VOCATION AS CALLING AND RESILIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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SUMMARY: Traditionally, adversity has been viewed as an undesirable construct while resilience is regarded as a professional attribute. This study explores the relationship between resilience as a reaction to adversity and vocation as calling in the workplace. The study redefines adversity as a positive concept and suggests opportunities for further discovery and maturation of a person’s vocation as calling within a theological context.

BACKGROUND

As a dominant activity of human and social endeavor, work is recognized as a significant locus of personal identity. Characteristically, there are an abundance of workplace situations that constantly challenge an individual’s uniqueness and personal maturation. The selection of a job is largely predicated on the fundamentals of individual distinctiveness, while an individual’s sense of self is molded and shaped by work habits and practices. The type, form, intensity, and frequency of interpersonal relationships among workers have a constant effect on a person’s character. The influence of workplace role models and the choices made in respect of managing work–family balance impose pressure on the self-image. Another stress upon an individual’s identity occurs when deciding the degree to which the cultural values, mission, and vision of one’s workplace are compatible with one’s own personal views and aspirations. The skills and abilities developed in the workplace may even prompt discoveries of one’s own latent talents. In many ways, the exercise of planning career progression or contemplating career changes prompt deeper reflection upon a person’s capabilities and potential. Even leadership development has a direct impact on identity formation, as leading others presumes the ability to

1 M. DOHERTY. When the working day is through: The end of work as identity? Work, Employment & Society, 2009, 23(1), 84-101.
lead oneself\textsuperscript{1}. Finally—and of special interest to the present study—adversities at work can challenge a person’s vocation and calling\textsuperscript{2}. The workplace is a setting in which a person both exercises and discovers their vocation and calling.

Although economic and social changes over the past decade may have led to values inconsistent with discerning one’s vocation and calling\textsuperscript{3}, interest in finding deeper meanings in work seems to be increasing\textsuperscript{4}. Consequently, a deeper sense of work is becoming more relevant within the context of career development processes\textsuperscript{5}, a trend that favors studies of vocation and calling.

However, within this emerging trend, both vocation and calling seem to be used interchangeably; a situation that warrants clarification.

It is understandable for vocation and calling to be used synonymously, since the word vocation is derived from the Latin <<vocare>> meaning “to call”\textsuperscript{6}. Fortunately, some business related literature addresses the differences between vocation and calling, a distinction that is helpful in framing the present research’s objectives. For instance, R. J. Andrisani, P. J. Andrisani, R. C. Miljus\textsuperscript{7} note that vocation is associated with extrinsic rewards, whereas calling is characterized by intrinsic rewards. In a subsequent comparison\textsuperscript{8}, B. J. Dik and R. D. Duffy state that calling is more associated with motivation from an external source (e.g., divine), whereas vocation depends more on social objectives rooted in internal personal reasons. In a more recent study, D. M. Haney-Loehein and others\textsuperscript{9} posit that vocation and calling are essentially the same if divine summoning is removed from the definition of vocation.

For the purposes of this study, B. J. Dik and R. J. Duffy’s definition of calling is most suitable. They contend: "[a calling is] a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as


\textsuperscript{3} L. Hardy. The fabric of this world: Inquiries into calling, career choice, and the design of human work. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.


primary sources of motivation. This definition is useful because it presents three distinct components relating to the workplace: (a) a motivation with a transcendent origin; (b) a spiritual context for work; and (c) an undertaking of service towards others. The first component of this definition facilitates transposing the findings from other disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, and theology) into the workplace setting. The second component inserts the nature of work into the domain of spiritual values and allows the connection of calling with the emerging discipline of Spirituality in the Workplace. The third component makes actionable the transcending summonsmons and spiritual meaning of work, and facing adversity in the process of carrying out this “mission” is expected.

In preferring the term “vocation as calling”, the present research (a) recognizes a transcendent summons that builds upon the emerging findings of vocation as career, which (b) suggests another research topic for Spirit at Work, and (c) allows the findings of other disciplines—particularly theology and a rich history of spiritual traditions—to enter gracefully into work environment research. In the current study, “vocation as calling” refers to progressive growth from a primarily secular view of fittingness for a particular career or occupation to a broader sense of purpose inspired and guided by a transcendent summons.

