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Faletehan, Aun Falestien; van Burg, Elco; Thompson, Neil Aaron; Wempe, Johan

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Called to volunteer and stay longer: the significance of work calling for volunteering motivation and retention

Aun Falestien Faletehan, a.f.faletehan@vu.nl; aunfalestien@uinsby.ac.id
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
The Netherlands and UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Elco van Burg, j.c.van.burg@vu.nl
Neil Aaron Thompson, n.a.thompson@vu.nl
Johan Wempe, johan.wempe@vu.nl
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

This article reviews the literature on non-profit volunteering to argue that the concept of 'work calling' is critical to broadening our understanding of volunteer motivation and retention. As an emerging concept, work calling is generally used to explain how individuals satisfy their calling by doing meaningful work. This concept is introduced to the issue of volunteer motivation and retention to detail why volunteers decide to join non-profit organisations and then willingly stay longer. Current theories explain volunteer motivation and retention by focusing on individual factors (commitment and job satisfaction) and organisational factors (management practices, volunteer tasks and organisational reputation). This article integrates work calling with these theories and thus contributes two important insights: (a) volunteers may choose to engage in meaningful work and, therefore, experience self-satisfaction and meaningful life by volunteering; and (b) work calling improves current theories of volunteering motivation and retention at both the individual and organisational levels.

Key words volunteering motivation • retention • work calling • meaningful work • non-profit organisation

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Introduction

Volunteer motivation and retention in non-profit organisations are of central interest to academics and practitioners, given that many non-profit organisations depend on volunteers (Dorsch et al, 2002; Aldridge, 2003; Eisner et al, 2009; Hidalgo and Moreno, 2009; Stillwell et al, 2010). In such organisational, non-profit settings, a volunteer is commonly defined as ‘a person who, out of free will and without wages, works for a not-for-profit organisation that is formally organised and has as its purpose service to someone or something other than its membership’ (Jenner, 1982: 30). Researchers have long argued that it is necessary to understand volunteer motivation to explore how to retain these volunteers in a later phase (Diamond, 2017). Retention is more likely when a volunteer’s motivation is understood, as every person, including volunteers, ‘has a button that can be pushed’ (Ellis, 2002: 22). Existing research explains motivation and retention using theories of commitment and job satisfaction. These theories argue that volunteers will stay at an organisation if they have high levels of personal commitment (Egli et al, 2011; Vecina et al, 2012; Sefora and Mihaela, 2016) and feel satisfied (Chacón et al, 1998; Cihlar, 2004; Egli et al, 2011) due to personally benefiting from mentoring, training and professional development practices, perceiving a match between their motivation and given tasks, and working for an organisation with a good organisational reputation (for example, Clary et al, 1992; Dyck, 2011; Egli et al, 2011; Newton et al, 2014).

This article builds on these important insights by arguing that the study of volunteer motivation and retention in non-profit organisations can be enriched by integrating the concept of ‘work calling’ into current theories (compare Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Dik and Duffy, 2009). Work calling refers to ‘an overarching sense of meaningfulness in one’s work’ (Molloy and Foust, 2017: 351) and emphasises how individuals may get ‘a sense of life purpose and spiritual fulfilment from their careers’ (Steele and Bullock, 2009: 273). This article draws on a work perspective, which explains that volunteering is understood as work (that is, formal unpaid work in the voluntary sector), connected to the organisation and embedded in social structures (Taylor, 2004). Following this perspective, it is argued that volunteers are likely to join and stay longer at non-profit organisations when they not only are personally benefiting from volunteering, as stated in current commitment and satisfaction theories, but also believe that they are meaningfully contributing to larger goals pursued by the organisation.

To make this argument, this article begins by reviewing the literature on non-profit volunteering to argue that the concept of work calling yields two main contributions to theories of volunteer motivation and retention. First, it is argued that volunteers choose to work and stay at non-profit organisations because they are engaged in meaningful volunteer work and, therefore, experience self-satisfaction and meaningful life. The main thought articulated here is that work calling helps to theoretically understand volunteer motivation and retention as it shifts assumptions of individual rational decision making (‘How can I best fulfil my aim to be humanitarian?’) towards more subtle and non-conscious decision making (‘I find myself volunteering’) based on societal narratives and discourses becoming deeply engrained. This addresses some of the limits of current theories of motivations, specifically relating motivation to current discourse in society, and explains that individuals could volunteer because they share an orientation towards a higher purpose. Second, this article integrates work calling

into theories of volunteer retention to further our understanding of the individual and organisational-level dimensions. Work calling is beneficial for understanding volunteers' commitment, satisfaction and motivation at the individual level. In managerial practices, despite generating 'the dark side', non-profit organisations could also develop work calling to help volunteers in finding their meaning and thus staying longer in an organisation. Accordingly, the arguments presented in this article will further future empirical studies by encouraging researchers to investigate how non-profit organisations and individuals could seek and maintain meaningful volunteer work.

