



# Living one's calling: Job resources as a link between having and living a calling

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## ABSTRACT

Recent research on calling has pointed to the important distinction between having and living a calling in order to explain the positive effects of callings on well-being. However, how the link between having a calling and living a calling might be explained has only been partially addressed. In the present study, we focused on the neglected role of workplace characteristics as key factors in this regard. In a sample of 232 working adults in Germany, we established that presence of calling and living a calling were significantly related to job resources in terms of decision-making autonomy, task significance, and social support at work. Moreover, presence of calling and living a calling positively related to level of education, leadership position, and salary. Testing indirect effects with bootstrapping analyses, we found that job resources, specifically decision-making autonomy and task significance, partially mediated the relation of presence of calling with living a calling, while controlling for educational level and leadership position. The results support the idea that living a calling is not just about finding work that fits one's calling. People who have a calling are also more likely to live their calling by working in jobs with more job resources.

## 1. Introduction

Calling has emerged as an important construct in the understanding of subjective career success, well-being at work, and general well-being. Across different samples in different countries, research has established that people who perceive their work as a calling generally report higher work meaningfulness and work engagement as well as life satisfaction, among other positive work and life outcomes (Duffy & Dik, 2013). However, more recently, research on calling has drawn attention to the distinction between having a calling and being able to live a calling (Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012).

Research suggests that having a calling (used herein synonymously with *perceiving a calling* and *presence of a calling*) without being able to live the calling might be more detrimental to well-being than having no calling at all (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, England, & Dik, 2016; Gazica & Spector, 2015). Other research found that living a calling correlates only moderately with presence of calling and that living a calling shows stronger correlations with life satisfaction, career commitment, work meaning, and job satisfaction than does having a calling (Duffy, Allan et al., 2012; Duffy, Bott, et al., 2012). Moreover, living a calling is related to higher educational level and income, while presence of calling is not (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy, England, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2017). In sum, recent empirical results suggest that the repeatedly reported positive effects of having a calling depend largely on the degree to which a person is able to actually live his or her calling. Moreover, findings imply that not everybody is able to live

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their calling, leading to the important question of what circumstances allow people to successfully live their calling (i.e., variables that link presence of calling and living a calling). In a first attempt to address this question, [Duffy and Autin \(2013\)](#) found support for their proposition that increased work volition (an individual's perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints) and organizational support are ways in which presence of calling and living a calling are related. However, a range of other factors might be important in this regard, and we lack a more complete understanding of factors that link presence of calling with living a calling. Most importantly, existing research has almost exclusively focused on individual factors to explain differences in living a calling and largely neglected the importance of the work context in this regard.

In the present paper, we advance existing theoretical and empirical research on calling and propose that job resources are an important factor to understand the linkages between having and living a calling. Specifically, the main aims of the present paper are to (1) theoretically introduce the importance of job resources for our understanding of the working conditions under which callings can be lived; (2) explore the extent to which job resources are related to presence of calling and to living a calling; and (3) evaluate a theoretical model that states that job resources represent a link between having a calling and living a calling. In sum, we will contribute to a better understanding of what factors allow people to be living a calling and thereby make a contribution to a still understudied issue of increasing importance in the calling literature ([Duffy & Dik, 2013](#)).

### 1.1. *Having a calling and living a calling*

Presence of calling can be defined as the belief that one is pursuing a particular line of work due to an external summons that is within one's broader sense of purpose in life and that has a prosocial orientation ([Dik & Duffy, 2009](#)). A number of empirical studies showed that presence of calling is relatively prevalent among college students and working adults in different professions and is related to a range of positive outcomes, such as career satisfaction, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction (see [Duffy & Dik, 2013](#), for a review). More recently, however, researchers ([Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010](#); [Duffy, Bott et al., 2012](#); [Duffy, Douglass, et al., 2016](#); [Gazica & Spector, 2015](#)) have begun to recognize that presence of calling is not always sufficient to yield positive individual and organizational outcomes; actually being able to live a calling is critical in this regard. The distinction between presence of calling and living a calling is based on the assumption that not everybody is able to find work that matches his or her personal career preferences due to a variety of personal and environmental barriers and constraints that can impede people from realizing their career aspirations and limiting their work volition ([Blustein, 2006](#)).

Consequently, research has started to examine living a calling as an important factor to explain how and under which conditions the presence of a calling might yield positive effects. From a theoretical standpoint, living a calling can be seen as a moderator that represents an important boundary condition for the positive effects of the presence of a calling. For example, the importance to distinguish between the presence of a calling and living a calling was supported by a quantitative study showing that presence of calling was only related to career commitment and work meaning under the condition of living a calling ([Duffy, Bott, et al., 2012](#)). Other studies have conceptualized living a calling as a mediator that explains by which process the presence of calling exerts positive effects. Specifically, several studies showed that living a calling mediated the relation between presence of calling and life satisfaction ([Duffy et al., 2013](#); [Duffy, England, et al., 2017](#); [Duffy, Torrey, England, & Tebbe, 2017](#)).

Other research found additional support for the importance of living a calling. [Duffy and colleagues \(Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy et al., 2017; Duffy & Autin, 2013\)](#) showed that living a calling, but not presence of calling, was significantly and positively correlated with higher income and educational level. [Gazica and Spector \(2015\)](#) found that academics with unanswered callings scored lower on work engagement, career commitment, job satisfaction as well as self-reported physical and psychological health than study participants who were able to live their callings or even had no callings at all. Finally, [Duffy, Douglass, et al. \(2016\)](#) report that perceiving a calling without the ability to live out the calling is related to decreased levels of life satisfaction. However, these authors also found that living a calling can buffer the negative effects of burnout and exploitation at work on job satisfaction. In sum, these results support the importance of being able to live one's calling for positive individual and organizational outcomes. They also raise the question of what factors allow people to be able to live their calling and how presence of calling is related to actually living it.

Research usually conceptualizes positive work experiences as outcomes of presence of calling and living a calling ([Duffy & Dik, 2013](#)). However, more recent work has started to conceptualize living a calling as a feeling that emerges when people are able to engage in fulfilling work and have positive work experiences. Hence, living a calling can be seen as the result of well-being at work and meaningful, satisfying work experiences ([Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Douglass, 2014](#)). Along these lines, [Duffy and Autin \(2013\)](#) more closely explored the mechanism linking presence of calling and living a calling and found that positive work experiences in terms of increased work volition and perceived organizational support were significant mediators in this regard. This suggests that people are able to live their calling due to an increased sense of control over their career decision making and because they have a supportive work environment. A longitudinal study of a diverse group of working adults further supported the notion that living a calling should be viewed as an outcome of positive work experiences because career commitment, work meaning, and job satisfaction prospectively predicted living a calling ([Duffy et al., 2014](#)). This perspective was further supported in a study by [Duffy, Autin, and Douglass \(2016\)](#) who conceptualized work meaning and career commitment as predictors of living a calling, mediating the effects of vocational privilege (i.e., social class and work volition) on being able to live one's calling. In the present study, we expand on these results and investigate the extent to which job resources are related to the presence of calling and living a calling and might act as a link between these two constructs. This will provide important new knowledge regarding what work context factors allow people with a calling to achieve a state of actually living it.

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