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"Is your career meaningful?" Exploring career calling on a Romanian students sample

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Abstract

In the competitive employment markets of the XXIst century, one of the most important and influential tasks in emerging adults is to develop a fulfilling career, which implies identifying a calling in their career. Aiming to explore calling in career, this study presents the frequency of perceiving a calling in career, the intergroup variations on calling regarding age, gender and field of study and the relation between the perception of calling in career and living calling on a sample of 497 Romanian undergraduate students. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The nature of careers and work has changed significantly over the last decades. Consequently, the characteristics of contemporary career pathways are: greater competition, pressure for productivity, greater work-life complexity (Amundson, 2005). In the competitive employment markets of the XXIst century, finding meaning in work and career is essential for becoming successful. One of the most important and influential tasks in emerging adults is to develop a fulfilling career, which implies finding a calling in their career. Empirical research (e.g., Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) shows that a considerable number of individuals in various professions are searching for or trying to implement a calling in their career.

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2. Theoretical background

The theoretical framework underlying our study is a social-constructionist one, emphasizing the meaning of work and career as embedded in social and cultural contexts (Amundson, 2006). In the last years there has been an increased scientific interest in the investigation of calling in career. A sense of calling is related to the subjective career success, also it is an important promoter of career metacompetences such as identity and adaptability (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Perceiving a calling is also an important source of meaning and purpose at work and is positively related to life satisfaction, meaning of life, career decisions, self-identity and positive affectivity (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Despite these results, there are still differences concerning the definition of calling. Hall and Chandler (2005), define calling as giving a sense of purpose to the individual's work, which plays a central role in his existence. Another definition is offered by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011), according to them, calling is a passion that gives meaning to the human existence in the career field. Dik and Duffy (2009) define calling in career as *"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, that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation."* (p. 427). This manner of conceptualizing calling also posited two overarching and overlapping aspects of the construct: presence and search. That is, some individuals may perceive that they currently have a calling (presence), whereas others may not currently perceive a sense of calling but report that they are actively seeking one (search). Each of the two aspects has three dimensions: transcendent summons, purposeful work, prosocial orientation. The transcendent summons dimension is experienced from outside the self and it is a source of social support in career, is positively related to career decision self efficacy and job satisfaction (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Duffy & Lent, 2008; Robert, Young, & Kelly, 2006). The second dimension involves finding a particular purposeful life role. This dimension is positively related to job satisfaction, career decision, adaptability in career, low level of stress (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). The third dimension is a prosocial one, in which the main motivation sources are values and goals other oriented. Helping others is a protective factor against burnout, predicts high levels of volunteer activity, and satisfaction (Dik & Duffy, 2009). In order to effectively examine this concept we will investigate calling as defined by Dik și Duffy (2009). Sense of calling refers to the phenomenon of perceived meaning in work and career as a sense of higher purpose, meaningful to oneself and the larger community (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005 as cited in Hirschi, 2010). Moreover, this conceptualization indicates the fact that every person has the potential of having a calling and it could be discovered in any career (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Additionally, as Dik and Duffy (2009) indicated, a sense of calling is not reserved for a particular type of occupation, but rather could be experienced across a broad range of occupations. Thus, calling is theoretically equally likely to be a relevant career development variable for both women and men.

Even though some researchers (for example Dik & Duffy, 2009) have suggested that this construct has considerable transcultural relevance, empirical investigations are necessary for illustrating this. Expanding the population included in the research sample is an important step in achieving this objective.

Regarding the prevalence of calling in populations where it was investigated, in one study on adults, the authors found that approximately 1/3 of participants viewed their career as a calling. Another study on college students showed that the construct of calling was relevant on how they thought about their careers (Hunter, Dik, Banning, 2010). In 2010 Duffy and Sedlacek conducted a study on a sample of over 5000 diverse undergraduate students and evaluated the degree to which first-year students endorsed a calling within the context of their career as being relevant to them. Overall, 44 percent of the sample endorsed having a calling as mostly or totally true of them. The studies reviewed above each assessed the degree to which individuals perceived a calling. However, recent research has suggested that there is a distinction between perceiving a calling and living a calling. (Duffy & Dik, 2013)

The purpose of the present study was to explore calling in career on a sample of Romanian undergraduate students. More specific, we seek to investigate the frequency of perceiving a calling in career, the intergroups variations on calling regarding age, gender and faculty and the relation between the perception of calling in career and living calling.