Volunteering for non-profit organisations: motivation and retention

A review of existing literature on volunteer motivation and retention in the non-profit organisational setting is presented to position this article's theoretical contributions. Subsequently, the notion of work calling is introduced and used to broaden our understanding of volunteer motivation and retention.

Volunteer motivation

There have been numerous studies that focus on the reasons why individuals engage in volunteering. Motivation studies argue that volunteering is a path to satisfy social and psychological goals (Sergent and Sedlacek, 1990; Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Chacón et al, 1998; Rehberg, 2005). Clary et al (1998) have made a significant contribution to this literature by developing the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which has been used extensively by other researchers (for example, Yoshioka et al, 2007; Bang and Ross, 2009; Butt et al, 2017; Chacón et al, 2017) and provides a good summary of the different factors that motivate people to volunteer.

According to the VFI (Clary et al, 1998), individuals can be driven to volunteer by six different motivations, and all volunteers have at least one of these motivations. First, individuals are led by altruistic and humanitarian values that lead them to be concerned for others. Religious beliefs are included in this value factor and are sometimes constitutive of this value factor (Wymer, 1997; Merino, 2013). Second, people volunteer because of an understanding factor as volunteering provides new learning experiences to build their knowledge, skills and abilities. Third, through volunteering, people obtain a higher quality of social interaction, such as building friendships with others. Fourth, volunteers aim to develop their own career paths. Fifth, they try to obtain a protective goal – volunteering can help them to escape from negative feelings such as guilt over being more fortunate and more prosperous than others. Finally, the VFI points towards an enhancement reason, which refers to promoting positive feelings such as personal growth and development.

Some scholars have also developed the VFI according to organisational types and volunteering work. New variables that are additional possible motivation categories include role identity (Penner, 2002), religiosity, enjoyment and team building (Allison et al, 2002), societal and governmental factors (Esmond and Dunlop, 2004), pastime (Van Vianen et al, 2008), love of the game (Hallmann and Harms, 2012) and the social justice function (Jiranek et al, 2013). These amendments to the VFI indicate that changes in non-profit organisations and volunteering work could encourage researchers to further elaborate on the volunteer motivation approach. Therefore,

Table 1: Factors influencing volunteer retention

Levels	Individual	Organisational		
Categories	Personal characteristics	Management practices	Task-related factors	Organisational reputation
Factors	Commitment	Learning opportunities (for example, mentoring, training and professional development)	Work engagement	Organisational reputation
	Satisfaction	Supporting personal growth in career path	Task design indicated by aligning volunteers' motives with the form of given tasks (for example, working in the same neighbourhood, working with children, high-quality task achievement)	
	Motivation	Incentives programme (for example, allowances, stipends and the provision of transport)		
		Understanding volunteer motives		
		Effective supervision		
		Recognition and appreciation		
		Orientation programmes		
		Leadership		
		Fun factor		
Communication and internal marketing				

this article argues that the concept of work calling is relevant as one of the personal motives to volunteer.

Volunteer retention

For organisations that rely on volunteers to a large extent, volunteer retention is a critical theme. [McBride et al \(2011: 852\)](#) define retention as 'completion of the term of service and examining time commitment by the intensity and duration of the service'. At its simplest level, volunteer retention is 'purely a matter of making volunteers feel good about their assignment and themselves. If the experience is satisfying, the volunteers will continue to want to participate' ([Lynch, 2000: 1](#)). To provide a summative overview, the factors that lead to retention are classified into four categories:

- personal characteristics;
- management practices;
- task-related factors;
- factors related to organisational reputation.

The first category relates to the individual level, while the other categories are linked to the organisational level, as illustrated in [Table 1](#).

Personal characteristics

Several studies have highlighted that commitment, satisfaction and motivation are important personal characteristics for volunteer retention. Commitment is defined as 'the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation' (Porter et al, 1974: 604). It is characterised by at least three factors: a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's values; a willingness to exert substantial effort on behalf of the organisation; and a convinced desire to maintain organisational membership. Volunteers remain longer in non-profit organisations if they have a high personal commitment (Dorsch et al, 2002; Egli et al, 2011; Vecina et al, 2012; Sefora and Mihaela, 2016).

Work satisfaction also plays a significant role in retaining volunteers (Cihlar, 2004; Egli et al, 2011; Vecina et al, 2012; Hyde et al, 2014). If the factor of commitment relates to the intention to remain for a longer duration, satisfaction plays a particular role in the initial phase of volunteering. This suggests that satisfaction is important when organisational commitment is still low but developing (Chacón et al, 2007). Volunteers enjoy the satisfaction from their work and work context because these are aligned with their intrinsic values, rather than the monetary reward (Benz, 2005).

