

# Calling. Making the World a Better Place from Within Multinational Corporations

**Omar Rodríguez, Belén Mesurado &  
Ricardo F. Crespo**

## Current Psychology

A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on  
Diverse Psychological Issues

ISSN 1046-1310

Curr Psychol

DOI 10.1007/s12144-017-9658-9



**Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your article, please use the accepted manuscript version for posting on your own website. You may further deposit the accepted manuscript version in any repository, provided it is only made publicly available 12 months after official publication or later and provided acknowledgement is given to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Springer's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The final publication is available at [link.springer.com](http://link.springer.com)".**

# Calling. Making the World a Better Place from Within Multinational Corporations

Omar Rodríguez<sup>1</sup> · Belén Mesurado<sup>2</sup> · Ricardo F. Crespo<sup>1,2</sup>

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2017

**Abstract** Nobody seems to doubt that working toward a calling is much more rewarding than just working for financial rewards or promotions. Nevertheless, although it is acknowledged that people can experience callings in any activity, up to now, there are few studies on this construct in the context of commercial companies. In this paper we focus on studying calling orientation in employees of a multinational company. We test three hypotheses: 1) the different ways of relating to work (as a job, a career or a calling) is also reported among corporate employees; 2) there are differences in the levels of flow at work in accordance with the different ways that employees relate to their work; and 3) there are differences in the levels of perception that employees have of the social relevance of their work in accordance with the way in which they relate to their work. In order to verify these hypotheses we applied three instruments to a sample of employees of the Latin America brand (279 Argentinean and 193 Ecuadorian employees) of a multinational corporation: The University of Pennsylvania Work Life Questionnaire, the Work Related Flow Inventory and a scale of Social Work Relevance Perception. The results suggest that callings are identifiable among corporate enterprise

employees and that employees with a calling orientation have higher levels of flow at work and a greater perception of the social relevance of their work than those employees who just relate to their work as jobs or careers.

**Keywords** Calling · Flow at work · Social relevance · Meaning of work · Company's mission

## Introduction

There is growing interest in the idea of work as being a truly significant experience. This has led a number of scholars to uncover an ancient notion with spiritual roots: a calling. Bunderson and Thompson (2009) begin their article on the work of zookeepers as follows: "To better understand the nature and characteristics of deeply meaningful work, a small but growing number of management scholars have looked to the notion of work as a personal calling" (Bunderson and Thompson 2009, p. 3). In effect, meaningfulness is a core aspect of a calling (Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Empirical research that has emerged on callings "suggests that when work provides individuals with opportunities to enact their callings, people tend to see their work as more meaningful because it is experienced as personally fulfilling and having worldly impact" (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 99). Besides, it is acknowledged that organizations play an important role in the way in which employees relate to their work (Rosso et al. 2010).

Research on *calling* reached its tipping point in 2007 (Dik and Duffy 2012). Since then, academic literature on the topic has flourished, expanding into sub-disciplines such as management and organizational behavior (Duffy and Dik 2013). However, this interest is not entirely new. Important precedents have developed in the literature in recent decades.

✉ Omar Rodríguez  
orb500@gmail.com

Belén Mesurado  
mesuradob@gmail.com; bmesurado@conicet.gov.ar

Ricardo F. Crespo  
rcrespo@iae.edu.ar

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Austral, Mariano Acosta s/n y Ruta Nacional 8 (B1629WWA), Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina

<sup>2</sup> National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), Universidad Austral, Tte. Gral. Juan D. Perón, 2158 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Though this abundant literature seems to coincide with the construct of calling as a means of imbuing work and life with meaning, there remains little consensus on how to define this experience (Duffy and Dik 2013). For some, a calling is experienced as a call originating from outside of oneself (Dik and Duffy 2009). For others, it can also be derived from an internal inclination (Hirschi 2011). Many link it solely to professional work, while for others it is a construct applicable to any area of life (Elangovan et al. 2010). A discussion has also emerged about whether this experience is unique to those who see themselves as religious or can also occur among those who do not adhere to specific beliefs (cf. Hunter et al. 2010; Duffy 2006).

