Mapping the Conceptual Terrain of Work Calling

K. Arianna Molloy

University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons, and the Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/439

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.
Mapping the Conceptual Terrain of Work Calling

Abstract
Communication researchers have much to gain and contribute by paying sustained attention to the implications, contributions, and consequences of the interpretation and (re)production of work as a calling. While work calling has been theoretically and quantitatively conceptualized in a number of disciplines, it remains lacking in evidence of how the lived experiences and sensemaking discourses of participants serve to (re)construct this concept. Thus, the current study is qualitatively guided by asking, how people from different professional domains communicate about their experiences of work as a calling. To begin, I assess the overarching themes related to work calling in the areas of organizational psychology, sociology, theology, and business. Second, I suggest that interweaving meaningful work, spiritual communication, and organizational rhetoric creates rich academic space for the study of work calling as a communicative concept. Third, using thematic analysis, I identify participant communication about work calling from twenty-nine interviews, informal observations, and artifact analysis. Three dominant themes emerged: (a) definitional markers, (b) inherent interaction, and (c) significant costs. The theme of definitional markers provides a conceptualizing basis for work calling, the theme of inherent interaction relates to the enactment of work calling, and the theme of significant costs describe potential consequences of this approach. From such discourse, work calling is revealed as a complex, constitutive, and contested term, providing promising avenues of research.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Ph.D.

Department
Human Communications

First Advisor
Christina R. Foust, Ph.D.

Second Advisor
Daniel Lair

Third Advisor
Kate Willink

Keywords
Calling, Meaningful work, Organizational communication, Organizational rhetoric, Qualitative, Spiritual communication

Subject Categories
Communication | Critical and Cultural Studies | Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication

Publication Statement
Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

This dissertation is available at Digital Commons @ DU: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/439
MAPPING THE CONCEPTUAL TERRAIN OF WORK CALLING:
EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF MEANINGFUL WORK, SPIRITUAL
COMMUNICATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL RHETORIC

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

K. Arianna Molloy

August 2012

Advisor: Dr. Christina R. Foust
Abstract

Communication researchers have much to gain and contribute by paying sustained attention to the implications, contributions, and consequences of the interpretation and (re)production of work as a calling. While work calling has been theoretically and quantitatively conceptualized in a number of disciplines, it remains lacking in evidence of how the lived experiences and sensemaking discourses of participants serve to (re)construct this concept. Thus, the current study is qualitatively guided by asking, how people from different professional domains communicate about their experiences of work as a calling. To begin, I assess the overarching themes related to work calling in the areas of organizational psychology, sociology, theology, and business. Second, I suggest that interweaving meaningful work, spiritual communication, and organizational rhetoric creates rich academic space for the study of work calling as a communicative concept. Third, using thematic analysis, I identify participant communication about work calling from twenty-nine interviews, informal observations, and artifact analysis. Three dominant themes emerged: (a) definitional markers, (b) inherent interaction, and (c) significant costs. The theme of *definitional markers* provides a conceptualizing basis for work calling, the theme of *inherent interaction* relates to the enactment of work calling, and the theme of *significant costs* describe potential consequences of this approach. From such
discourse, work calling is revealed as a complex, constitutive, and contested term, providing promising avenues of research.

*Keywords:* organizational communication, spiritual communication, meaningful work, calling, organizational rhetoric, qualitative
Acknowledgements

To my dissertation committee, thank you for investing time into my scholarly journey. More specifically, thanks to: Dr. Christina Foust, for your incredible intelligence, generous heart, and the open door you always gave me; Dr. Dan Lair, for enriching my understanding of meaningful work and organizational rhetoric; Dr. Kate Willink, for impacting my approach to methods; Dr. Cynthia McRae, your natural authority and gentleness is a breath of fresh air. To my academic family, which include: Dr. Renee Heath, Dr. Jeff Kerssen-Griep, Dr. William Purcell, Dr. Todd Rendleman, and Professor Debbie Pope, you play a priceless role in my life as rare encouragers, model teachers, integrity-based scholars, and kind-hearted individuals. I hope I can extend the same spirit towards my future students. Additionally, Daniel Foster, your shepherding heart and wonderful intellect is a gift and a legacy. Keeley, your work-ethic and creativity is inspiring. Katie, inviting me to your family dinners helped me remember to breathe. Daniel Strasser, my first friend in the program, I will miss all of those dissertation coffee shop writing sessions. To the participants in this study, it was an honor to engage in discussion with you. To my family and friends your support and prayers were invaluable.

To my parents, Bill and Johanna Molloy, the wisest people I know. Your intelligence is rooted in Love, and therefore is unmatched in my life. Your guidance, generosity, humor, relationship with God, and integrity is an ever-present light in my world. Finally, to my Caller, You are my glory. You lift up my head and help me experience the greatest measure of joy through continuous relationship with You. My mind, heart, soul, and life is Yours. Success would be that I may reflect Your heart so that others will know You and be encouraged.
# Table of Contents

**Chapter One: Introduction** ........................................................................................................... 1
  Organizational Communication and Work Calling ................................................................. 3
  The Spirit of Organizing ......................................................................................................... 6
  Theorizing Calling in Organizational Psychology, Sociology, Theology, and Business ......................... 9

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** .................................................................................................. 22
  Spiritual Communication and Organizations ................................................................. 23
  Meaningful Work ........................................................................................................... 33
  Organizational Rhetoric ................................................................................................... 42
  Calling as a Distinctively Communicative Act .................................................................... 50
  Differentiating between “Just a Job,” Career, and Calling ............................................. 62
  Summary .............................................................................................................................. 67