Finally, an individual with high altruistic motivation tends to volunteer for a longer duration (Rehberg, 2005). This intrinsic motivation could arise from several sources, including humanitarian values, a desire to produce quality service, career considerations and positive feelings of self (Benz, 2005; Yoshioka et al, 2007). Religious traditions and belief systems can also provide intrinsic motivation (Rehberg, 2005), and some scholars indicate that increases in religiosity and spiritual support are associated with increases in volunteering over time (Chao Guo et al, 2013; Krause, 2015).

Management practices

The second category that affects volunteer retention is management practices. As the category of management practices is broad, the factors listed in this category are diverse. They include learning opportunities such as mentoring, training and professional development (Hidalgo and Moreno, 2009; Newton et al, 2014), supporting personal growth in a career path (Yoshioka et al, 2007), incentive programmes such as allowances, stipends and the provision of transport (Aldridge, 2003; McBride et al, 2011), understanding volunteers' motives (Clary et al, 1992), effective supervision (Flood, 2005), recognition and appreciation (Phillips et al, 2002; Stillwell et al, 2010), orientation programmes (Cuskelly et al, 2005), leadership (Carter, 2005; Trexler, 2014) and a 'fun' factor (Aldridge, 2003). Finally, communication and internal marketing practices also influence volunteer retention. Internal marketing is regarded as the task of successfully recruiting, informing the organisation's vision, educating and motivating volunteers to accomplish organisational goals. Within this concept, volunteers are considered as internal customers and must be managed carefully to ensure a good relationship with the non-profit organisation (Phillips et al, 2002; Little, 2004; Lee et al, 2015; Curran et al, 2016).

Task-related factors

The third category that affects volunteer retention is the nature of the task itself. This includes factors such as work engagement (Vecina et al, 2012) and the task or job

design (Egli et al, 2011) by aligning volunteers' motives with the form of the given tasks (Clary et al, 1992). These factors essentially ensure that volunteers can match non-profit organisations' activities with their main motivational needs. An empirical study shows that this 'matching principle' could satisfy volunteers' motives and seems likely to make them stay longer in the same organisation (Stukas et al, 2009). For instance, the tasks that volunteers appear to enjoy are delivering services in residential homes that are in the same neighbourhood as their sponsoring church (Barthle et al, 2008), activities that allow them to work with children (Huber, 2011) and tasks that acquire high-quality task achievement (Gidron, 1985). These factors may influence volunteers' satisfaction since the quality of task assignments that volunteers receive is the most imperative determinant of volunteer satisfaction. Moreover, the task must be conducted in a friendly atmosphere (Cihlar, 2004).

Organisational reputation

The fourth category that influences volunteer retention is organisational reputation. As there are many types of non-profit organisation, some volunteers have their own preferences to get connected with them. An organisation's reputation, which is related to the concepts of identity, image and the status that the non-profit organisation has built up, becomes an important reason for volunteers to join and stay longer in the organisations. It also links to a non-profit organisation's brand heritage (Curran et al, 2016). Reputation is a general label for an individual's perception about the credibility of an organisation's historical actions over time, and a high reputation positively affects volunteers' loyalty and retention (Dyck, 2011).

Opportunities for conceptual development

As mentioned before, many non-profit organisations rely on volunteers, and they need to manage volunteers' commitment and satisfaction so that they stay at the organisation longer. A few studies have started to connect the idea of work calling to volunteer motivation as a volunteer joins a non-profit organisation because they have a perceived calling to help others or the environment (for example, Akintola, 2011; Topp et al, 2015). However, work calling has not yet been related to volunteer retention. This is despite the fact that work calling has a strong impact on both volunteer motivation and retention. Work calling provides meaning to volunteers' work, specifically regarding emotional support (Horstmann, 2011). Although high intrinsic or altruistic motivations are important, volunteers could lose those feelings in the future and stop volunteering. Volunteers often need to sustain and rejuvenate the meaning they find in their tasks to stay at an organisation longer. Volunteers may, therefore, find and renew meaning through performing their volunteer work based on their sustained calling. It is about calling management. Sustained work calling may stimulate volunteers to follow their 'life purpose and spiritual fulfilment' (Steele and Bullock, 2009: 273), which also points to the important role of workplace spirituality, which can be the basis for work calling. Therefore, as a concept, work calling can shed more light on meaningful work concerning volunteer motivation and retention.

The significance of work calling in volunteering motivation and retention

In this section, the notion of work calling is reviewed in terms of the theory of meaningful work, and its implications for understanding volunteer motivation and retention in non-profit organisations are discussed. It is argued that work calling furthers theories of volunteer motivation and retention in non-profit organisations by shifting assumptions of individual rational decision making towards more subtle and non-conscious decision making based on pro-societal motivation and an orientation to serve a higher purpose.

