



Testing a calling model of psychological career success in Australian young adults: A longitudinal study



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ABSTRACT

Theory-based longitudinal research on career calling is sparse. In a two-wave, cross-lagged panel design we assessed Hall and Chandler's (2005) calling model of psychological career success using 216 young adults (M age = 20.44 years, SD = 2.54). We tested if changes in career calling over time were associated with changes in goal-directed effort (work effort and career strategies) and psychological career success (life meaning and career adaptability) over time, and if goal-directed effort mediated between career calling and psychological career success over time. The standard causal model showed a better fit over the base, reverse, and reciprocal causation models. T1 career calling predicted T2 work effort, career strategies, life meaning, and career adaptability. Only career strategies mediated between T1 career calling and T2 life meaning and T2 career adaptability. Limitations and future directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In times of career transition, such as when young people leave high school for university or enter the workforce, career calling is an important personal resource, which aids them in successfully managing the transition, developing their career, and achieving career success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In recent years, research on career calling, which largely indicates that young people with a calling are advantaged in terms of well-being and the development of career-related behaviours and attitudes, has flourished (see Duffy & Dik, 2013 for a review). However, much of this research has been atheoretical, with only a handful of studies guided by theoretical models (see, for example, Duffy & Autin, 2013), and much has been cross-sectional (Duffy & Dik, 2013). As career calling is a developmental construct (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2014), longitudinal research is especially important to tease out developmental trajectories and clarify causal relations. The current study contributes to a better understanding of career calling by using Hall and Chandler's (2005) calling model of psychological career success to test the across-time relations between calling and effortful behaviour (operationalised as work effort and career strategies) and psychological career success (life meaning and career adaptability).

1.1. Career calling

While there is no standard definition of career calling, conceptualisations can be categorised as either traditional or neoclassical (i.e., religious, or other external source of a calling, and a sense of destiny and pro-social duty) or modern (an internal drive for self-fulfilment and happiness; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Career calling has been considered as a transcendent summons to a meaningful career used to serve others (Dik & Duffy, 2009), a consuming, meaningful passion

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(Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), work perceived as one's purpose in life (Hall & Chandler, 2005), and a course of action in pursuit of pro-social intentions (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010). Scholars generally agree that people with a calling consider their work to be deeply meaningful and approach it with a strong sense of purpose and desire to contribute to others in some way (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010).

The literature suggests that career calling is a developmental construct tied to general career developmental tasks, which starts to emerge in adolescence or earlier, becomes salient for young people, and is shaped over time (Dobrow, 2007; Hunter et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2012). Thus, career calling is expressed differently in young adults than in adults, who are already living their calling in the workplace (Duffy & Autin, 2013; Praskova et al., 2014). Developmentally, young adults (approx. 18 to 25 years old) are in the process of transitioning from high school to work or further education. Their main developmental tasks are to abandon some earlier goals, establish new goals relevant to their studies, future profession, and life in general (Arnett, 2000; Havighurst, 1953/1961), and to engage in career preparatory processes relevant to reaching purposeful and meaningful work (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Career calling in young adulthood involves identifying strong, long-term, abstract, personal goals, which can be manifested in future-oriented actions and attitudes applied to motivate, pursue, and manage the goals (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Praskova et al., 2014). This view is consistent with goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) and other views that describe calling as a context-specific goal (Duffy & Dik, 2013) that promotes human agency (Elangovan et al., 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Specifically, responding to a career calling might involve complex exploratory and planning behaviours, a willingness and effort to engage in career-related activities (Elangovan et al., 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005), and career and life preparatory behaviours, such as developing relationship skills (Arnett, 2000). From this perspective, and for the purpose of this study, a career calling in young adults refers to a “mostly self-set, salient, higher-order, career goal, which generates meaning and purpose for the individual (and the community), and which has the potential to be strengthened (or weakened) by engaging in goal-directed, career-preparatory actions and adaptive processes aimed at meeting this goal” (Praskova et al., 2014, p. 3).

Generally, however, researchers have not clearly articulated an overarching theoretical framework when examining career calling, and the research has been predominantly cross-sectional. This limits our knowledge of how career calling might relate to individual behaviour more generally, and how it might affect people over time (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Despite this, the current evidence indicates that career calling in young people has been associated with general well-being, such as life satisfaction and psychological adjustment (e.g., Steger et al., 2010) and domain-specific well-being, such as academic satisfaction and career choice comfort (Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Young adults with a career calling also report having more career information (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007) and greater career involvement (Hirschi, 2011). They are more decided, confident, and clear about their career (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007), and have more positive career attitudes and outcome expectations (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Steger et al., 2010). In sum, young people with a career calling benefit from better well-being and more positive career development.

However, only a handful of studies has been guided by, or embedded in, general theoretical models, such as the psychology of working framework (Duffy & Autin, 2013), indicating the need to build a stronger, domain-specific, theoretical foundation for the construct (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Hall and Chandler (2005), who also consider calling from a goal-setting perspective (i.e., a calling is “work that a person perceives as his purpose in life”, p. 160) proposed a specific calling model of psychological career success that is relevant to young adults in transition (see Fig. 1 for the full model). The model describes the development of a career calling as an ongoing, cyclical, and adaptive process, involving setting and exploration of career goals, trial efforts, and evaluations of success. However, to date, this model has not been tested in the career calling domain. The main aim of this study was to address this by testing this model using a short-term, longitudinal design, and a sample of young adults.

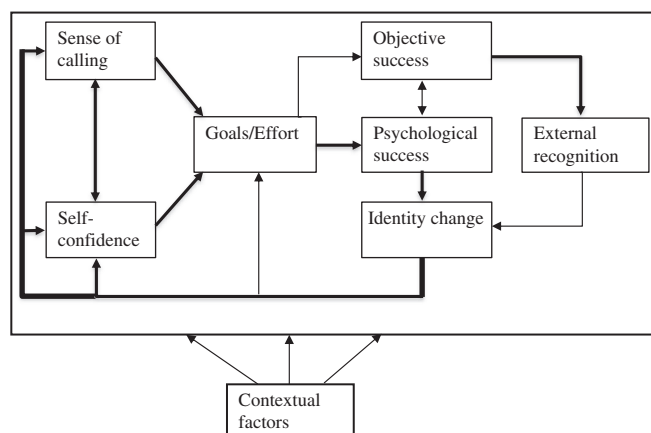


Fig. 1. The calling model of career success. Highlighted paths represent the strongest associations. With permission, adapted from Hall and Chandler (2005, p. 165).

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