Regrettably, many of the business literature’s definitions of calling and vocation have a workplace focus that discounts spiritual connotations; therefore, finding studies addressing the relationship between calling and resilience is somewhat challenging. In many ways, this gap in the literature motivates the current study. However, the literature on reactions to adversity and resilience in the workplace are more readily available.

The few studies available on the topic of vocation and calling recognize the value of resilience as a response to adversity and the importance of emphasizing this topic within the workplace. On the one hand, resilience—the ability to overcome and move forward despite adversity—is recognized as a necessity for business organizations and is a significant factor in employee response to organizational change. Resilience has been associated with organizational commitment, used as a predictor of organizational change effectiveness, and considered a mod-

1 Dik, Duffy. Calling and vocation, 427.
moderator of employee stress\textsuperscript{1}. Further studies suggest that resilience has a positive influence when making risky decisions\textsuperscript{2}, on promoting self-efficacy\textsuperscript{3}, and as a factor that reduces absenteeism\textsuperscript{4}; it is also relevant to leadership dynamics, particularly in crisis situations\textsuperscript{5}. In summary, a resilient person has been described as one capable of identifying what is stressful, assessing the most appropriate response, and solving the issue effectively\textsuperscript{6}.

On the other hand, spirituality in the workplace has emerged in the literature as another factor relevant to the development and competitiveness of business organizations. In 2010, F. Karakas\textsuperscript{7} reviewed 140 studies of spirituality in the workplace and observed three major contributions to organizational performance: improving employee well-being; providing a sense of purpose and meaning at work; and offering a sense of connectedness and community. All three of these contributions to organizational performance relate to the definition of calling used in the current study.

Despite some controversy regarding definitions and instruments\textsuperscript{8}, spirituality studies in business organizations have found that spiritual values positively impact work productivity\textsuperscript{9} and foster a sense of creativity, trust, and respect that favor healthy team dynamics\textsuperscript{10}. A more obvious and therefore well documented contribution of spirituality in the workplace is its effects in preventing unethical behaviors\textsuperscript{11} and providing a basis for understanding the dynamics of organiza-

tional conscience. However, as in the case of resilience presented earlier, spirituality is also re-
related to commitment, stress, decision making, self-efficacy, and leadership.

In reviewing these studies, it becomes somewhat evident that both resilience as a reaction to adversity and spiritual values share some degree of effect upon the same employee and organizational variables. Numerous studies describing the relationship between these two factors are available in the literature, but primarily originating from disciplines other than business. For example, Walsh found spirituality and resilience to be significant factors in family healing processes. Likewise, G. B. Angell, B. Dennis and L. Dumain identify both spirituality and resilience to be key attributes in reconfiguring one’s life following the trauma of parental death. S. Vanistendael demonstrates the value of resilience and spirituality in elevating the quality of life of patients and their families in confronting life-threatening illness. In yet another study, M. M. Banerjee and L. Pyles discovered spirituality to be a vital source of resilience in African American women. M. N. Womble, E. E. Labbé and C. R. Cochran found evidence to support the argument that spirituality promotes resilience. I. V. Vahia and fellow researchers conclude there is a clear role for spirituality in promoting resilience to manage stressors. A regression analysis of women with abusive partners showed that women who score higher on spirituality also report greater resilient characteristics. In several studies, spirituality is specifically recognized as a pathway to resilience. A principal implication of these studies—albeit from other

disciplines—is that spirituality is a source of resilience. Studies in the business disciplines characterizing resilience as a source of spirituality or offering evidence of the relationship of the two were extremely scarce, despite searches in multiple aggregate databases. Although some scholars have framed calling in terms of personal fulfillment at work\(^1\), this study defines calling as a spiritual value\(^2\); it is, therefore, best characterized within a theological framework. In the modern context, calling is both a sacred and secular term, but the idea that work can be associated with calling as a spiritual value originated within Judeo-Christian traditions\(^3\). Within this perspective, a number of theologians and mystics—as well as numerous other scholars—have advocated the “transcendent summons” as an essential characteristic of vocation as calling\(^4\). Rather than just a one-time beckoning, this divine summons is more of a lifetime discovery process\(^5\) that requires constant discerning though life (Ellis and Henry 2012) or, better yet and as R. J. Pemberton states, vocation as calling is an evolving and dynamic that is “story-shaped”\(^6\). Since the transcendent aspect of vocation as calling is also such an integral part of individual identity, various theological reflections and explorations—such as the “theology of the person”\(^7\)—are best suited to offer clarity and direction to the unfolding of the human-divine relationships in general, and their dynamics in the workplace\(^8\) in particular.