Work calling and the theory of meaningful work

According to [Wrzesniewski et al \(1997\)](#), most people view their work as a way to gain income, as a career is necessary to fulfil individual desires of advancement, and a calling as a way to enhance self-fulfilment and contribute to pro-social or environmental goals. While gaining income and building a career relate to paid work and focus on financial status and aims, work calling refers to individual statements such as ‘You do it because you love what you do and you really have this sense of purpose and meaning, and that’s what’s driven me’ ([Molloy and Foust, 2017: 347](#)) or ‘Well, I don’t know what they could do that would make me leave. Even if I wasn’t getting paid, I would still be here’ ([Bunderson and Thompson, 2009: 35](#)). Work calling emphasises an inner drive towards personal happiness ([Duffy and Dik, 2013](#)) and positively influencing society and the environment, which can be related to both paid and voluntary work in formal or informal settings ([Taylor, 2004](#)).

As an emerging concept to study, [Molloy and Foust \(2017: 351\)](#) define work calling as ‘an overarching sense of meaningfulness in one’s work, brought to awareness through a process of being compelled or a moment of reckoning instigated by a higher power or the internal self and enacted through the integration of the individual’s passion and skill-set in ways that positively contribute to society through one’s work’. Accordingly, work calling combines an individual’s sense of what they would like to do, should do and actually do with the pursuit of pro-social intentions ([Elangovan et al, 2010: 430](#)).

In particular, the literature on work calling argues that the concept contains three components: an external summon suggesting an orientation towards action; the clarity of meaning or purpose as well as a personal mission; and pro-social motivation leading to societal action ([Elangovan et al, 2010](#); [Hagmaier and Abele, 2012](#)). These components distinguish work calling from related constructs such as work centrality, work commitment, work engagement and pro-social work behaviours ([Duffy and Dik, 2013](#)). Furthermore, work calling is considered as a subset or specific construct under the umbrella of meaningful work ([Steger et al, 2012](#)), since the meaningfulness dimension is merely one part of work calling ([Molloy and Foust, 2017](#)). Work calling emphasises personal authenticity for individuals to complete their unique purpose ([Bunderson and Thompson, 2009](#); [Rosso et al, 2010](#)) and how individuals may get ‘a sense of life purpose and spiritual fulfilment from their careers’ ([Lips-Wiersma, 2002](#); [Steele and Bullock, 2009: 273](#)). Work calling also requires ‘a communicative perception and process between the called and the caller’ ([Molloy and Foust, 2017: 351](#)).

The existence of communication among the called and the caller becomes a central issue in work-calling literature. This is the reason for the presence of the term ‘a

transcendent or external summon' (Dik and Duffy, 2009: 427; Duffy and Dik, 2013: 429) as a calling source. However, there are other possible sources such as a sense of destiny, an awareness to suit with the individual's passions, the needs of society or other domains that have not yet been measured in academic works (Duffy and Dik, 2013). Individuals likely have multiple sources for their calling (Dik and Duffy, 2009). In fact, the term calling originally referred to social practices in a religious context where individuals are called by God to perform good deeds (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997; Hagmaier and Abele, 2012). Calling exposes the meaningfulness of the work as a kind of obligation and personal responsibility that must be accomplished (Molloy and Foust, 2017). Historically, calling was regarded by theologians as 'the summons to Christian life and discipleship' or as 'man's outward station in life to which he is assigned by divine providence' (see Elangovan et al, 2010: 430).

Contemporary scholarship views work calling as stimulated by religious or secular interest. Many people sense a calling through secular causes like education, world peace, environmentalism, moral duty, public health, wildlife conservation and global biodiversity (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Elangovan et al, 2010). Due to secularisation, for many people, the modern term of calling has lost most of its religious linkage (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997; Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015). This has led to 'neoclassical' and 'modern' views of work calling. Neoclassical views tend to include an external or transcendent summons to encourage pro-social behaviours, while modern views prefer to use an inner drive towards self-actualisation and fulfilment (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Shimizu et al, 2018). In the following section, the argument that these views assist scholars in understanding the relevance of the work calling concept for both faith-based and secular-based non-profit organisations is developed.

Work calling in volunteer motivation

As stated previously, existing studies have shown that work calling plays a role in self-fulfilment and emphasises an inner drive towards personal happiness (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997; Duffy and Dik, 2013), which generally motivates people to pursue work even though they would not be paid. Therefore, volunteering may be strongly motivated by work calling.