Nonetheless, beyond the numerous differences and varied emphases present in the abundant literature published in recent years, several important agreements have been reached around the definition of callings. We agree with Wrzesniewski that the two most salient characteristics of a calling in modern research revolve around a calling as springing from inner enjoyment and as a way of contributing to a greater good (Wrzesniewski et al. 2009). The same author refers to these two dimensions in other words by defining people who work out of a calling as those who “love their work and think that it contributes to making the world a better place” (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997, p. 22). Thus, the calling construct can be defined as a passion for an activity that is perceived as being socially relevant.

As Cardador suggests, “despite a growing interest in callings in the academic and popular press, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the workplace implications of callings” (Cardador et al. 2011, p. 1). In addition, although it is acknowledged that people can experience callings in any activity (Dik and Duffy 2009; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997), up to now, most studies on this construct have been centered on jobs or organizations with an explicit social focus (teachers, health workers, public sector employees, zookeepers, etc.). For this reason, we will focus on studying the callings of employees at a multinational company. We have sought to study the conceptualization of callings among employees of multinational corporations—by whom a significant part of workers throughout the world are employed—and where work can seem more oriented towards profitability rather than providing a relevant service to society. We chose one of the largest technology companies in the world that represents the most emblematic context of modern work. We believe that this study can provide some clues as to what organizations can do to facilitate the calling experience among their employees.

### Calling and Optimal Experience

The experience of a calling appears to be described as a stronger passion for the activity of performing job tasks (Wrzesniewski and Tosti 2006). Dobrow (2004) speaks of a sense of passion, or deep enjoyment and satisfaction from

engaging in one's work. For Seligman (2002) a calling is linked to the passion for a gratifying activity. Bellah (1989) posit that when work is lived as a calling, the activity has intrinsic meaning and value, instead of merely being tied to a resulting product or benefit. Certainly this would indicate that a primary requirement for experiencing a calling is that the work activity be intrinsically motivating, or in other words, that the person feel moved to work because the activity in itself is interesting, attractive and somehow satisfying (Amabile et al. 1994). A calling could thus be linked to another construct postulated by positive psychology, which is optimal experience or flow (Duffy et al. 2011). Flow is defined as an “intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity. Attention is fully invested in the task at hand, and the person functions at his or her fullest capacity” (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 2005, p. 600). On the other hand, Bakker's (2008) definition, pertaining to the work context, describes work at flow as “a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation” (2008, p. 401). The flow construct is considered to be the prototype of intrinsically motivated behavior (Deci and Ryan 2000), and although it refers to a fluctuating mental state rather than to a stable experience like a calling (Elangovan et al. 2010), it describes what is generally experienced during an activity that one is passionate about. Certainly, one has an intrinsic state of motivation because the activity produces such a satisfying mental state that the person undertakes the activity without consideration for the external reward and despite the high cost of energies invested in the task or efforts required to reach the goal (Mesurado 2010). Although it seems theoretically logical for calling to be associated with the experience of flow at work, until now, this relationship has largely been unexplored at an empirical level. If the existence of a relationship between calling and flow at work can be proved, it would demonstrate that tasks undertaken out of a sense of calling are not solely instrumental to a result, even if this result were to change the world. Work would thus not be defined solely as a duty to society or an obligation of one's own conscience (Bunderson and Thompson 2009), but rather, work activities would be experienced as intrinsically rewarding (Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas 2011).

### Calling and the Perceived Social Relevance of Work

The literature on work orientation is mostly based on the distinction between job, career and calling, as proposed by Robert Bellah in his book *Habits of the Heart*. For Bellah, the way in which people understand themselves underlies these different notions of work. When understood as a ‘job’, work is a way to earn money and get by. This reflects a ‘self’ that is defined by success and economic security. When

understood as a ‘professional career’, work marks personal advancement throughout life, by things such as success and promotions at work. In this case, the ‘self’ is defined by a broader type of success that includes social status and prestige, and a sense of growth in power and skill, which convert work into a source of self-esteem. More importantly, when understood as a ‘calling’, a person’s work is morally inseparable from their life. It is an activity that has meaning and value in itself and goes beyond the product or profit that result from it. Bellah emphasizes that a person’s calling links them with their co-workers and the general community because they see their work as a contribution to the common good. In this sense, Bellah maintains that a distinctive motivation of a calling is ‘to make the world a better place’ (Bellah 1989, p. 102). This expression was coined to describe this construct in the literature that characterizes it. “Having a calling orientation was linked to several self-reported benefits, including higher life, health, and job satisfaction, and lower absenteeism than job- and career-oriented respondents” (Berg et al. 2010, p. 974).