While scholars recognize the existence of forms of calling common to all people, calling is also personal in epitomizing the nature of one’s existence: a personal uniqueness designed for a specific purpose in time and place\(^9\). This unique personal calling points to a task for a community or society\(^10\), is also simultaneously expressing an ontological foundation of personal identi-
which may partly explain why the terms calling and vocation are used interchangeably. Terms used to describe the calling—vocation concept are the “personal ideal,” “ego-ideal,” and “ontological name.” G. Bogart calls it “a central facet of the narrative that a person constructs to make sense of his or her personal history,” while I. Progoff calls it “a single directive principle unifying one’s inward and outward life.”

The development or maturation of calling, as a spiritual value, occurs throughout the course of adult life. More specifically, longitudinal studies have shown that negative life events are associated with spiritual growth in adulthood. To this effect, K. Stokes notes that growth occurs more frequently during periods of transition and crisis than during times of stability. Within this spiritual maturation process, values—such as calling—are considered a significant influence in building a positive reaction to adversity. Essentially, calling presumes adversity and adversity challenges the response to calling.

Since the workplace occupies such a central part of adult life, adverse and nurturing situations at work can contribute to the evolving “story-shaping” activities of a person’s vocation and calling. Yet, rather than focusing on the type and intensity of a variety of possible adverse situations in the workplace (e.g., relational, task, structural, environmental, and work-family), this study focuses specifically on the relationship between calling and resilience as a measure of reaction to adversity. Scholars already recognize calling as a source of resilience for various reasons. First, the transcendent summons in calling offers a solution to human insufficiency and a meaning-making framework for positively interpreting adversity. Calling also has a sacrificial,

self-giving component that compels an altruistic disposition\(^1\). In asserting that calling is a source of resilience (i.e., resistance to adversity), one can assert—at least theoretically— that better appreciation of one’s calling would also result in higher levels of resilience.

This study’s objective is to evaluate the relationship between resilience and spirituality. The sample comprises data collected over a four-year period from 516 business graduate students undertaking an online business research class. Students completed a resilience scale and a spirituality assessment scale at the beginning of the course using an online data collection platform, which would identify each participant only by session ID and date-time stamp. To encourage participation and protect anonymity, no other demographic data were collected. The data were used for this study and for illustration purposes later in the students’ research course.

**Methodology**

Data were collected from 516 business graduate (MBA) students, representing a variety of workplaces, using two instruments: a resilience instrument and a spirituality assessment tool. The participants completed online assessments for resilience and calling as a spiritual value. The psychometric properties of both instruments were reviewed and also validated with the data of the present study. A subset of items from the spirituality assessment tool was identified as directly related to calling and was also tested for internal validity. The data from the calling subset and resilience were subjected to a Pearson correlation to test the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

Originally developed and validated by G. Wagnild and H. Young\(^2\), the Resilience Scale (RS-25) comprises 25 items. In their original study, the instrument showed a coefficient alpha of 0.91 and item-to-total correlations between 0.37 and 0.75, with the majority falling between 0.50 and 0.70 using a sample of 810 adults. All inter-correlation of items were significant at \(p \leq 0.001\). For the current study, with a sample of 516 business graduate students, the RS-25 showed a coefficient alpha of 0.89 with similar inter-item correlations at \(p \leq 0.001\), with a skewness of \(-0.274\) and kurtosis of \(-0.301\).