A person motivated by a calling may focus on larger, shared goals, and not individual financial, ego or career needs. Previous research established that workers such as zookeepers who are willing to do 'dirty work' (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009), or volunteers who are sacrificing their time and energy, and even their lives, in conflict zones (Clarke, 2006) and districts with high rates of HIV (Akintola, 2011; Topp et al, 2015), are driven by 'underlying values and to be his or her true self' (Bussell and Forbes, 2002: 249). Describing calling as a source of motivation to do volunteering is about balancing the social aspect and the self. For instance, volunteers are motivated to join faith-based non-profit organisations because their motives are calling them to serve God by caring for others (Mittermaier, 2014). In this context, a calling to serve God relates strongly to religious teachings, personal faith or trust in God, and a calling to serve God triggers volunteering for this type of non-profit organisation. Volunteering in faith-based non-profit organisations thus becomes a kind of extension of faith. For example, a volunteer asserts 'I believe that God has commanded me to

volunteer’ (Belcher and DeForge, 2007: 12), so they devote their work entirely to God. Here, volunteers satisfy their individual spiritual needs by helping others.

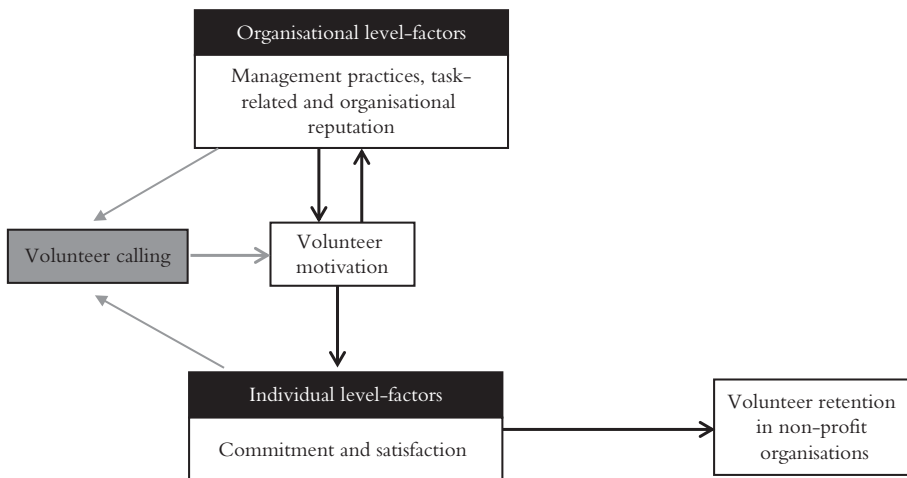
In a secular non-profit organisation, work calling has been found to also drive individuals to contribute to communities without an external call from God. For example, Ryan et al (2001) empirically show that helping the environment is a strong reason for urban forestry volunteers to get involved. Additionally, Omoto et al (2010) detail how values and community concern enable AIDS activists to feel ‘called’ to help others. Following the modern view of calling, volunteers might participate in a secular non-profit organisation when it fulfils their motivations or inner drives towards self-actualisation.

The most intriguing feature that stems from connecting work calling and volunteer motivation is that it could shift assumptions of individuals’ decision making to participate in volunteering activities. Prior research has proved that the value factor on the VFI that is related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns is the most dominant as it contributes the highest score among other motivations (Chacón et al, 2017). It also means that people tend to use rational decision making in volunteering, which concerns ‘How can I best fulfil my aim to be humanitarian?’. On the other hand, work calling shifts this mindset towards more subtle and non-conscious decision making because individuals would consider volunteering as a personal mission for a higher purpose. Work calling drives individuals to be motivated to help others so that they might perceive that ‘they could find themselves volunteering’ based on societal narratives and discourses.

Work calling in volunteer retention

Research on work calling implies that the concept influences both individual- and organisational-level factors that relate to volunteer retention. In this section, work calling is linked to the individual-level (for example, commitment, satisfaction and motivation) and organisational-level (for example, management practices, task design and organisational reputation) explanations of volunteer retention. Figure 1 integrates the different factors and relates them to work calling. At the individual level, calling has

Figure 1: The intersection of calling and other factors influencing volunteer retention



a strong impact on commitment, satisfaction and motivation, resulting in volunteers' intention to stay. Volunteers themselves can maintain their calling over time. Further, calling may appear or disappear because it is partly influenced by organisational-level factors. Regardless of 'the dark side' of the calling concept, which concerns the possibility for volunteers to be exploited, non-profit organisations could manage calling by finding, developing and sustaining volunteers' calling so that they stay for longer.

Individual level

At the individual level, work calling has been found to have a strong influence on employee commitment, satisfaction and motivation (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al, 2003; Dik and Duffy, 2009; Steger et al, 2012). This implies that volunteers who are driven by a calling may feel committed, satisfied and motivated, thus increasing their intention to continue volunteering. If individuals believe that their volunteer tasks are a calling, they will consequently be more committed to their organisation and tasks, and find it easier to find meaning in the tasks (Duffy and Dik, 2013). Work calling is even positively connected to organisational commitment in cases where the nature of the job could not satisfy individuals (Neubert and Halbesleben, 2015), and this likewise may be the case in a volunteer setting.

