient, but in most cases work or life experience is still relatively limited. Many of the results in this study were based on perceptions of what calling is, but less so on how people had experienced it as many participants were still actively seeking it and had not yet entered careers or life roles that they perceived as being a calling. Because of this, a sample of individuals with more life/work experience would be very enlightening in that it would be able to support whether or not these perceptions of calling are accurate or present in their lives. Qualitative questions could again provide interesting information in how calling is defined, the behavioral aspect of calling, the areas which it pertains, the outcomes of having a calling and perhaps some inquiry into how callings might shift or change over time.

Another area in which research should be expanded would be to find a more diverse sample in respect to socioeconomic status, ethnicity and possibly country of origin. Cross-cultural research is highly important in order to understand if and where

the construct of calling exists, how it might differ, and how it might apply to other populations. Collectivistic cultures may reference other oriented outcomes as being more central to meaning and satisfaction rather than personal success or achievement (Dik & Duffy, in press). Religious differences may also play a large role in how calling is defined especially with the labels that emerged within the theme of external forces. In summary, a more diverse sample in all respects would provide a richer understanding of this construct as well as more opportunity to evaluate existing definitions and conceptualizations of the construct in the literature.

Finally, as our results have suggested, further research examining participant responses regarding how calling is understood in regard to other life roles would add a great deal to the current literature. Aside from responses supporting calling as existing in life roles other than career, little is known how it might be defined, sought out, maintained and benefited from in these various other roles.

The results presented in this study provide support for how calling has evolved over the years and can potentially help support definitions that will unify and facilitate further research. Calling was found to be important to a majority of college students in our sample. As this is the case, and as it is considered to lead to a multitude of positive outcomes, it seems to have clear implications for practice in various life roles. As the construct of calling is further understood, perhaps ways will emerge to promote it or assist people in trying to find a sense of calling in their lives. Once a sense of calling is present, maintenance may become an issue which would again be an area of research and practical implication. Understanding the individual factors present in calling is also important for respecting and valuing the diverse experiences within human lives.

There are also implications for counseling practice within the area of vocational counseling as well as more general counseling that may pertain to other life roles. As enjoyment, motivation and dedication are key components of what many might consider a successful life, it seems that the presence and search for a sense of calling could be an important aspect for a person's general well-being. As over two thirds of our initial sample responded that calling was relevant to their lives, it would be anticipated that counseling in this area would be a valuable service for a large population of individuals in our society. As a counselor, simply being aware of this added dimension to how a person might approach a certain life role is important in understanding the client's experience. Similarly, identifying roles to which a client feels called would have implications for goal setting as well as dedication toward the fulfillment of goals. Finally, the positive outcomes of having a calling such as happiness and a sense of purpose or meaning may have implications for helping those who feel out of place and hopeless or who feel that life is meaningless (provided more is understood about the process of obtaining and maintaining a sense of calling in life).

Limitations

Despite a number of strengths of the present study, several limitations require some caution in interpreting results. Researcher bias in this work is inescapable, as is exact replication of qualitative findings (Altheide et al., 2008). However, attempts were made to minimize this somewhat by using multiple coders who were well trained and through peer examination of what emerged from the data. Maintaining a constant awareness of how we might be impacting the results is also important. As the results of this study are supportive of my advisor's definition of the construct I was even more

aware that I may inadvertently see what I want to see. The peer examination process was helpful for this reason as the other research assistants had little to no knowledge of the connection between this work and the definition put forth by Dik and Duffy (in press). As mentioned above, a more diverse sample of participants would provide valuable information, but considering the exploratory nature of this study our sample was an appropriate starting point. Having increased diversity would add to the overall transferability. Likewise, in- depth interviews would have been helpful in further investigating some ideas, the use of short answers allowed us to gather a much larger and more diverse sample.

Despite the limitations, the results presented here provide a base understanding which can inform and encourage other research in the area of calling. Calling clearly is a construct which is changing and seems to have relevance for a large percentage of people. Understanding calling in more depth will enable us to better predict and promote it so that the positive outcomes which come from calling can be something that more and more individuals can experience.

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