Our hypotheses were:

I. More than 1/3 of students will report high scores on perceiving calling presence.

II. There will be significant differences on perceiving calling and living calling scores between women and men.

III. There will be no significant differences on perceiving calling and living calling scores between students living in rural areas and those living in urban areas.

IV. There will be significant differences on perceiving calling and living calling between students in different field of studies.

V. The 3 dimensions of calling presence will predict a significant variance of living calling.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants were 497 undergraduate students in the 1st year of study from Babes-Bolyai University (Romania), 73.6% female, 26.4% male, $M=20.78$, $SD=4.8$. Between them, they majored in 5 different areas of study: Psychology, Theology, Literature and foreign languages, Law, Political Sciences and Public Relations.

By investigating those relations in emerging adults is important due to their task of developing career direction (Arnett, 2000).

3.2. Instruments

For assessing the demographic variable we constructed a short questionnaire with questions regarding: age, gender, faculty, ethnicity, residence, year of study, income. The calling was measured with two instruments: The Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ; Dik, Eldridge, Steger, Duffy, 2009), Living calling scale (Duffy, Bott, Allan, B.A., Torrey, & Dik, 2012). The Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) is a measure based on Dik and Duffy's (2009) theoretical conceptualization of calling, which includes three dimensions: (1) a transcendent summons, (2) deriving or expressing meaning or purpose through work, and (3) a prosocial orientation in work. Additionally, this instrument measures 2 aspects of calling: presence and search. CVQ has 24 items, 12 items for presence of calling and 12 for searching for calling, for each of the three domains conceptualized by Dik and Duffy (2009): transcendent summons, purposeful work, prosocial orientation. The scale of measurement is continuous in nature and uses a 4-point Likert-rating system: 1 – Not at all true of me, 2 – Somewhat true of me, 3 – Mostly true of me, 4 – Absolutely true of me. For assessing living calling we used Living Calling Scale (Duffy et al., 2012), an unifactorial scale, with 5 items. The scale uses an 8-point Likert scale.

3.3. Procedure

Questionnaires were administered in class, at the end of the first semester. Participation was voluntary.

4. Data Analyses and results

The data was analyzed with SPSS 19.1. Statistics program. In order to reveal the frequency of calling in our sample, we conducted a frequency analysis. We used visual binning in order to establish the cut off points to ± 1 standard deviations. The results showed that about 46% of students reported scores above on having a calling and about 53% were searching for calling. Although, very few of the students reported scores above 2 standard deviations. Based on these results, Hypothesis I was supported. Moreover, we investigated the differences on living calling and presence of calling, regarding age, residence and gender. No significant differences were found for age and residence. Regarding gender, the t test revealed that girls reported higher presence of calling ($t=-2.16$, $p<0.05$) and were more oriented for searching a particular type of calling (purposeful work), than boys ($t=-1.84$, $p<0.05$). Based on these results, Hypothesis II was partially supported (the differences were found only for presence of calling and a particular type of searching for calling) and Hypothesis III was fully supported. We also investigated the potential effect of field of study on calling. Due to the fact that the fields of study were not equally distributed across the groups, we excluded the cases of Faculty of Political Science. To assess for the effects of major choice on presence of and search for calling, analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted evaluating the

mean scores for the major fields of study, for living calling, calling presence and calling search (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics across field of study). The results indicated a significant difference for living calling, $F(4, 456) = 4.86, p = .0002$. Post-hoc Scheffe’s comparisons indicated significant differences between Psychology and Theology $MD=-4.29, p=.0016$, as well as between Theology and History $MD= 5.36,p=0.004$. Likewise, a significant difference was found for calling presence, $F(4, 443) = 10.18, p =0.001$. Post-hoc Scheffe’s comparisons indicated a significant difference between Psychology and Theology $MD=-4.47, p=0.001$, between Letters and Theology $MD=5.31, p=0.001$ and also between Theology and History $MD=5.42, p=0.001$ Thus, it appears that chosen field of study had a significant impact on scores for living calling and for presence calling (see Table 1). However, the main effect of field of study for search for calling was not significant. Based on these results, Hypothesis IV was partially supported.