Work calling can also influence volunteer satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997) by adding and focusing on meaningful experiences (Duffy and Dik, 2013). At the same time, because the work is their passion and they perceive it as a moral duty, individuals are willing to sacrifice more of their time at the workplace (Wrzesniewski, 2002; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) and work better in teams when doing their activities (Steger et al, 2012). Often, individuals with a sense of calling perceive that their work cannot be separated from their life. They work for both self-fulfilment and social fulfilment, not just for building a career or financial aims (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997). Further, it is argued that individuals would often continue to work even if they were not being paid (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). The goal of those with calling orientations is to obtain profound fulfilment while on the job and create a better place in the world (Wrzesniewski, 2002). Consequently, volunteers are likely to have an intention to remain when they are personally satisfied with their self-fulfilment, are oriented towards a larger purpose and can achieve meaning through their work.

Finally, work calling potentially influences retention by maintaining motivation to remain active as a volunteer. As volunteers are willing to work to find meaningful work, this does not necessarily imply that they will cease volunteering after their meaningful tasks are finished. Meaningful work, like the experience of happiness as a by-product of a meaningful life (Bellin, 2015), is relatively dynamic – sometimes individuals find meaning, but sometimes they lose it. Through a sense of calling, volunteering is seen as a journey to seek and maintain meaningful work, which influences the motivation to remain active as a volunteer. For example, in faith-based organisations (a subset of non-profit organisations) the connection between spirituality and individual morale is likely linked to volunteer turnover, such that those with high levels of spirituality and meaning-finding behaviour tend to stay at the same organisation for longer (Hong, 2012).

Organisational level

Work calling may also influence management practices, volunteer tasks and organisational reputation, which in turn influence volunteers' commitment, satisfaction and motivation. In the end, this will affect their retention. Concerning management practices, work calling may influence a non-profit organisation's recruitment system to ensure that volunteers' calling is matched with the organisation's goals, activities and culture. For instance, non-profit organisations may only select volunteers who have compassion and experience a calling. In faith-based organisations, some empirical studies have found aspects of religious calling to be influential, as volunteer recruitment effectiveness increased through close- or same-faith ties as well as faith teaching and developing spirituality among members (Paik and Navarre-Jackson, 2011; Merino, 2013). Further, by understanding volunteers' calling, non-profit organisations could develop recruitment strategies through volunteer profiling systems (Ward and McKillop, 2010). Recruitment has a strong impact on retention because the reasons why volunteers join a non-profit organisation could become the reasons why they stay longer. However, despite the benefits for non-profit organisations, volunteers might feel disadvantaged with this managerial practice. Volunteers who do not match with organisational preferences may not be recruited despite demonstrating a strong work calling. Non-profit organisations with this practice might be considered too exclusive as they do not provide the same opportunity to everyone.

Training and personal development programmes can also be designed to focus on ensuring that volunteers' calling is sustained. A lot can be learnt from faith-based non-profit organisations that emphasise religious teaching about God's calling and volunteering in training programmes. Relying on the proposition that 'the most consistent finding is that volunteers are more highly educated and more religious' (Son and Wilson, 2012: 473), training programmes in this type of non-profit organisation may trigger and maintain desires to engage in volunteering. Another example from secular non-profit organisations is the design of training related to environmental stewardship. An empirical study established that continued learning in a natural setting could influence volunteers to become more attached to ecological areas and feeling called to give more to protect the environment (Ryan et al, 2001). A similar situation is found in the retention of volunteer firefighters (Henderson and Sowa, 2018). Through the training programme, volunteers may regularly be called, reminded and educated about the idea of doing good for the commons and, thus, remain active as volunteers. However, it is also possible that training could fail, volunteers do not feel called or they get called but their new calling does not match with the organisational culture, and, in the end, they still want to leave the organisation.

Leadership practices could also trigger and enhance work calling among volunteers. A study revealed that transformational leadership could inspire volunteers to constantly seek meaningful work (Dwyer et al, 2013), and this journey would mean they stay longer in a non-profit organisation. Volunteers could feel called as a part of the organisational member and be willing to contribute more. Thus, the sense of calling could be managed and influenced by management practices. As a volunteer's level of commitment may change over time, and this affects retention, non-profit organisations can stimulate volunteers' sustained calling to maintain not only volunteers' commitment but also their satisfaction and motivation. However, at the same time, volunteers could also feel exploited if they are overloaded with tasks and then experience personal problems stemming from their work-life balance. For

example, an empirical study quotes a religious volunteer who felt overwhelmed with their given tasks and said: 'I love God, but this is too much' (Belcher and DeForge, 2007: 12).