Amy Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) were the first to confirm that the distinction proposed by Bellah between job, career and calling could be of interest and potentially applied in organizational psychology. Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) posit that for work activities lived as an end in themselves to be understood as callings, they must also be perceived as socially valuable. The authors of the *Work-Life Questionnaire* use the expression ‘to make the world a better place’ to characterize a *calling* (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). The expression is used textually by various authors in relation to this construct: Grant (2007), Bunderson and Thompson (2009), (Elangovan et al. 2010). This consensus allows us to affirm that perceiving one’s work as socially relevant is a necessary condition for this work to become a calling. Those who work out of a calling to change the world and do not see this impact become frustrated. However, as Dik and Duffy state, “some people help others directly and tangibly—teachers, social workers, and physicians, for example. Others do so indirectly, but not insignificantly” (Dik and Duffy 2012, p. 13). Indeed, teachers directly experience the impact of their classes by seeing their students learn. But what happens, for example, to those individuals who work in a multinational corporation in marketing or finance roles? In these cases, the perception of the social relevance of their work is mediated by an organization. The organization itself is what is socially relevant, and thus, is what transforms the work of each employee into something valuable for society, through its integration into the company’s mission.

## This Study

Although academic interest in callings has built steadily in recent years, the different ways of relating to work (as a job,

a career or a calling) have been scarcely analyzed in the context of commercial firms. Moreover, there are no empirical studies that show if different ways of relating to work are associated with different aspects of flow at work and the perception that employees have of the social relevance of their work. Consequently, based on previous literature, we hypothesize that:

- 1) Different ways of relating to work, whether as a job, a career or a calling –as initially tested on types of work with a strong connotation of service– is also reported among corporate employees;
- 2) There are differences in the levels of flow at work (absorption, enjoyment and motivation) in accordance with the different ways that employees relate to their work;
- 3) There are differences in the levels of perception that employees have of the social relevance of their work in accordance with the way in which they relate to work.

Given that there are no studies in Latin America about the different ways of relating to work, flow at work and the levels of perception that employees have of the social relevance of their work, our hypotheses will be tested there. We explored these hypotheses in the offices of a multinational corporation in two Latin American countries: Argentina and Ecuador. We have chosen these two countries because Argentina and Ecuador share a few common cultural characteristics. These two countries are similar to each other due to their predominantly European heritage, as they share the same language (Spanish) and the Catholic culture. Consequently, we expected to find similar results for both locations.

## Method

### Procedures and Participants

Participants were recruited from a multinational broadband and telecommunications provider with operations in Europe, Asia, and North, Central and South America. The multinational telecommunications company has been operating in Argentina since 1990 and in Ecuador since 2004, and has approximately 15,000 employees in Argentina and 1300 in Ecuador. The selection of participants took place after permission was obtained from the executive management, managers, and human resources departments, while employee-employer committees were informed about the study during management meetings. After that, all employees received an email with an invitation to participate in the study as well as a link to access a questionnaire. The employees were asked to fill out the questionnaire in private. Participation was voluntary and the confidentiality of the answers was guaranteed.

### The Argentinean Sample

Participants consisted of 201 men and 78 women, ranging from ages 22 to 61 years old ( $M = 38.70$  years;  $SD = 8.88$ ), and from Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. In terms of marital status, 27% were single, 68.5% were married or were a couple and 5% were divorced or widowed. Their roles in the company included 35% workers or operators, 36% middle management with employees working under them and 29% directors.

### The Ecuadorian Sample

The group of Ecuadorian participants included 100 men and 93 women ranging from ages 23 to 51 years old ( $M = 33.68$  years;  $SD = 6.37$ ), and from Quito, the capital of Ecuador. In relation to their marital status, 36% were single, 55.5% were married or were a couple and 8.5% were divorced or widowed. In terms of their roles in the company, 30% were workers or operators, 41% held a middle-management role with employees working under them, and 29% were directors.

