

LINKING CALLING AND WORK PASSION IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: WORK MEANINGFULNESS AS A MEDIATOR

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Abstract

Researchers and practitioners have shown an increasing interest in the construct of work passion. However, in the existing literature little is known about work passion among educators. Given the recent attention in the educational literature regarding the concept of calling, we attempt to examine its relationship with teachers' work passion. In doing so, we also highlight the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the aforementioned association. Using a diverse sample of teachers employed in primary education, results indicated that teachers' calling is positively related to their levels of work passion. Moreover, there is an indirect relationship among these two constructs through work meaningfulness.

Keywords: calling; work meaningfulness; work passion; mediation; teachers

Introduction

In recent years, research has emphasized teachers' motivational processes as well as potential motives that determine their attitudes and behaviors and, in turn, affect learning processes, and student performance (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Butler & Shibaz, 2008). In this vein, a construct that has witnessed a burgeoning interest among educational scholars is calling. Calling relates to individuals' motivation to perform their duties (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Importantly, calling is

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more likely to occur in social occupations such as teaching because individuals describe their work as an extension of their selves and that they contribute to society (Molloy & Foust, 2016; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

In the educational literature, calling has been shown to be related to various outcomes. For instance, teachers who perceive their work as a calling have self-awareness of their interests and skills which, in turn, fosters their career development and career decisions (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Similarly, educators who experience such a calling not only exhibit a yearning to teach longer but also are more likely to sacrifice their personal life and devote extra time to their work (Serow, 1994).

In the realm of motivation, an additional construct that has recently received attention is work passion. Surprisingly, though, existing literature has largely ignored work passion among educators. Building on the common theoretical bases of calling and work passion, this study attempts to provide novel insights regarding the relationship between teachers' calling and work passion. Even more, given that the latter has been described as a "strong inclination toward work activities that individuals find personally meaningful" (Vallerand Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle, & Leonard, 2003, p. 757) we also examine the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the aforementioned relationship.

Taken together, the present study aims to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, it adds to the empirical evidence on the outcomes of teachers' calling. Second, it offers important insights into the antecedents of work passion. In doing so, we also highlight the psychological mechanism that may account for the effect of employee and work-related factors on work passion. Third, it contributes to work meaningfulness literature by illustrating both antecedents (calling) and outcomes (work passion).

Calling

Calling has its origins in a religious context and has been conceptualized as a spiritual and profound importance for individuals to do a morally and socially significant work (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). From this point of view, a calling has been perceived as an invitation from God to a livelihood, through which volition of God is acknowledged (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Recently, though, a secular meaning of calling has attracted a more generalized view

which underscores the notion of self-actualization and contribution to the community (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In this context, many definitions have emerged and proposed (Lee, 2016). In this study, we use the definition of Hall and Chandler (2005) that describe calling as “work that a person perceives as her or his purpose in life” (p. 160).

In this regard, the specific definition of calling incorporates a feeling of reason, direction, and individual fulfilment (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Furthermore, educational calling relates to an intensive inner belief in the critical role of the teacher and his/her commitment to children’s development. This commitment encourages teachers to go beyond their formal duties in order to satisfy this calling (Oplatka & Stundi, 2011).

As suggested in the literature, there are several positive individual outcomes when experiencing work as a calling. For instance, calling is positively associated with life fulfillment, self-concept, clarity, stronger vocational identity and decreased levels of depression (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hirschi & Hermann, 2012; Steger et al., 2010). In a similar vein, people with a strong sense of calling experience personal involvement in their work, high dedication, job satisfaction (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018) and organizational commitment (e.g., Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012; Duffy et al., 2011; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Some of these attitudinal constructs (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, dedication) are also related to work passion (Burke Astakhova, & Hang, 2015; Vallerand & Houliort, 2003). Albeit similar concepts, there is a nuance between calling and passion. Concretely, a calling commonly includes a feeling that one’s work ameliorates the world, while a passion does not necessarily have a social orientation and is characterized by subjective vitality and experiences of delight (Rothmann & Hamukangandu, 2013).

Calling and work passion

Individuals who experience their work as calling demonstrate a more positive attitude towards work (Duffy et al., 2011; Elangovan et al., 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Steger et al., 2010). Building on work passion literature, we suggest that calling is likely to be related to work passion. Passion is described as a “strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p.

757). Passion has been separated into two types, namely harmonious and obsessive passion toward activities. The former emanates from an autonomous internalization that individuals experience because they consider the activity as important and willingly engage in it whereas obsessive passion results from a controlled internalization that exerts a high pressure on the individuals who feel compelled to engage in the activity due to the need to experience elevated levels of self-acceptance and self-esteem (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010). In this study, we use the harmonious type of work passion because, at its core, it is a construct that is theoretically related more strongly to both calling and work meaningfulness.