For spirituality, the Relational Spirituality Scale\(^3\) or RSS-30 (formerly known as the Independent Spirituality Assessment Scale) was used, comprising 30 items that measure spirituality as a relational construct (i.e., relationship with self, others, and the divine). The RSS-30 was originally developed in 2003 and has been used in various published studies. For a large sample of 1,527 responses generated throughout studies using this scale, the instrument exhibited an internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of 0.94 with adequate normality statistics (skewness = –0.048, kurtosis = –0.459). The RSS-30 results for the current study of business graduate students (\(n=516\)) showed a Cronbach alpha of 0.92, with a skewness of 0.23 and kurtosis of –0.572. Notably, values for skewness and kurtosis between –2 and +2 are considered acceptable to show normal distribution\(^4\), a key assumption when using correlation.

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From the RSS-30, a series of nine statements that directly relate to “calling” were grouped to represent a single variable named CALLING. These nine statements were verified against the extant literature and tested for internal validity with the graduate students (alpha = 0.793, skewness = –0.093, kurtosis = –0.455). The selected RSS-30 statements representing CALLING and the verifying sources are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S#</th>
<th>Narrative from the RSS-30</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Everything I am in my private life, I am also in my public life.</td>
<td>Markow and Klenke (2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>I spend time each day reflecting on the results of my daily activities as a way to adjust my life-style.</td>
<td>Hall, D. T., &amp; Chandler, D. E. (2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>I can easily cope with adverse situations that are beyond my personal control</td>
<td>Vinje, H. F. (2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1, Validation of statements extracted from the RSS-30 relating to CALLING

Satisfied with the psychometric properties of the Resilience Scale (RS-25) and the sub-grouped variable CALLING from the RSS-30, the next step was to calculate the strength of the relationship between resilience and calling using a Pearson correlation. In doing so, the resulting correlation factor (n=516) using SPSS was r=0.58, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As with any form of research, there are limitations and constraints that are necessary to present in order to properly frame the value of the outcomes. First of all, the literature acknowledges a variety of theories and difficulties in measuring resilience, spirituality, and calling and therefore the selection of instruments used in the present study provide a first look of strength among these variables. Although the present study is intended to illustrate the dynamics of these variables in the workplace setting, the study is unable to neither determine different forms of commitment to calling in the workplace nor determine the effects of adverse events that fall outside the workplace and their effects at work. Likewise, the study is unable to establish whether

the participants hold a healthy or biased sense of a transcendent summons or identify the belief system used by each participant to interpret the summons. Although demographics were not collected, it is fair to assume that participants have a professional sense of their vocation and calling since they are business graduate students, and consequently, the research outcomes may apply just to a professional population. Finally, this study is affected by the strengths and weaknesses of a typical empirical research, which recognizes that not all human phenomena can be quantitatively measured. Despite these constraints, this exploratory study into the relationship between resilience and vocation as calling has some value in addressing a gap in the literature and also serves as an invitation to explore the relationship among these variables using alternative research methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study’s purpose was to investigate the relationship between resilience as a reaction to adversity and vocation as calling in the workplace. The results show a positive and moderate relationship between these variables, supporting the argument that increasing appreciation of a transcendent summons also increases resilience. Additionally, the direction of the relationship was positive, meaning that these variables tend to increase together. The magnitude—or strength—of the association was moderate (r=0.58) but somewhat stronger than the results between the RSS-30 (Spirituality) and the RS-25 (Resilience) overall scores, which yielded an r=0.50. This suggests that calling is a better indicator of resilience than spirituality as measured by this instrument. Even taking the scores of items 14 (“I am living according to my personal calling in life”) and 37 (“I adapt well, even in the face of severe adversity”) from the RSS-30 together, they present a moderate correlation with resilience (r=0.55).

These findings indicate that calling in the workplace generates resilience as a reaction to adversity, although causality remains uncertain because facing adversity could also serve to deepen commitment to calling. Some literature points to spirituality—and calling as a spiritual value—as the source of resistance to adversity, but studies explaining the effects of resilience upon calling in the workplace are scarce. Without question, the intertwining of resilience as a reaction to adversity and vocation as calling impedes the study of causality. Calling can provide a source to face adversity, whereas adversity can challenge behaviors related to calling. Yet living a calling is by no means a guarantee for dealing effectively with adversity. Either way, the study of spiritual values such as calling may not be fully understood through quantitative methods alone.