### Statistical Procedure

Descriptive analyses of the variables under study were carried out as follows: frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations –according to the type of variable. To test the research hypothesis, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were performed in order to study differences in the levels of *flow* in different employee groups and employees' perceptions of the social relevance of their work.

### Instruments

#### University of Pennsylvania Work-Life Questionnaire

The *University of Pennsylvania Work-Life Questionnaire* (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997) was used to evaluate the type of relationship that employees reported having with their work, according to the distinction between job, career and calling proposed by Bellah. The evaluation consisted of presenting participants with three paragraphs, which required that a respondent choose whether they identified with either Mr. A (job orientation), Mr. B (career orientation) or Mr. C (calling orientation), on the basis of a four-point scale. This scale was scored from 3 to 0, where 3 corresponded to “very much like me” and 0 corresponded to “not like me at all”.

A psychologist, who is also a qualified professional English–Spanish translator and has expertise in employing

the terminology of the subjects covered by the instruments, translated the Scale. The translator is fluent in English, and is a native Spanish speaker. We gave instructions to her in the approach to translating, emphasizing conceptual rather than literal translations, as well as the need to use natural and appropriate language for the participants. During the second stage, the original translator, a psychologist, as well as an expert with experience in instrument development and translation revised the first translation for semantic and syntactic equivalence. Lastly, an independent translator, who is a native speaker of English, and has expertise in questionnaire design for the field of psychology, translated the scales back into English. As in the initial translation, emphasis on the back-translation was on conceptual and cultural equivalence and not linguistic equivalence. The two translators revised the differences until satisfactory versions were reached.

#### The Work-Related Flow Inventory (WOLF)

The *Work-Related Flow Inventory* (WOLF) was used to evaluate *flow* experience at work (Bakker 2008). The scale measures three dimensions of *flow*, namely: absorption (4 items, for example, “When I am working, I don't think of anything else”); work enjoyment (4 items, for example, “I feel happy while I'm working”) and intrinsic motivation at work (5 items, for example, “I would do this job even if I was paid less”). The participants are asked to indicate how often they experience these elements of *flow* on a 7-point scale (1 = never and 7 = always). *Flow* refers to short periods of time, for example, in the past few days or weeks. We used the same translation procedure described for the University of Pennsylvania Work-Life Questionnaire.

The total WOLF scale had an internal consistency of .92 for the Argentinean sample and .85 for the Ecuadorian sample and the three subscales had Cronbach's estimates of .82 and .70 (absorption), .94 and .90 (work enjoyment), and finally .72 and .76 (intrinsic work motivation), respectively for each country.

#### Social Relevance of Work Perception Scale (PRS)

Rodriguez' Social Relevance of Work Perception Scale (2015) was used. It is composed of a group of six items that evaluate the construct in a unidimensional manner. The scale includes six statements with four possible answers scored from 0 to 3 points (0 = nothing and 3 = a lot). One of the items on the scale was, for example, “I feel useful and contribute value to society when I do my work in my company”. The study received a Cronbach's Alpha of .86 for the Ecuadorian sample and .89 for the Argentinean sample.

**Results**

**The Distinction Between Job, Career and Calling in a Corporate Enterprise**

The primary hypothesis of this study was, as stated earlier, to confirm whether the corporate world –in the context of a multinational company– manifests distinctions between job, career and calling, which resemble those identified by Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) among public sector employees and non-academic staff in a university setting. To go about doing this, participants were categorized using the methodology proposed by these authors in their research: taking only the results of those participants who, having assigned a score to the three work orientations, gave only one of them a highest identification rank. 49 Ecuadorian employees and 66 Argentinean employees gave the highest rank to two out of three orientations, and taking this criterion into account were therefore excluded from the analysis because the study sought to focus only on those employees that had a clear identification with only one of the three orientations.

As Table 1 illustrates, in the case of Ecuador, only 6 employees or 4.14% of the sample reported a job orientation; 75 employees reported a career orientation (51.72%); and 64 employees reported a calling orientation, making up 44.14% of the Ecuadorian sample. In the case of Argentinean employees, as Table 2 illustrates, 34 employees identified with a job orientation (12%), while 114 reported a higher identification with a career orientation (41%), while 65 were more inclined towards a calling orientation (23%).

