

## THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: A REFLECTION ON THE CALLING CONSTRUCT

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**ABSTRACT:** This brief chapter arises from reflections on the research studies relating to the Calling construct, carry out by colleagues from the University of Padua. Basically this is a reasoning on the implications of which we should (as academics) always keep in mind when we are called to think about career paths for students, and how it could be important to help students to develop a Calling, putting them in the conditions of making an aware and passionate choice about their future working life.

**KEYWORDS:** calling; multidimensional construct, vocational behavior, students career, University of Padua.

This brief chapter arises from reflections on research studies relating to the Calling Construct presented by colleagues from the University of Padua (Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2014; 2017; Dalla Rosa, Vianello, Anselmi 2017) at the Final Event of the Project *Employability & Competencies. Innovative Curricula for New Professions*. Certainly, as my colleagues have suggested, from a theoretical point of view, a calling is a complex multidimensional construct that describes spiritual, motivational, affective, and identity-related facets of the relationship between individuals and a specific domain in life or work (Wrzesniewski *et al.* 1997; Dik, Duffy 2009; Elangovan *et al.* 2010; Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2016). The longitudinal research carried out by colleagues on the development of a calling – the sample consisted of Italian college students – during three years of university, highlighted, very clearly, that calling is far from being a stable construct such as a personality trait, but is extremely dynamic. In addition, ‘being called’ is not a condition for engaging in domain-related activities or for developing a clear idea of our professional future, but quite the opposite, if anything: the more students have a clear idea of their future and the more they engage in learning activities, the more they will develop a calling. The findings underlined some important practical implications for both professors and university governance, namely, that if we foster students’ engagement and if we let them explore many different domains, we help them feel passion for a domain and find a meaning in their work and their life. It is precisely upon this point that I will try to reason: on the implications of what we should (as academics)

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always keep in mind when we are called to think about career paths for students, and how it could be important to help students develop a calling, by putting them in the conditions of making an informed and passionate choice about their future working life. In fact, the topic is central for those research fields that focus on creating value within organizations, within a wider scenario which is that of the knowledge economy, where the gaze is increasingly shifted from human capital (what you know) to psychological capital (who you are) as a possible competitive advantage for organizations, in which the search for 'talents' becomes a necessary condition to remain competitive in the marketplace. Talent is a keyword within the theme of the calling, because one of the questions about this construct is just this: is it a gift or a talent?

There is no unambiguous answer to this in the literature, however it seems more interesting, for the sake of reasoning, to remain within the dimension of talent, since a talent requires exercise and an area of action in which its practice is defined.

As has already been said, the authors of this study have proposed a multidimensional and integrated definition of the Calling Construct, which describes the relationship between individuals and a specific domain in life or work. Hence, although it is a construct whose dimensions are individual, and in turn, these dimensions can be considered as individual personal resources, it should however be explained within a social relationship, for the above reasons.

Indeed, the findings of this research underline that a calling is an outcome of something, rather than a predictor of something else. In this regard, it seems important to emphasize what Hall & Chandler (2005) have pointed out regarding the definition and domain (subjective vs. objective) of calling, namely, the need to abandon an 'either/or' logic. Instead, it is the interdependence between the two domains that is the central question, to wit, the relationship between subjective and objective, or between individual and organization. Though a calling is something we 'feel', if we move from a transcendent dimension, it can be 'felt' only if it is tied to the dimension of doing, or can be 'discovered' only through doing, or 'found' within the process of attributing meaning to acting, which drives us to pursue a goal. Within this relationship between subjective and objective, the finding of the Calling Study tells us that the greater the engagement, the higher the chances of developing a calling. Therefore, it could be said that a calling is a *talent* that emerges.

Despite being rooted in the well-established theoretical and empirical tradition of vocational psychology, and in the more recent sphere of positive psychology, research into the Calling Construct is still in its preliminary stages (Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2014).

A growing interest in its theoretical implications and potential applications (e.g. career counseling) make this construct important both in

research on vocational behaviour, and to provide vocational guidance. Furthermore, in the light of the above, it would be interesting to understand what facilitates the development of a calling in relation to its social and structural setting, for example, the opportunities offered by its environment (both in training and work environments).

From an organizational point of view, if we consider a calling an outcome, it might be interesting to explore it within the framework of Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger *et al.* 2001), where some objective social conditions can facilitate the emergence of a calling, for example in new hires. Instead, within the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker, Demerouti 2007), it would be interesting to explore the role of the calling as a personal resource, able to, at least hypothetically, moderate or mediate the relationship between perceived or required costs by the organization as well as certain dimensions of stress and burnout.

Lastly, another intriguing perspective in which to explore calling is the relationship between motivation and the Regulatory Mode Theory (Pierro, Kruglanski, Higgins 2006) on goal-pursuit. It would be interesting, within this framework, to understand the relationship between a calling and goal attainment, namely the function of a calling between the steady pursuit of an object, and flexibility in the lens remodelling.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize this: the importance of the methodological and theoretical systematization concerning the Calling Construct, carried out by colleagues from the University of Padua, which underscores not only the complexity of the construct but also the necessity to pursue, in further researches, a more shared definition of what a calling is, to clarify its place in a nomological network of similar constructs; the importance of a calling in the practical implications for professional choices.

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