Task design within non-profit organisations can also be related to calling by matching social work with volunteers' callings. Prior studies have noted that volunteers with tasks that meet their basic motivations tend to remain longer in the same organisation because they are generally more satisfied (Clary et al, 1998; Stukas et al, 2009) and committed (Alfes et al, 2015). Thus, it may increase retention if the task is adjusted to the purpose of the volunteer's calling. Some empirical studies reveal that common tasks in non-profit organisations are food distribution, eviction assistance (Belcher and DeForge, 2007), youth activities, abuse counselling, educational assistance, business development and health treatment (Littlefield, 2010). Volunteers might feel a call for all these tasks, and organisations can, therefore, try to match an individual's calling to the tasks available. Engaging volunteers in experiencing emotions is also crucial to renewing their calling. Putting volunteers at the focal point of emotional work, such as sympathising with beneficiaries, could tie them to volunteering for longer (Froyum, 2018).

Volunteers can also feel attached to a particular non-profit organisation by understanding its organisational value, history or the people who work in it. It is all about the organisation's reputation (Dyck, 2011) and linked to brand heritage, which comprises an organisation's track record, use of symbols and organisational culture (Curran et al, 2016). As volunteers gradually understand an organisation's identity and historical actions over time, the feeling of calling to help the organisation might emerge and often increase volunteers' loyalty. For example, faith-based non-profit organisations generally secure their volunteers' loyalty by building and promoting an organisational reputation that asserts that their values are driven by faith, and they are practising religious calling by volunteering (see Atia, 2012; Mittermaier, 2014).

Discussion and implications for future research

This article reviewed research on volunteer motivation and retention in non-profit organisations to argue that work calling is needed to better understand volunteer motivation and retention. Integrating work calling into theories of motivation and retention suggests that volunteers choose to work (and continue working) at non-profit organisations because they are engaged in meaningful work and, therefore, experience self-satisfaction and meaningful life. As such, work calling can be incorporated within various factors at both the individual and organisational levels to conceptualise volunteer retention. These insights have five main implications for future studies.

First, integrating work calling into studies on volunteer motivation addresses the limits of the existing VFI model. Work calling could be considered as an additional motivation to volunteer on the VFI, following previous scholars adding several new variables (Allison et al, 2002; Penner, 2002; Esmond and Dunlop, 2004; Van Vianen et al, 2008; Hallmann and Harms, 2012; Jiranek et al, 2013). This article adopts the work calling concept to argue that volunteer motivation is likely driven by a sense of contributing to a higher purpose, which departs from the role of altruistic and humanitarian values (Wymer, 1997; Clary et al, 1998). Whereas altruism and humanitarian values stress that the individual volunteer discretely chooses a certain

pro-social behaviour from among a variety of different courses of action, work calling views volunteer motivation to be more driven by personal mission, societal needs and other external stimuli. It is, therefore, less individualistic. Work calling could make individuals more responsible because they frame their social tasks as a moral duty (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) and passionately accomplish their personal mission (Molloy and Foust, 2017; Shimizu et al, 2018). People who feel called and volunteer do so not because they have consciously calculated the need to be altruistic (for example, 'How can I best fulfil my aim to be humanitarian?') but rather 'follow' societal narratives or discourses and thus find themselves volunteering. Work calling explains that individuals make more subtle and non-conscious decisions to volunteer. Work calling is different from individual work centrality, work commitment, work engagement and pro-social work behaviours. This is because it is an external summons, it has clarity of meaning or purpose as well as a personal mission, and pro-social motivation leading to societal action (Elangovan et al, 2010; Hagmaier and Abele, 2012). Moreover, by sharing an orientation to a higher purpose, volunteers are likely to be motivated by working with others, building new relations and learning how to achieve higher goals. Stories of very poorly paid zookeepers, volunteers in conflict zones or religious caregivers in areas with high rates of HIV could explain the mechanism (Clarke, 2006; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Akintola, 2011). This argument supplements the VFI model (Clary et al, 1998) by clarifying the underlying basis for motivational factors, such as learning opportunities and building friendships. It differs, however, in that people motivated by a calling are likely to place less emphasis on their ego, career path or obtaining a protective goal. Future studies should focus on individualistic and/or collaborative goals in both developed and developing countries to determine the prevalence of work calling and its role in motivating people to volunteer with non-profit organisations.