Harmonious passion has been associated with both psychological adjustment indices (Philippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009) and emotional well-being during activity engagement (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008). Individuals who have activities that make their lives worth living could feel a passion for those activities. Passion can fuel motivation, improve prosperity, and give importance in regular day to day existence (Vallerand et al., 2003). Occupational calling has been frequently associated with sentiments of enthusiasm and passion toward work related exercises that people find fascinating, critical, and deserving of their time and vitality (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). Furthermore, several studies have proposed that individuals who perceive their profession as a calling they are more likely to feel increased passion toward their work activities (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009).

Calling and work meaningfulness

Meaningful work is perceived as a noteworthy piece of major part of life and refers to the amount of importance individuals perceive from their work (Rosso et al., 2010). Also, Hackman and Oldham define meaningful work as “the degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile” (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 162). It is very important for individuals to perceive their work as meaningful because it fosters their personal motivation and growth (Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997). On the contrary, low levels of work meaningfulness are likely to result in alienation or low levels of engagement at work (Aktouf, 1992; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

Theoretically, individuals with a calling experience an extreme sense of meaning, dedication, and personal involvement into their work (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Calling and work meaningfulness albeit similar they are theoretically distinct constructs. That is, work is perceived as meaningful mostly due to specific characteristics, such as feedback and task clarity, which may exist regardless of whether an individual considers his/her work as purposeful and therefore exhibits increased work calling. In fact, calling constitutes an important antecedent of work meaningfulness because the former promotes employees' sense of meaning and reason in his/her work (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2003). In this vein, several scholars have suggested that calling enhances work meaningfulness (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy et al., 2012; Hirschi, 2012). On the basis of the above theoretical and empirical research, we assume that calling will produce greater levels of work meaningfulness.

Work meaningfulness and work passion

Work meaningfulness is the noteworthiness one connects to one's presence and includes the esteem one places on the presence of life and on the direction of his/her life (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintroub, 2008). Furthermore, Rosso et al. (2010) describe psychological meaningfulness as the measure of essentialness a vocation has for the person. In this context, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of meaningful work because individuals' work attitudes rely on the amount of meaning that they encompass from their work (Steger et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

In addition, several studies have shown that work meaningfulness is a predictor of various positive individual and organizational outcomes, such as satisfaction and performance (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Rosso et al., 2010). In a similar sense, work meaningfulness constitutes an important psychological condition for people's engagement in their work (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). As noted above, when individuals consider their work as meaningful they experience higher levels of motivation. In essence, work meaningfulness describes how valuable a work goal is compared to individuals' standards and ideas (May et al., 2004). Therefore, it is highly related to intrinsic motivation (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Hackman & Oldham, 1975). As such, given that harmonious passion denotes an autonomous internalization of individuals regarding the importance of their

work, we propose that the higher the work meaningfulness that individuals experience the more passionate they will be at work.

Objectives

On the basis of the above theoretical and empirical research, the present study aims to investigate following hypotheses (*see* Figure 1):

H1. Calling is positively related to work passion.

H2. Calling is positively related to work meaningfulness.

H3. Work meaningfulness is positively related to work passion.

H4. Combining the above hypotheses, we also examine work meaningfulness as a mediator in the relationship between work calling and work passion.

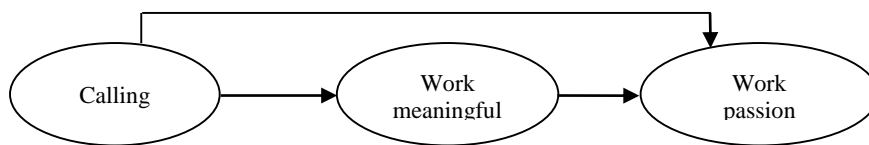


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 245 teachers of primary education in Greek public and private schools. Among the respondents, 205 were female (83.7%) and 40 male (16.3%). The average age of the respondents was approximately 39 years old. Regarding their educational level, most of the respondents held a bachelor degree (49%). Last, the mean job tenure was almost 14 years and the organizational tenure was approximately 6 years.

Measures

All variables were assessed using a 5-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Calling was assessed using the four-item scale from Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012). Sample items for this scale are ‘I know that teaching is what I am supposed to do in life’ and ‘I was destined to become a teacher and It was meant to be’ (Cronbach’s alpha=.91).

Work meaningfulness was assessed with six items taken from May et al., (2004). Sample items for this scale are ‘The work I do on this job is very important to me’ and ‘I feel that the work I do on my job is valuable’ (Cronbach’s alpha=.90).

