

COMMENTARY

## Who is called to work? The importance of calling when considering universal basic income

Patrick Rowles<sup>1\*</sup>, Cody Cox<sup>1,2</sup>, and Gregory J. Pool<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Industrial Organizational Psychology, St. Mary's University and <sup>2</sup>Greehey School of Business

\*Corresponding author. Email: [4rolwes@gmail.com](mailto:4rolwes@gmail.com)

In their focal article, Hüffmeier and Zacher (2021) discuss the effects that basic income (BI) could have on the relationship between employees and their work. In particular, they note that the introduction of BI might lead to an increased focus on meaningfulness of work as individuals become less reliant on a salary. We agree with this viewpoint, and we feel that variables related to motivation will be particularly important in this discussion. One of these that has demonstrated a consistent relationship with workplace outcomes is *calling*. Calling is generally considered a person's purpose or passion in life and can be defined as a "meaningful passion toward a domain" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1003). We think calling has the potential to be one of the most important variables to explore when considering the influence of BI on employment.

Although calling is a relatively new variable in psychological and organizational research, several studies have established the importance of calling (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Kaminsky & Behrend, 2015; Lobene & Meade, 2013). Many studies on calling have demonstrated the positive relationship between calling and beneficial workplace outcomes, including job satisfaction and career self-efficacy (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy et al. 2011a; Kaminsky & Behrend, 2015; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In addition, Duffy et al. (2011b) suggests that higher levels of calling promote greater confidence in career decisions and greater hope in the pursuit of one's goals.

Research has further demonstrated how organizations can benefit from fostering a sense of meaning in the work of their employees, as doing so will result in happier and better workers (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Kaminsky & Behrend, 2015). Research has also begun to explore what relationships calling might moderate, which could help organizations better understand when having a calling would be most beneficial (Lobene & Meade, 2013). Although most outcomes associated with perceived occupational calling are positive, one potentially negative outcome is a decrease in career adaptability (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). However, other research has found that calling actually increases career adaptability (Praskova et al., 2014). On the other hand, if a calling is left unanswered, research indicates that people will often craft their jobs in order to fulfill their calling through less conventional methods (Berg et al., 2010). Although it was found that individuals who practice job-crafting techniques experience enjoyment and meaning through this practice, they also felt regret and stress due to the difficulty of pursuing their unanswered call (Berg et al., 2010). Thus, there are potentially serious consequences for an unfulfilled calling.

In our exploration of psychological calling, we conducted a meta-analysis of the effect of calling on several workplace outcomes such as job satisfaction, turnover intention, and career related self-efficacy, as well as more general outcomes such as life meaning. The studies in this analysis used several different measures of calling, which included the 12-item Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (Dik et al., 2012), the 9-item Vocational Identity Questionnaire (Dreher et al., 2007), Dobrow and

**Table 1.** Meta-Analytic Relationship With Calling

Construct	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mr</i>	<i>Mp</i>	% variance
Job performance	3	843	.47	.48	>.01
Turnover intention	2	531	-.32	-.32	>.01
Career-related self-efficacy	4	1,194	.29	.32	>.01
Life meaning	3	744	.63	.68	>.01

Note. *k* is the number of samples, *N* = total number of individuals samples, *Mr* = uncorrected and unweighted mean, *Mp* = corrected weighted mean, *SDp* = standard deviation corrected, % variance = variance due to sampling error.

Tosti-Kharas's (2011) 12-item scale, and Praskova et al.'s (2014) 15-item Career Calling Scale. For the present analysis, qualitative studies were excluded. We conducted a "bare bones" meta-analysis due to the relatively small number of studies and effects included in this analysis in order to minimize unreliability and sampling error in the data (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990). The effects were then corrected for attenuation and weighted by sample size to reduce sampling error. The weighted and unattenuated effect sizes were then averaged together. This process was done for each of the effects (calling and job satisfaction, calling and turnover intention, calling and career-related self-efficacy, and calling and life meaning).