Second, integrating work calling will help to further studies on volunteer retention by influencing well-known individual and organisational factors. At the individual level, work calling furthers our understanding of volunteer commitment, satisfaction and motivation (Wrzesniewski et al, 2003; Dik and Duffy, 2009; Steger et al, 2012). As volunteers engage in meaningful work, they typically experience relatively dynamic happiness: sometimes they could have it, but sometimes they could lose it. Through a sense of calling, volunteering is seen as a journey to seek and maintain meaningful work, which influences commitment, satisfaction and the motivation to remain active as a volunteer. Called individuals might be easily attracted to any type of volunteering tasks, in either organisational or informal settings, as long as they can contribute to communities. Further studies should investigate the relationship between the work calling concept and new volunteering trends such as voluntourism (Brown, 2005), micro-volunteering (Mukherjee, 2011) and virtual volunteering (Fényes and Pusztai, 2012). Another relevant concept that may link to work calling is 'volunteer role identity'. This concept has been regarded as a significant factor that could influence the amount of time volunteers give to an organisation as well as their intention to leave (Grube and Piliavin, 2000). At the organisational level, future studies may provide new insights by conducting empirical research that specifically explores management practices related to work calling and volunteer retention. Prior research on volunteer recruitment (Merino, 2013; Paik and Navarre-Jackson, 2011), training and development (Hidalgo and Moreno, 2009; Newton et al, 2014) and reward systems (McBride et al, 2011) have relevance to volunteer retention. Additional

studies would be needed to understand the linkage between organisational practices, work calling and volunteer retention. The emergence of an individual's work calling might also be influenced by managerial practices to make them stay longer in non-profit organisations or, conversely, to leave.

Third, although the calling concept originates from religious traditions, it has been further developed and is now mostly understood from a secular perspective. Hence, calling needs to be seen from multiple perspectives. At the very least, it is necessary to distinguish calling with three types of organisations: business organisations, non-profit organisations and faith-based organisations. Work calling in the first case is the popular-secular one that prevails in most current research. These organisations can try to shape careers as calling by 'funneling all paid work toward calling' because it can provide 'the means to achieve transcendent fulfilment' (Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015: 163). Second, calling in non-profit organisations does not usually connote to religious matters, but, at the same time, is different from calling in a wage-earning setting. Third, work calling in the last case is based on religious values that typically appear in faith-based organisations. Prior studies have used different names to label calling. These include spiritual calling (Neubert and Halbesleben, 2015), vocational calling (Kent et al, 2016) and sacred calling (Rosso et al, 2010; Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015). Previous studies have differentiated between the neoclassical view of calling, which emphasises the existence of a transcendent summons, and the modern view that stresses an inner drive towards self-actualisation and fulfilment (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Shimizu et al, 2018). However, comparative empirical research needs to be conducted to further explore and conceptualise the differences between these multi-layered facets of calling within organisations.

Fourth, the primary sources of work calling, which are of critical importance to answering the question of how to create and find a calling, need to be studied. Elangovan et al (2010) suggest that calling might appear from four conditions: an urge to find meaning in one's life; attentiveness; a willingness to experiment with new paths; and a growing understanding of the self. However, this assumption has never been tested, and studies have not evaluated whether these four conditions are comprehensive. Sturges et al (2019) have enriched this issue by discussing how work calling's emergence is an evolving process of sense making and emphasising interactions among cues, interpretation, action, context and identity. However, their study focuses only on religious calling and how people can find their unique calling. The research is also limited to investigating work calling at the individual level, like other previous studies (for example, Duffy et al, 2017; Gazica and Spector, 2015). Further empirical studies at the organisational level are thus required to establish how organisations could successfully create or influence individuals' calling. In fact, by conducting empirical research in various types of organisations, prospective new sources of calling might be discovered to complement current findings.

Finally, work calling may also have a dark side, particularly because of individuals' non-conscious decision making in terms of volunteering. Individuals who are highly motivated by a calling tend to keep volunteering in any circumstances, and this can create opportunities for others to exploit and even manipulate them. Volunteers' motivations are a bit mysterious to themselves but may not be to those creating and sharing volunteer narratives, thereby enabling exploitation. Previous research mentioned some cases, such as zookeepers who are willing to do the 'dirty work' (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009), which could easily lead to exploitation. A few

studies have indicated that work calling might trigger exploitation from managers as they leverage volunteer commitment to a higher purpose for their own gain. This would include a prevalence of workaholism, resulting in a work–life imbalance (Duffy and Dik, 2013; Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015). Further, within faith-based non-profit organisations, which are strongly connected with people’s innermost religious feelings, the exploitation or even abuse might potentially emerge as people can be easily manipulated through religious arguments and feelings. A 12th-century theologian, Averroes, rhetorically wrote: ‘If you want to control the ignorant, you must cover every falsehood in religious guise’ (see Al-Asmar, 2015). Much could also be learnt from international volunteering non-profit organisations that demonstrate that their managers and volunteers have already had a calling because they bring their own agenda to other countries. Some potential problems may arise as a lack of cultural awareness (Hart et al, 2019) can influence how they deal with local volunteers and how they affect power relations, dependency/independence and sustainability. Empirical studies are required to uncover this dark side of work calling and, accordingly, offer creative solutions.

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Conflict of interest

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