Work passion was measured using the harmonious type of passion taken from Vallerand et al. (2003). Sample items for harmonious passion are ‘My work is in harmony with other activities in my life’ and ‘My work allows me to live memorable experiences’ (Cronbach’s alpha=.86).

Control variables

We also controlled for a number of demographic variables namely gender, age, education, type of school, job tenure, and organizational tenure. Given that gender, job tenure and organizational tenure demonstrated significant bivariate correlations with the present outcomes, we included them in the subsequent statistical analysis (Becker, 2005).

Procedure and design

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling approach. Toward this end, authors invited their personal and professional contacts and asked them, in turn, to invite their contacts. The respective questionnaire was distributed through a web link.

Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations regarding the present variables. Calling is positively correlated to both work meaningfulness ($r = .53$, $p < .01$) and work passion ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). In addition, work meaningfulness is positively related to work passion ($r = .65$, $p < .01$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|--------------------------|-------|------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Gender | 1.84 | .37 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 38.97 | 9.82 | -.17** | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education | 2.98 | 1.60 | -.05 | -.15* | | | | | | | |
| 4. Type of school | 1.19 | .49 | .08 | -.33** | .08 | | | | | | |
| 5. Job Tenure | 13.57 | 8.35 | -.19** | .84** | -.16* | -.34** | | | | | |
| 6. Organizational tenure | 5.68 | 5.77 | -.02 | .52** | -.11* | -.10 | .62** | | | | |
| 7. Calling | 3.64 | .98 | .12 | .10 | -.07 | .04 | .10 | .19** | (.91) | | |
| 8. Work meaningfulness | 4.22 | .66 | .10 | .07 | .00 | -.02 | .03 | .18** | .53** | (.90) | |
| 9. Work passion | 4.11 | .73 | .21** | -.06 | -.05 | .09 | -.13* | .07 | .52** | .65** | (.86) |

Note: * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. Internal reliabilities (alpha coefficients) for the constructs are given in parentheses on the diagonal.

Confirmatory factor analysis

To examine the discriminant and convergent validity of our model we used confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS 21). Results reported that our measurement model provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2[96]=246.35$, $p<.01$, TLI=.93, CFI=.94, RMSEA=.08). Furthermore, the specific model fits the data significantly better as compared to other models (Table 2). Thus, we offer support for the distinctiveness of the constructs. Regarding the items of each scale, they demonstrated significant associations with the respective latent variables. Therefore, we also provided convergent validity.

In light of the cross-sectional and mono-source data we attempted to alleviate common method bias. To this end, participants were assured of the anonymous nature of the questionnaire and were encouraged to be as honest as possible (Chang, Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). In fact, the use of a web-based survey fosters anonymity and confidentiality and attenuates social pressure (Richman, Kiesler, Weisband, & Drasgow, 1999). In addition, we conducted Harman's single factor test in order to examine the potential influence of common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Results indicated that the single factor solution has a poor fit ($\chi^2[99]=688.77$, $p<.01$, TLI=.73, CFI=.78, RMSEA=.16). Combined, we assume that common method bias may not be an important problem for our study.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis

| Model | χ^2 | df | TLI | CFI | RMSEA |
|--|----------|----|-----|-----|-------|
| Four factor model | 246.35 | 96 | .93 | .94 | .08 |
| Two factor model: Calling and work meaningfulness | 559.19 | 98 | .79 | .83 | .14 |
| Two factor model : Calling and work passion | 522.58 | 98 | .80 | .84 | .13 |
| Two factor model: Work meaningfulness and work passion | 385.43 | 98 | .87 | .89 | .11 |
| One factor model | 688.77 | 99 | .73 | .78 | .16 |

Notes: TLI is the Tucker-Lewis index; CFI the comparative fit index; and RMSEA the root-mean-square error of approximation.

Hypothesis tests

To test the present hypotheses we used Preacher and Haye's macros (2008). Table 3 reports the results of the respective statistical analysis. As shown, we found support for the first hypothesis which stated that calling is positively related to work passion ($B=.19$, $p<.01$). Likewise, the present results supported our second hypothesis that proposed the relationship between calling and work meaningfulness ($B=.34$, $p<.05$). We also found support for our third

hypothesis which proposed that work meaningfulness is associated with work passion ($B=.57, p<.01$). Last, using bootstrapping analysis (1000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals) we examined the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the relationship between calling and work passion. Results found support for this indirect effect since the confidence intervals do not contain zero (.13, .28).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

| Variables | B | SE | t | p |
|--|-----|-----|---------|--------|
| Work meaningfulness regressed on calling | .34 | .04 | 8.54 | .00 |
| Work passion regressed on work meaningfulness, controlling for calling | .57 | .06 | 9.13 | .00 |
| Work passion regressed on calling, controlling for work meaningfulness | .19 | .04 | 4.53 | .00 |
| | M | SE | L95% CI | U95%CI |
| Bootstrap results for indirect effect | .19 | .04 | .13 | .28 |

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 1000. L = lower limit; U = upper limit, CI = confidence interval.