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of the effect sizes between calling and each criterion. Calling and job satisfaction were positively related; after weighing and correcting for attenuation, the mean effect size was found to be  $r = .48$ , a medium positive effect. There was also a negative relationship between calling and turnover intention  $r = -.32$ , a medium negative effect. Additionally we found a positive relationship between calling and career related self-efficacy  $r = .32$ , a medium positive effect. Finally, we also found a positive relationship between calling and life meaning,  $r = .68$ , a large positive effect. Our analysis demonstrates the importance of calling and its potential for organizations. This analysis demonstrates how organizations can benefit from fostering a sense of meaning in the work of their employees, as doing so will result in happier and better workers and reduce the likelihood of turnover. For researchers, this analysis demonstrates that calling has a significant effect on important factors. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study calling in future research.

Future research in the area of calling needs to focus on methods for increasing a sense of calling among people, as such research would aid organizations in developing programs to increase calling. Such programs will undoubtedly create a more fulfilled workforce. In addition, further research needs to be done to investigate the relationships that calling could potentially moderate or mediate. A better understanding of these relationships could assist in determining what situations in which it is best to emphasize calling. In addition, further replications of the current studies would help reaffirm the findings of this analysis, as there are still relatively few studies on calling available.

Beyond our analysis, there are many areas of calling worth exploring in future research. One interesting area of research in the area of calling that needs further development is investigation into what relationships calling could potentially moderate. Lobene and Meade (2013) sought to investigate one such relationship in their study of outcomes of teachers and perceived overqualification. This is a particularly interesting study, as perceived overqualification has generally been shown to be associated with more negative career outcomes (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard et al., 2009), and the authors suspected that calling might reduce the negative effects of perceived overqualification (Lobene & Meade, 2013). Specifically, the authors hypothesized that calling would make the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction weaker. In addition, the authors expected calling to strengthen a positive relationship between perceived overqualification and job performance. To test these questions, the authors sent out an online survey to K–12 teachers. The survey used reliable items that measured calling, perceived overqualification, turnover intentions,

commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Hierarchical regression was used to test for moderation. The results showed that although perceived overqualification was positively related turnover intentions, calling did not appear to moderate the relationship between perceived overqualification and either turnover intentions or job satisfaction, but it did appear to moderate the relationship between perceived overqualification and both organizational commitment and performance (Lobene & Meade, 2013). Overall, calling was found to have much stronger effects on the selected variables than perceived overqualification did. This finding suggests that those with higher calling perceive fewer costs in the pursuit of their desired career and have a more optimistic view of career outcomes. Therefore, perceived overqualification and its corresponding negative effects may be effectively mitigated in the presence of calling. In the light of this knowledge, there are several important implications for organizations. First, it is to an organization's advantage to hire those with a high sense of calling, not only because of the potential positive outcomes but also because it will potentially decrease the risk of perceived overqualification. In addition, organizations should seriously consider fostering a sense of meaning among their employees to encourage a greater sense of calling among the workforce.

Calling has already demonstrated a strong relationship with performance, career choice, and motivation in the current marketplace, where salary considerations also play an important role in motivation and performance. We can only imagine that if a program of universal basic income were adopted, the importance of calling in motivating employees to stay with an organization would become even more important. Therefore, organizations and researchers should capitalize on the potential of calling and consider further research into how to develop a sense of calling in the workplace. Although calling has been a concept for a long time, research into calling has just begun. The initial results have demonstrated that calling has great potential to have an overwhelmingly positive influence on the workplace. Organizations that help employees develop a sense of calling may not only see the benefits of job satisfaction and lower turnover but also discover that their employees feel greater control over their careers and more meaning in their lives.

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**Cite this article:** Rowles, P., Cox, C., and Pool, GJ. (2021). Who is called to work? The importance of calling when considering universal basic income. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* **14**, 582–585. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2021.119>