Table 1 Effects of field of study on calling

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p
Living calling	Psychology	167	31.39	8.41	4.86	0.002
	Letters	152	32.21	8.26		
	Theology	50	35.68	6.38		
	History	87	30.31	8.84		
Calling presence	Psychology	163	34.10	6.88	10.18	0.001
	Letters	151	33.26	6.19		
	Theology	52	38.57	6.03		
	History	77	33.15	5.30		

We conducted a hierarchic regression analysis in order to investigate what is the best predictive model that explains the living of calling. We introduced in the model the correlations of living calling in the order of the intensity of relation with the criterion. The results presented in the Table 2 indicate that two dimensions of calling presence (Transcendent Summons Presence and Purposefull Work Presence) explained 11.4% of variance in living calling ($r^2= 0.114, p=0.01$).Based on these results, Hypothesis V was partially supported, only two dimensions of calling presence being significant predictors.

Table 2 Regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
dimension	1	.30a	.09	.08	7.78	.09	42.75	1	424	.000
	2	.33b	.11	.11	7.69	.02	10.82	1	423	.001
	3	.34c	.11	.11	7.69	.00	.93	1	422	.335
	4	.34d	.12	.11	7.69	.00	1.56	1	421	.211

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transcendent_Summons_Presence
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Transcendent_Summons_Presence, Purposeful_Work_Presence
 c. Predictors: (Constant), Transcendent_Summons_Presence, Purposeful_Work_Presence, Prosocial_Orientation_Presence
 d. Predictors: (Constant), Transcendent_Summons_Presence, Purposeful_Work_Presence, Prosocial_Orientation_Presence, Prosocial_Orientation_Search

5. Conclusions and discussions

The purpose of our study was to explore the calling in career on a sample of Romanian undergraduate students. Our finding suggest that almost ½ of students in our sample perceiving a calling in a particular career, while the others are still searching for calling. Those findings are similar to those of Hunter et al (2010) and Duffy and Sedlacek (2010). Moreover, these results indicate that calling is a relevant construct for Romanian students and may suggest that it could be important to help students find calling in their career. In this context, it could be also relevant to investigate the dynamics of calling in time and what it means to explore, discover calling and how the

perception of it modifies over time. A second purpose of our study was to explore potential age cohort, gender, residence and field of study differences on perceiving and living calling. The results showing no significant differences for age and residence indicate that those may not be relevant for this construct. On the other hand, the negative results regarding age may be due to the limited sample and small differences in participants. Regarding gender, it seems that girls scores higher on presence of calling and on searching for meaning in calling. The practical implication of this may suggest that this concept of calling may assist women in balance between work life and family (Sellers et al., 2005) Additional analyses indicated significant differences in the means of the various fields of study for both presence of and living calling, but not for search for calling. Students from Theology reported significant higher scores than the others on living calling and presence of calling. Those findings are in line with previous research showing that religiousness is related to calling (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Finally, as Duffy and Dik (2013) suggested, there may be an important difference between perceiving a calling and living a calling. Previous studies investigated the construct of living calling as a mediator or moderator between perceiving calling and different outcomes. Our purpose was to investigate which of the dimensions of perceiving calling predict best living calling. The results showed that only two of them were relevant, (Transcendent Summons Presence and Purposeful Work Presence), prosocial orientation seems not to contribute too much on it. One important future direction of study should investigate the relation of calling to different possible antecedents and outcomes.

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