As observed in Tables 1 and 2, the majority of participants reported a defined orientation towards one of the three options. The participants who identified themselves with a job orientation, selecting paragraph 1 (Mr. A), averaged 2.17 in Ecuador and 2.21 in Argentina. Those who identified with a career orientation obtained an average score of 2.72 in Ecuador and 2.47 in Argentina selecting paragraph 2 (Mr. B), and finally those who reported working out of a calling scored an average of 2.62 in Ecuador and 2.40 in Argentina selecting paragraph 3 (Mr. C). On the contrary, however, the average values for the other paragraphs were low –between .16 and 1.31 in the Ecuadorian sample and between .29 and .87 in the Argentinean sample.

**Table 1** Means and Standard Deviations of Work Orientation of Ecuadorian Employees

	Job (n = 6)	Career (n = 75)	Calling (n = 64)
Job	<b>2.17</b> (0.75)	0.47 (0.70)	0.16 (0.37)
Career	1.00 (0.89)	<b>2.72</b> (0.51)	0.92 (0.74)
Calling	0.67 (0.82)	1.31 (0.77)	<b>2.62</b> (0.52)

Standard deviations appear in parentheses. The bold entries emphasize the means that each orientation obtained between those who opted for it

**Table 2** Means and Standard Deviations of Work Orientation of Argentinean Employees

	Job (n = 34)	Career (n = 114)	Calling (n = 65)
Job	<b>2.21</b> (0.47)	0.68 (0.57)	0.29 (0.49)
Career	0.74 (0.62)	<b>2.47</b> (0.55)	0.77 (0.68)
Calling	0.29 (0.46)	0.87 (0.68)	<b>2.40</b> (0.58)

Standard deviations appear in parentheses. The bold entries emphasize the means that each orientation obtained between those who opted for it

Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the variables of flow and social relevance of work perception, of respondents who view work as a job, a career or a calling in the Argentinean and Ecuadorian samples.

**The Relationship between the Dimensions of FLOW and the Three Types of Work Orientations**

The second hypothesis of our work was that there are differences in the levels of flow at work (absorption, enjoyment and motivation) according to employees' given work orientations. This hypothesis was tested using two Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA), one for each country, in which each of one of the three dimensions of *flow* (absorption, enjoyment and motivation) was a dependent variable and work orientation (job, career and calling) were independent variables. In the case of Ecuador, the job orientation was not analyzed because less than 30 respondents identified with this orientation.

The results for the Ecuadorian sample show that the model was significant using the Hotelling trace criteria  $F(3, 135) = 5.20, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .10$ . The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in levels of *flow* in all of its dimensions [Absorption =  $F(1, 137) = 7.18, p \leq .01, \eta^2 = .05$ ; Enjoyment =  $F(1, 137) = 6.61, p \leq .01, \eta^2 = .05$ ; Motivation =  $F(1, 137) = 13.99, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .10$ ], when referring to work as a career or a calling. These results indicate that employees who relate to their work as a calling scored higher on the three dimensions of *flow* (absorption, enjoyment and motivation) than those who see work as a career.

The results for the Argentinean sample also showed that the model was significant using the Hotelling trace criterion  $F(6, 414) = 16.75, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .20$ . The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the three dimensions of *flow* [Absorption =  $F(2, 210) = 24.43, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .19$ ; Enjoyment =  $F(2, 210) = 41.92, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .29$ ; Motivation =  $F(2, 210) = 37.52, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .26$ ] for employees who relate to their work as a job, career or calling. *Post hoc* Bonferroni tests indicated that those who relate to work as a calling have higher levels of absorption than those who relate to their work as a job (Bonferroni =  $6.35, p \leq .001$ ) or as a career (Bonferroni =  $2.38, p \leq .001$ ). Employees who relate

**Table 3** Means and Standard Deviations of *Flow* and Perceived Social Relevance of Work in Reference to the Three Orientations Proposed by the WLQ

