

Multiple Meanings of Calling

Next Steps for Studying
an Evolving Construct

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Q: What is a calling?

A: Depends on who you ask.

- A transcendent summons toward purposeful work that serves other-oriented ends?¹
- A consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain?²
- A higher-order, self-set career goal that generates meaning?³
- A course of action in pursuit of pro-social intentions converging on person's sense of what she wants to do, should do, and actually does.⁴
- etc.

¹Dik & Duffy, 2009; ²Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; ³Praskova, Creed & Hood, 2014; ⁴Elangovan, Pinder & McLean, 2015

Where does that leave us?

Research Strategy 1: Top-Down Approach

- Articulate a clear definition of the construct (and make a case for why it's a good one).
- Develop and validate a scale to measure it.
- Examine antecedents, correlates, and consequences of the scores on the scale.

PROS: Standardized; efficient; easily replicated; can examine group differences easily

CONS: Doesn't directly study participants' definitions; only their adherence to researchers' definitions.

Research Strategy 2: Bottom-Up Approach

- Qualitative research: Coding of interviews or open-ended responses that directly assess how people understand “calling”
 - e.g., grounded theory, EQDA, CQR

PROS: Allows participants to “speak for themselves;” “thick description;” more carefully accounts for context

CONS: Cannot generalize from a sample to a population in a traditional sense; not useful for testing theory

e.g., Duffy et al., 2012; French & Domene, 2011; McKenna et al., in press; Oates, Hall & Anderson, 2005; Sellers, Thompson, Batts & Ostman, 2005; Zhang, Dik, Wei & Zhang, 2015.

Option 3: Hybrid or Mixed Approaches

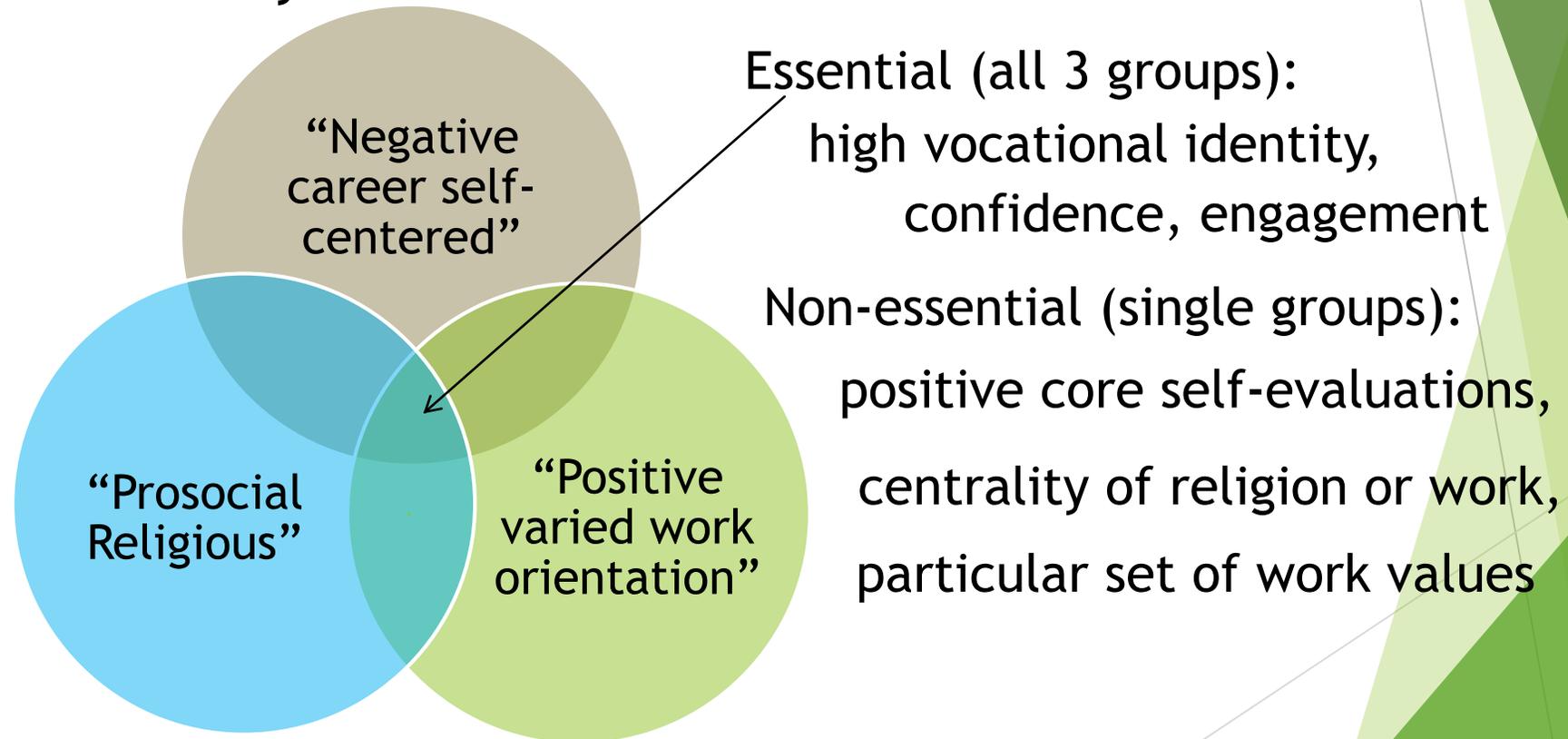
- Using qualitative results to inform scale development¹
- Using brief scales that permit participants to appeal to their own definitions of calling²
- Combining ideographic with nomothetic methods of assessing a construct³
- etc.

