

Understanding How Callings Develop: A Phenomenological Study of Millennials' Lived Experiences in Discerning a Calling through Meaning-Making

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THE PROBLEM

- Perceiving/living a calling is associated with various life/work outcomes such as satisfaction, meaning, etc., but little is known about how callings develop and there are conflicting views on the conceptualization of a calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013).
- There is a lack of diversity in the populations studied; the focus has been on previous generations, students, and individuals of faith-based backgrounds (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015).
- It is important for researchers/practitioners to understand how a newer generation, such as Millennials, develop a calling because they are currently in the workforce, are the biggest U.S. generation yet (Ng, et al., 2010), and research shows they value meaningful work and “making a life” over “making a living” (Zhang et al., 2007).
- On average, Millennials leave their jobs after college after 2 years, and are known to “jump ship” several times in their careers in search of meaningful work (Ng et al., 2010).
- Meaning-making from past experiences and self-reflection have been primary means to discern a calling (Ahn et al., 2017). Thus, it is important to study the lived experiences of Millennials and their meaning-making process in the development of their callings.

PURPOSE/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

PURPOSE:

- The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences that have led Millennials through a meaning-making process to discover their callings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Primary: What is the relationship between Millennials' meaning-making process and the discovery of their calling?
- Secondary:
 - How do Millennials, who have found their calling, define and conceptualize the construct of calling and the sources of calling?
 - What are the lived experiences that have led Millennials to discover their calling?
 - How do Millennials make meaning of the experiences and influences that have led them to discover their calling?

METHODS

- **METHODOLOGY:** Qualitative, Phenomenology
- **DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**
 - Semi-structured interviews using a modified Seidman's (2013) approach
 - 2-interview series: 1) life history and details of the participant's experiences; 2) meaning-making process of the phenomenon
- **PARTICIPANT SELECTION:** Social media announcements asking for volunteers who meet the criteria -
 - 1) Members of the Millennial generation (born in or between 1981 – 1996)
 - 2) Perceive to have discovered their calling (refers to work that one believes is meaningful to him/her and believes he/she is meant to do)
 - 3) Currently working in a career (primary, professional work experience) that they believe to be their calling
- **DATA ANALYSIS:** Thematic coding analysis (open/axial codes and main themes)

CONTACT INFO

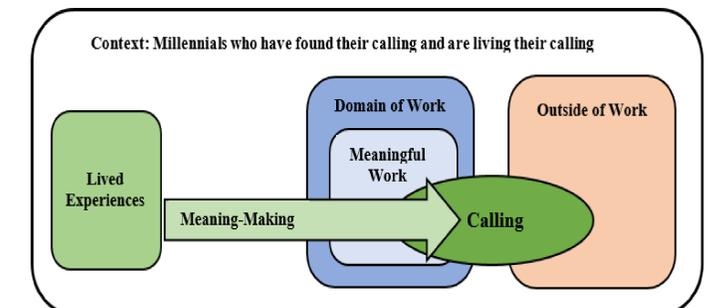
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FINDINGS

- **THEME 1: Conceptualizing a Calling**
 - Calling as a life philosophy, goal, or purpose (slight incongruence between calling and work)
 - Calling as meaningful work
 - Modern/"fluid" perspective on calling (can have multiple callings/multiple roles within calling; calling does not change over time but career may)
 - Calling in connection to sense of self/life (work/life integration vs. work/life balance)
 - Sources of calling (internal drive, external factors, or combination)
- **THEME 2: Lived Experiences in Developing a Calling**
 - Adversity/trying times
 - Professional/educational experiences
 - Receiving messages (e.g., family/peers, mentors, pop culture/media)
 - Un-planned/un-specified opportunities (e.g., “just fell into place”)
- **THEME 3: The Meaning-Making Process**
 - Process of both discovery and development (e.g., balance between passion and pragmatism, trial and error)
 - Reflection and self-discovery (e.g., desire to create change)
 - Trusting/following your instincts
 - Receiving confirmation

CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Participants conceptualized calling as a life philosophy, purpose, or goal, but which often includes career as a means to fulfill one's calling.
- 2) Participants' lived experiences in developing a calling reinforce the themes of adversity/trying times, professional/educational experiences, receiving messages, and un-planned/un-specified opportunities.
- 3) Participants' meaning-making experiences as they pertain to developing a calling are based on an ongoing process of development, reflection, and self-discovery.



IMPLICATIONS

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE:

- Field of career counseling/executive coaching:
 - Practitioners may be better equipped to help their Millennial clients discern/develop their callings through self-reflective practices and assistance with meaning-making.
- Leadership in organizations:
 - Should employ strategies to ensure they are meeting the needs of their changing workforce. Based on the findings, this could include creating opportunities for job roles of interest, allowing employees to learn/engage in multiple roles of different interests, and ensuring they allow for an adequate work/life balance.
 - Can invest in more learning/development programs, with a focus on adult learning and reflective practices, in hopes of developing employees personally and professionally.
 - Can provide more mentorship programs to promote (social) learning and reflection. Findings showed Millennials benefited from their relationships with mentors, as they were critical in development of calling.
- Other Millennials:
 - Those who are still searching for their callings may gather insights from findings and adopt existing strategies to help develop their own callings (such as focusing on their personal and professional development/ learning more about themselves and what they want through reflection and self-discovery).

FUTURE RESEARCH

A continuation of this study to explore the present experiences of Millennials living their callings and take a deeper dive into understanding their conceptualization of calling. Specifically, to explore the finding that there may be a slight incongruence between calling and work and verify if this is true of the larger Millennial population. Questions such as “What do callings mean to Millennials?” and “How are callings manifested in the lives of Millennials?” should be further addressed. This could provide implications for the way we approach calling research and how organizations can better adapt to the new conceptualizations to help employees develop their calling.