	Ecuador			Argentina		
	Job ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Career ( <i>n</i> = 75)	Calling ( <i>n</i> = 64)	Job ( <i>n</i> = 34)	Career ( <i>n</i> = 114)	Calling ( <i>n</i> = 65)
Flow						
Absorption	22.50 (4.27)	22.49 (3.72)	23.95 (2.45)	15.53 −4.94	19.50 (4.24)	21.88 (4.00)
Enjoyment	23.50 (3.33)	24.84 (3.47)	26.17 (2.45)	14.65 (5.68)	21.01 (4.58)	23.58 (4.07)
Motivation	23.67 (5.85)	25.08 (4.83)	27.94 (4.04)	14.79 (5.15)	20.31 (5.20)	23.98 (5.83)
Perceived Social Relevance	15.17 (1.83)	16 (2.40)	17.08 (2.48)	8.44 (4.30)	12 (4.11)	15.46 (2.69)

Standard deviations appear in parentheses

to their work as a career also have higher levels of absorption than those who view it as a job (Bonferroni = 3.97,  $p \leq .001$ ).

The same is observed for enjoyment and motivation: employees who see their work as a calling have higher levels of enjoyment and motivation than those who see it as a job (enjoyment Bonferroni = 8.94,  $p \leq .001$ ; motivation Bonferroni = 9.19,  $p \leq .001$ ) or as a career (enjoyment Bonferroni = 2.58,  $p \leq .001$ ; motivation Bonferroni = 3.67,  $p \leq .001$ ). Also, those who have a career orientation have higher levels of enjoyment and motivation at work than those with a job orientation (enjoyment Bonferroni = 6.36,  $p \leq .001$ ; motivation Bonferroni = 5.52,  $p \leq .001$ ).

### The Relationship between the Perceived Social Relevance of Work and the Three Types of Work Orientation

The third hypothesis of our work was that there are differences in the levels of perception that employees have of the social relevance of their work in accordance with the way in which they relate to their work. In order to undertake this study, One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were performed for each sample, including the Perceived Social Relevance of one's work as a dependent variable and employees' work orientation (job, career or calling) as an independent variable. In the case of the Ecuadorian sample, the employees with a job orientation could not be included given that there were only 6 of them, and a minimum of 30 subjects per group are required to conduct an ANOVA. In the Ecuadorian sample, the results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the levels of Perceived Social Relevance between employees with a career orientation and those with a calling orientation [ $F(1, 137) = 6.73, p \leq .01, \eta^2 = .05$ ]. This would indicate that employees who see their work as a calling also have higher levels of social relevance of work perception than those who relate to work as a career.

In the case of the Argentinean sample, the results also indicate that there are statistically significant differences in levels of social relevance of work perception according to the type of work orientation [ $F(2, 210) = 40.66, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .28$ ]. The *post hoc* Bonferroni tests indicated that employees who relate to work as a calling have higher levels of Perceived Social Relevance in their work than those with a job orientation (Bonferroni = 7.02;  $p \leq .001$ ) or a career orientation (Bonferroni = 3.46;  $p \leq .001$ ). On the other hand, these same analyses indicate that those who relate to work as a career have a higher level of Perceived Social Relevance of their work than those who relate to their work as a job (Bonferroni = 3.56;  $p \leq .001$ ).

### Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the distinction between job, career and calling is also in force in the corporate world. Of the 473 employees who participated in the study, 358 (76%) preferentially identified with one of these three options. This result is higher than the one obtained with the first validation of this instrument, in which 69% participants had a clear identification with one of these three orientations (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). Therefore, the fact that the identification rate was higher in this study suggests that the distinction between job, career and calling is also valid in the corporate world.

More precisely, we were also interested in providing evidence that the calling construct appears in a sufficiently representative proportion in the corporate world. Through the self-categorization method proposed by the Work-Life Questionnaire (WLQ), our initial hypothesis has been validated. In effect, workers from all ranks (operators, middle-management and directors) of the corporate ladder were included in the study, and the percentage of employees who reported that they work out of a calling was high. As we have seen, 129 out of the 473 participants (64 in Ecuador and 65 in



Argentina) –representing 27% of the sample– identified with work as a calling. This result is encouraging because it suggests that the calling orientation is not exclusively experienced by jobs or organizations with an explicit social focus (teachers, health workers, etc.).