¹Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Hagmaier & Amabile, 2012; ²Brief Calling Scale; Dik et al, 2012; ³Career Development Strivings Scale; Dik, Sargent & Steger, 2009

Research Strategy 4: A Typological Approach

Hirschi (2011):

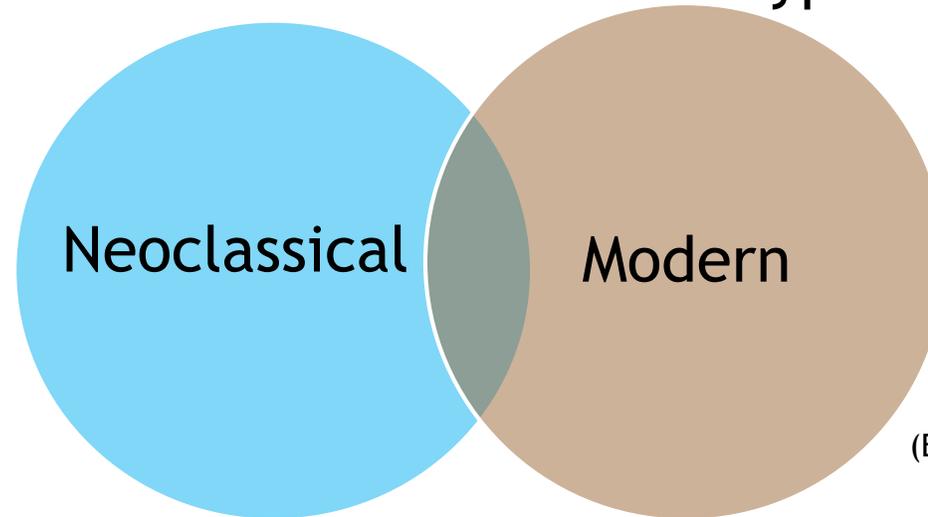
- Cluster analysis with 407 German students



Research Strategy 4: A Typological Approach

An alternative view: There are different types of callings

e.g.,



(Bunderson &
Thompson, 2009)

Taxometric Analysis (Meehl, 1992; Ruscio, Haslam & Ruscio, 2006)

- Detects whether data are “taxonic” (i.e., categorical) or dimensional.
- If taxonic, what are the taxa?
 - Neoclassical vs. modern? Sacred vs. secular? Eudaimonic vs. Hedonic? Prosocial vs. self-focused?

So What?

If calling is taxonic, future research should:

- Acknowledge the plurality embedded in the concept
- Study each type of calling on its own terms
 - Use purposive sampling
 - Develop unique theoretical models for each

If calling is dimensional rather than taxonic, future research should:

- Identify the essential vs. non-essential dimensions (maybe Hirshi was right!)

In either case, questions remain about what outcomes different understandings of calling best predict, and how they may develop.

In the meantime....

1. Articulate your definition of calling clearly and early.
2. Describe the conceptual context in introduction sections.
3. Describe samples in as much relevant detail as possible (incl. religiousness, occupational titles, career stage, etc.).
4. Avoid penalizing researchers who use a different (but reasonable) conceptualization than that favored by a reviewer.
5. Test the measurement model in every study.
6. Don't try to create a new, "consensus" definition.

THANK YOU!

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