From the workplace perspective, this moderate relationship provides the foundation for an otherwise difficult skill to develop as a standalone value. Resilience is rarely promoted in isolation as a salient organizational value and is a difficult behavioral skill to develop over a short

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period of time, especially when facing an impending crisis. Unfortunately, in business settings, management interest in resilience tends to be more frequent when the organization is exposed to high risk events, such as reorganization, layoffs, and changes in job descriptions. Yet if the moderate relationship holds true, calling in the workplace provides a “reservoir” of resilience as an alternative to an “on-demand” need for resilience.

Aside from helping to prepare for organizational crises, resilience is also known to be a significant factor in alleviating employee stress. The literature on resilience recognizes specific intrapersonal dynamics related to stress, such as a belief system that provides existential meaning, a cohesive life narrative, and an appreciation of one’s uniqueness. Yet belief systems, meaning making, cohesive life, and the recognition of personal uniqueness are also considered ered attributes of a calling. Essentially, vocation as calling carries these attributes and results in better coping of stress in the workplace.

It is remarkable to observe over the past decades how business journals seem to be indirectly “reaching out” to the theology disciplines for perspectives supportive of the workplace spirituality movement. To illustrate, the business literature has already shown interest in researching topics such as the meaning of work, faith at work, prayer in the workplace, forgiveness, healing, spiritual formation, and morality for which theology already has rich content and proven traditions. Peter Vaill advocates for this interdisciplinary "reaching out" with a broader question affecting the worker as well as the workplace: "Can there be a divinely grounded organizational behavior—that is, a serious study in which organizational events are assumed to be codetermined by human and divine action?" Without doubt—as in the case of

vocation as calling—theology can become a major contributor to these discussions and yet there
seem to be few interdisciplinary initiatives attempting to reduce this divide.

The current study raises questions for further exploration. Admittedly, one can have a voca-
tion without the benefit of calling, but—within the business setting—how does one discover
and develop a calling within the workplace setting, starting from a well-defined professional voci-
nation and effectively transition to a “higher purpose” inspired by the transcendent? Is this the role
of Human Resources or a chaplain? Could calling be eventually considered a hiring criteria
for certain jobs? What are the devices used to discover and promote calling at work religion spe-
cific? Are there ethical implications? What particular theological lines of inquiry or initiatives
are appropriate in closing the interdisciplinary gap and further vocation as calling within the
evolving spirituality at work movement? Are there empirical discoveries in workplace research
that benefit theological discourse? Other than at personal level, is there also a comparable calling
at organizational level within a business that gives it a more transcendent sense of meaning and
direction? Evidently, the concept of vocation as calling presents research opportunities for a bet-
ter defined role of the theology disciplines in workplace research.

Work is a dominant activity of human and social endeavor, and a significant locus of per-
sonal identity. Typically, there are an abundance of workplace situations that constantly chal-
lenge an individual’s calling. Having a calling by no means guarantees being able to deal with
adversity; yet adversity in the workplace has been determined to contribute to the evolving, “sto-
ry-shaping” activities of a person’s vocation and calling. This study’s results show a positive and
moderate relationship between calling and resilience, supporting the argument that increasing
appreciation of a transcendent summons also increases resilience. Very few studies are available
on the effects of these variables in the workplace, and extensive further investigation is still re-
quired to better appreciate the value of vocation as calling in the workplace.

ABSTRACT

Among the settings that constantly challenge an individual’s uniqueness is the workplace. Within
the workplace, adversity—and resilience as its purported remedy—plays a key role in molding
the self-image. Traditionally, adversity has been viewed as an undesirable construct, while resil-
ience is regarded as a professional attribute. This study redefines adversity as a positive concept
and an opportunity for further discovery and maturation of a person’s calling within a theolog-
cal context. For this study, 516 business graduate students from a variety of workplace settings
completed online assessments on resilience and calling as a spiritual value. The study explores
the relationship between resilience as a reaction to adversity and vocation as calling in the
workplace.