This research also confirms our initial hypotheses that there is a close relationship between calling and *flow*. Although there were theoretical justifications that presupposed a relationship between calling and flow, as far as we know, this is the first study that has empirically demonstrated this relationship. We can affirm that those individuals who work out of a calling develop a much stronger link with the activities that they undertake than those individuals who work for money or out of a desire for professional development. Specifically, individuals who work out of a calling report higher levels of absorption, enjoyment and motivation than those who do so out of the desire for professional development, and even more so for those who work for money. For Csikszentmihalyi, flow is associated with autotelic activities (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) that are lived as an end in themselves and that people do out of mere satisfaction. For people who work out of a calling, the activity in itself is gratifying. Everything sought by doing the activity is part of the activity itself. This statement has important theoretical implications. A person can flow in and out of different types of activities, which means that they can find their calling in different tasks. Csikszentmihalyi describes the necessary conditions for an activity to produce a flow experience: balance between challenge and skill, immediate feedback and clear goals. These three conditions offer an attractive perception of competence (Salanova et al. 2006). Consequently, we conclude that this perception of competence is closely associated with the experience of calling.

The third hypothesis of our research was to verify whether there is a relationship between the type of work orientation and workers' Perceived Social Relevance of what they do in a company. The results suggest that those who identify with a calling orientation report a higher Perceived Social Relevance of their work. As anticipated, this is particularly important for studying the experience of callings in large organizations where the social impact of one's work is much less clear. As mentioned above, some professions or activities may be more easily associated with a calling because their social impact is one with the activity. For some authors, calling is a construct that is fundamentally particular to certain activities (Estola et al. 2003). As already established, for a teacher, the activity of teaching is identified with the students' learning. This does not necessarily happen in the case of corporate employees.

This study shows that individuals who identify with a calling orientation in multinational corporations also report a higher Perceived Social Relevance of their work than those who work out of a desire for professional development (in both countries) and who work for money (in Argentina). Consequently, it is probable that if the company is socially valuable and communicates this value, its employees will

perceive the work they undertake as valuable to society. Working for a company can thus be gratifying in itself because it implies participation in something that is socially relevant. We conclude that the work that employees perform in a company can be lived as a calling, but they must perceive their work in the organization to be socially relevant and feel integrated with this mission (see Dik and Duffy 2012).

### Limitations and Possible Future Research

This study was based on cross-sectional data, consequently, future research should be undertaken to analyze this hypothesis through a longitudinal study because, for example, the calling experience could change through the different stages of an employee's lifespan. Furthermore, this research used self-reporting to evaluate the variables included in the study. It would thus be of interest for future studies to complement this work with other evaluation methods. Another limitation of our study was the size of the samples. A larger sample is necessary to be able to study the variations in different ways of relating to work among employees with different types of jobs, years of experience in the company, in the position, etc. Bigger samples as well as studies in other Latin American and Anglo-Saxon countries and cultures may be of benefit to future research.

This study sets a path for deepening the conceptualization of the calling experience in the corporate world. Along with the numerous contemporary studies that promote ways for encouraging intrinsic work motivation, the notion of calling invites us to experience work within the corporate world as a socially relevant activity. In this sense, it is worthwhile studying how companies can better define and measure how they contribute to making the world a better place and how they can create awareness among their employees of this impact.

### Conclusions

Despite the ancient roots of the notion of calling and the outstanding interest that it has recently triggered, comparatively less empirical research has examined this construct. This may be due to the lack of convergence around exactly what a calling is, as well as the lack of a common measurement instrument (Rosso et al. 2010). Studies on the topic of calling in big commercial firms are scarcer. We consider that the strong relationship we have found between calling, flow and the perception of the social relevance of work, helps to better understand this construct and has relevant personal and organizational implications. In light of the results obtained, it can be suggested that a calling orientation is associated with two kinds of perceptions: of competence which is a perception of the flow construct and of relevance that we have measured with social relevance of work perception scale. We think that

these two perceptions enable the perceptions of meaningfulness in work which is a characteristic of a calling orientation (Rosso et al. 2010). The organizations that want to favour a calling orientation should ensure that their employees have good perceptions of their performance and of the impact of their work inside and outside of the organization. We think that these results motivate interesting threads of research in the field of organizational behaviour.

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Funding** This study was funded by Universidad Austral (grant number 2015-02).

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was also obtained from all individual participants included in the research. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

**Conflict of Interest** Omar Rodríguez declares that he has no conflict of interest. Belén Mesurado declares that she has no conflict of interest. Ricardo F. Crespo declares that he has no conflict of interest.