Calling has recently attracted an increasing interest in various occupations including academics (Rothmann & Hamukangandu, 2013), zookeepers (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), musicians (Dobrow, 2007) and hotel frontline employees (Lee, 2016). In this vein, prior studies have also addressed this construct in the educational context (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Duffy et al., 2012; Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). In contrast, very little is known about work passion in the specific setting. Addressing this gap, this study attempted to provide new insights into the role of teachers' calling in fostering their work passion. Consistent with our hypothesis, the present results demonstrated that teachers who perceive their profession as a calling experience higher levels of work passion. This finding adds to previous empirical research that associates calling with a range of positive employee outcomes such as work motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and employee turnover (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Elangovan et al., 2010; Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018).

Similarly, the relationship between calling and work passion also sheds new light on the antecedents of work passion. Prior literature has largely focused on the outcomes of work passion such as psychological need satisfaction, organizational identification, job performance, organizational citizenship behavior (Astakhova, 2015; Astakhova & Porter, 2015; Houlfort,

Fernet, Vallerand, Laframboise, Guay, & Koestner, 2015; Kong, 2015). Nevertheless, we know little about the antecedents of work passion. Thus, we contribute to this gap by highlighting both calling and work meaningfulness as important predictors. Even more, using work meaningfulness as a mediator in the relationship between calling and work passion, this study provides insights into the explanatory mechanisms that account for the effect of various antecedents on work passion.

Last, in demonstrating work meaningfulness as a mediator we also contribute to its literature vis-à-vis both antecedents and outcomes. As regards the former, previous studies have indicated that contextual factors such as job enrichment and work role fit are likely to affect employees' levels of work meaningfulness (May et al., 2004). We add to this stream of research by showing that calling may also result in increased work meaningfulness. Likewise, there is limited empirical research on the outcomes of work meaningfulness. As such, supporting empirically the relationship between work meaningfulness and work passion, we offer some new insights into the role of this construct in generating positive employee outcomes.

Conclusions

The present findings of this study have a number of practical implications not only for teachers but also for individuals who carve education policy. If educational policies and practices are implemented with the intent to foster the quality of education, they could change employees' attitudes and behavior by motivating them to discover the meaningfulness of their occupations (Aksu, 2005; Poulston, 2008).

More specifically, given the positive role of calling in enhancing both work meaningfulness and work passion, recruitment policies and practices could incorporate questionnaires and interview questions that will unveil potential teachers' levels of calling. Moreover, a possible strategy to achieve increased calling relates to the field of leadership. For example, previous studies have suggested that spiritual leadership is likely to foster individuals' calling (Kawiana & Riana, 2016). Consequently, principals could adopt such leadership behaviors and, in turn, increase teachers' calling. Moreover, a self-directed career attitude may lead to a higher calling (Zhang, Hirschi, Herrmann, Wei, & Zhang, 2015). Thus, principals and school environments could

embolden proactive career behaviors and, further, provide personal challenges regarding their career development (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Hirschi, Lee, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2013).

In addition, the present findings demonstrated that work meaningfulness can also trigger teachers' work passion. As a result, schools could nourish work environments that will lead teachers to perceive their work as meaningful. One way to do this is to enrich their jobs. Drawing on the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), public policy and principals could enhance teachers' task identity, skill variety and task significance which in turn will make teachers' jobs more enriched and ultimately more meaningful.

Limitations and future research

As in most studies, our research presents some limitations that warrant attention. First, data were collected using a cross-sectional and mono-source design. Therefore, our findings may suffer from causality issues and common method bias. Regarding the former, it is conceivable that reverse relationships occur. For example, work passion may result in increased work meaningfulness. As far as common method bias is concerned, although we employed ex-ante and ex-post remedies, such bias may still confound our results. A last limitation relates to the snowball process of data collection which does not allow the estimation of response rate. Allied to this, sampling error may also comprise a problem.

The above limitations may suggest directions for future research. For example, future empirical research could address causality issues by using a time-lag or a longitudinal design. As regards the potential occurrence of common method bias, future studies could also collect data using other-rated data. For instance, measuring work-passion using supervisor-ratings could mitigate the confounding effect of common method bias. Also, further research could examine the relationship between sense of calling and other under-researched teacher outcomes such as, work-related boredom and thriving. In a similar sense, future studies could investigate not only alternative underlying mechanisms that explain the association between calling and work passion but also boundary conditions (personality or contextual factors) that may enhance or attenuate the present relationships.

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