



Calling and career preparation: Investigating developmental patterns and temporal precedence[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The presence of a calling and career development are assumed to be closely related. However, the nature of and reason for this relationship have not been thoroughly investigated. We hypothesized the existence of reciprocal effects between calling and three dimensions of career preparation and assessed the change of the presence of a calling, career planning, decidedness, and self-efficacy with three waves of a diverse sample of German university students ($N = 846$) over one year. Latent growth analyses revealed that the intercepts of calling showed a significant positive correlation with the intercepts of all career preparation measures. The slope of calling was positively related to those of decidedness and self-efficacy but not to planning. Cross-lagged analyses showed that calling predicted a subsequent increase in planning and self-efficacy. Planning and decidedness predicted an increase in the presence of a calling. The results suggest that calling and career preparation are related due to mutual effects but that effects differ for different career preparation dimensions.

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1. Introduction

In today's post-industrialized economies, many people seek intrinsically motivating work. Empirical research (e.g., 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. Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011, p. 1003) defined calling as a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a career domain while Dik and Duffy (2009) described it as a transcendent summons to a meaningful career that is used to serve others. Regardless of the specific definition, the presence of a calling is often described as a psychological resource that promotes vocational development and as connected to identity, confidence, resilience, and adaptability (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Empirical studies confirmed a positive relationship of calling and several career development variables such as career decidedness (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010) or career self-efficacy beliefs (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Hirschi, 2011). However, the reason for and nature of the relationship have not been clearly addressed. As a consequence, we do not know whether callings promote, hinder, precede, follow, or are reciprocally related to pivotal career development constructs. However, such knowledge is crucial to increase our understanding of how a calling emerges and how it affects career development (Dobrow, in press).

The major general contribution of the present study is that it is the first study to our knowledge to investigate the developmental intersection between calling and career development variables with a true longitudinal design encompassing three measurement points — a feature generally very rare in career and organizational research. Specifically, the present study

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examines the relation of change trajectories of the presence of a calling and three dimensions of career preparation (Skorikov, 2007): Career planning, decision-making, and confidence among university students with three measurement points over a period of one year. Moreover, we investigate to what extent the presence of a calling precedes and/or follows the development of the career preparation dimensions with a cross-lagged study. In this way, the study makes three key contributions. First, we contribute to the calling literature by investigating how callings change over time and what factors affect such changes. Second, we extend this literature by linking calling with three dimension of career preparation among university students and show if and how calling affects those pivotal career development variables. Third, we contribute to career development research by demonstrating how career preparation affects the emergence of a presence of a calling.

2. Theoretical background

Dobrow (in press) suggested that researchers must consider a calling to be a dynamic phenomenon that changes over time and addressed the need for research examining calling in conjunction with possible antecedents and outcomes. Longitudinal research investigating the relation of calling and career development variables has only begun to emerge (Dobrow, in press; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2011) and generally reported positive relations. However, these studies have not tested lagged effects, which would establish whether a change in career development variables is related to a change in calling (or vice versa) and thus make a case for their mutual influence above and beyond mere concurrent relations. The present study extends existing research and attempts to increase our understanding of how calling and dimensions of career preparation are related over time.

Specifically, we investigated the intersection of calling and three dimensions of career development that represent three commitment-focused dimensions of career adaptability (Savickas, 2005) that Skorikov (2007; Stringer, Kerpelman, & Skorikov, 2011) defined as career preparation: Planning, decision-making, and confidence. Previous research showed that those dimensions are pivotal constructs of career development and related to important career outcomes such as, for example, fewer career concerns among first-year university students (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009) or better psychological adjustment after high school (Skorikov, 2007). In our study, we investigated the relation of those career preparation variables with calling among a large and diverse group of German university students. This allowed us to tap into a critical period in terms of career and identity development. First, engaging in career preparation is particularly pivotal for students to address the specific career task of transitioning from university to work or postgraduate degrees, which is characterized by the need for active career planning, decision-making, addressing uncertainty about future work, an active job search, and career self-management (see Abele & Spurk, 2009, for a study with German university graduates). Second, during the period of emerging adulthood, which encompasses the university years, the development and establishment of a student's identity, values, goals, and life structures are particularly prevalent (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, investigating the emergence of a presence of a calling appears timely for this population. Empirical research confirmed that the concept of a calling is relevant for a considerable number of university students in the US (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010) and Germany (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012; Hirschi, 2011).

Because university students are concerned with career preparation and the notion of a calling is important for a considerable number among them, investigating the developmental intersection of career preparation and calling seems important and fruitful to increase our understanding of the nature, antecedents, and consequences of callings. A calling is frequently considered as a psychological resource that positively affects career development (Hall & Chandler, 2005) and empirical research showed positive relations to different career development variables (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy, Allan, et al., 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hirschi, 2011; Steger et al., 2010). It is hence reasonable to expect meaningful positive relations with dimensions of career preparation among university students. However, previous research has not investigated the developmental intersection of those career constructs.

In the next paragraphs, we review the relation of calling with the three dimensions of career preparation in terms of career planning, career decision making (i.e., career decidedness), and career confidence (i.e., career self-efficacy beliefs). All three dimensions can be conceptualized as positive indicators of career preparation (Skorikov, 2007) and we hence expect no fundamental differences in their relation to the presence of calling. However, empirical research (Stringer et al., 2011) suggested that they show different antecedents, developmental patterns, and outcomes which make it important to treat them as distinct dimensions in their own right.

2.1. Career planning and calling

People with a sense of calling should be motivated to proactively consider and plan their career because they are likely to aim to implement their calling at work, which allows them to live their calling and achieve higher job satisfaction (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012). As such, callings can represent an ideal possible (future) work self that motivates anticipatory and future-oriented career behavior, such as career planning (Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012). On the other hand, it is also possible that active career planning facilitates the development and confirmation of one's calling. Career planning entails future-oriented thinking and envisioning future work states (Savickas, 1997). Thus, it allows people to envision themselves in different future work contexts and to construct a possible future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which is important in identity construction and finding meaning. This future-oriented identity construction can lead to the discovery or confirmation of a sense of calling.

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