### References

- Amabile, T. M., Hill, K. G., Hennessey, B. A., & Tighe, E. M. (1994). The Work Preference Inventory: assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *66*(5), 950–967.
- Bakker, A. B. (2008). The work-related flow inventory: Construction and initial validation of the WOLF. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *72*(3), 400–414. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2007.11.007.
- Bellah, R. N. (1989). *Hábitos del corazón [Habits of the Heart]*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Berg, J. M., Grant, A. M., Johnson, V. (2010). When callings are calling: crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings. *Organization Science*, *21*(5), 973–994.
- Bunderson, J. S., & Thompson, J. A. (2009). The call of the wild: Zookeepers, callings, and the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(1), 32–57. doi:10.2189/asqu.2009.54.1.32.
- Cardador, M. T., Dane, E., & Pratt, M. G. (2011). Linking calling orientations to organizational attachment via organizational instrumentality. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *79*(2), 367–378. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2011.03.009.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Abuhamdeh, S., & Nakamura, J. (2005). Flow. In A. Elliot (Ed.), *Handbook of competence and motivation* (pp. 598–608). New York: Guilford Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*(4), 227–268. doi: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\_01.
- Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2009). Calling and vocation at work definitions and prospects for research and practice. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *37*(3), 424–450. doi:10.1177/0011000008316430.
- Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). *Make your job a calling: How the psychology of vocation can change your life at work*. Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Dobrow, S. (2004). Extreme subjective career success: a new integrated view of having a calling. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2004, No. 1, pp. B1–B6). Academy of Management. doi: 10.5465/AMBPP.2004.13863838.
- Dobrow, S. R., & Tosti-Kharas, J. (2011). Calling: The development of a scale measure. *Personnel Psychology*, *64*(4), 1001–1049. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.2011.01234.x.
- Duffy, R. D. (2006). Spirituality, religion, and career development: Current status and future directions. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *55*(1), 52–63. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2006.tb00004.x.
- Duffy, R. D., & Dik, B. J. (2013). Research on calling: What have we learned and where are we going? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *83*(3), 428–436. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2013.06.006.
- Duffy, R. D., Dik, B. J., & Steger, M. F. (2011). Calling and work-related outcomes: Career commitment as a mediator. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *78*, 210–218. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2010.09.013.
- Elangovan, A. R., Pinder, C. C., & McLean, M. (2010). Callings and organizational behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *76*(3), 428–440. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2009.10.009.
- Estola, E., Erkkilä, E., & Syrjala, L. (2003). A moral voice of vocation in teachers' narratives. *Teachers & Teaching*, *9*, 239–256. doi:10.1080/13540600309381.
- Grant, A. M. (2007). Relational job design and the motivation to make a prosocial difference. *Academy of Management Review*, *32*(2), 393–417. doi:10.5465/AMR.2007.24351328.
- Hirschi, A. (2011). Callings in career: A typological approach to essential and optional components. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *79*(1), 60–73. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2010.11.002.
- Hunter, I., Dik, B. J., & Banning, J. H. (2010). College students' perceptions of calling in work and life: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *76*(2), 178–186. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2009.10.008.
- Mesurado, B. (2010). La experiencia de Flow o Experiencia Óptima en el ámbito educativo. [The flow experience or optimal experience in educational settings]. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología*, *42*(2), 183–192.
- Rodríguez, O. (2015). Calling. The experience of working as a vocation on Positive Psychology (Doctoral Dissertation). Universidad de Navarra.
- Rosso, B., Dekas, K., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *30*(2010), 91–127. doi:10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.001.
- Salanova, M., Bakker, A. B., & Llorens, S. (2006). Flow at work: evidence for an upward spiral of personal and organizational resources. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *7*(1), 1–22. doi:10.1007/s10902-005-8854-8.
- Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.
- Wrzesniewski, A., & Tosti, J. (2006). Career as a calling. *Encyclopedia of career development*, *1*, 71–75.
- Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *31*, 21–33. doi:10.1006/jrpe.1997.2162.
- Wrzesniewski, A., Dekas, K., & Rosso, B. (2009). Callings. In S. Lopez & A. Beauchamp (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.