**Chapter Three: Methods** .......................................................................................................... 69
  Research Question ........................................................................................................... 70
  Qualitative Methods ......................................................................................................... 71
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................ 75
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................... 83
  Summary .............................................................................................................................. 87

**Chapter Four: Definitional Markers and Metaphors** ............................................................. 89
  Definitional Markers .......................................................................................................... 91
    *Overarching Meaningfulness* ......................................................................................... 92
    *Compelling Processes and Reckoning Moments* ......................................................... 97
    *Skill-Set and Passion* .................................................................................................. 105
    *Contributing to Society* ............................................................................................. 110
  Sense-Making Metaphors ................................................................................................. 113
    *Work Calling is a Journey or Epiphany* ...................................................................... 114
    *Work Calling is Material and Organic* ......................................................................... 117
    *Work Calling is Romantic and Committed Love* ....................................................... 120
  Implications and Applications ............................................................................................ 122

**Chapter Five: Interently Interactional** .................................................................................... 131
  Interacting with a Caller ..................................................................................................... 132
    *Charlie and the Guitar* ............................................................................................... 133
    *Laurel and the Banner* ............................................................................................... 134
    *A Caller* ....................................................................................................................... 135
  Interactions with Community ............................................................................................. 144
    *Josh and the Wall* ....................................................................................................... 145
    *Community* .................................................................................................................. 147
  Interactions with Work/Family ............................................................................................ 154
    *Frank and the Pictures* ............................................................................................... 154
“At your core is something special which speaks to your passions and strengths and helps inform your career and your life. This is your calling.”
-Monster.com Advertisement (2011)

Chapter One: Introduction

With bare feet splashing on the shores of a grey English ocean, the camera pans several faces in the small group of runners. Some of whom show a sort of smile and ease, others a fixed perseverance and austere determination. One face however, briefly tilts upward, revealing a momentary expression of joy. This is the face of devout Scottish missionary, Eric Liddell. Nominated for seven Academy Awards and winning four, including Best Picture, Chariots of Fire (1981) recounts a compelling story surrounding the 1924 Summer Olympics (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082158/). Upon hearing the bold mixture of modern electronic sounds, synthesizer, and piano music in the iconic theme song (composed by Vangelis), perhaps the opening scene flashes across your own mind. There are several extraordinary moments in this film, such as when Liddell defends his choice to participate in the Olympics to his sister, a fellow missionary. Liddell feels divinely inspired when he runs declaring, “I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.” Certainly, Liddell ran with admirable skill. What distinguishes him from the crowd, however, is an almost unearthly passion and a connectedness to something other than himself. When he runs, he feels his calling.
In contemporary Western society, with the average person changing jobs approximately 10 times between the age of 18 and 42, many people are no longer merely looking for an occupation (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010). They are looking to feed an intrinsic passion that incorporates their skills with a sense of greater purpose. A rise in work as life and a decrease in communities outside of work all point to a shift in our culture. This shift appears to be a newfound yearning to bring our “whole self” to the workplace (Fry, Kisselburgh, & Butts, 2007). Wall Street Journal and New York Times bestselling author, business analyst, and former White House speechwriter, Daniel Pink (2009) argues that external rewards such as money cannot sustain this internal drive in a chosen profession. Pink focuses on the idea that motivation in the workplace is the product of an individual experiencing autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

People require a sense of freedom and a participatory role in establishing their own working environment. When workers are no longer expected or required to incorporate their abilities, the job can seem overwhelmingly empty. Such emptiness leads to an inefficiency bred from boredom. Yet, when individuals can pursue ongoing learning and expertise in their professions, coupled with a sense of purpose at work, the result is often inspiration, renewed responsibility, and invested ownership. Pink concludes that when people experience autonomy, mastery, and purpose there are actual psychological benefits that result in tangible organizational successes. This positive relationship between intrinsic motivations and organizational outcomes is compelling and has caught the interest of both theorists and practitioners. Organizational psychology scholars view this type of purpose as subjective work success (Helsin, 2005), many communication scholars refer to it as meaningful work (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008), and some
sociologists connect this yearning for work purpose to the blurring of work-life spheres (Bauman, 2000). Another way to understand this type of subjective success or meaningful work is through work as a calling. Monster.com (2011) highlights this dynamic phenomenon of subjective success or meaningful work, pointing individuals to look beyond extrinsic rewards (e.g. pay and prestige) to their core passions and strengths, referenced as a calling.

Organizational Communication and Work Calling

While work calling may or may not overtly occur in everyday interaction, one’s communication in and about organizational life is clearly influenced by one’s approach to work. Within daily interaction the formation of an individual’s knowledge about themselves, others, and the world around them becomes cemented in their minds as reality (Shotter & Gergen, 1997). Not only are our perceptions about work intersubjectively constructed, institutional powers and the media also act as a mouthpiece of trendy truth for a society of consumers. Evidence of work as calling in popular culture includes job search companies such as Monster.com (2011) launching advertisements urging individuals to “find your calling” and best-selling books seeking to reawaken the “intrinsic richness” and “spiritedness” that exists when work is experienced as a calling (e.g. Crawford, 2009). The Oprah Magazine (Winfrey, November, 2010) dedicated an issue to answering the question, “What’s your true calling: An easy-does-it guide to finding (and fulfilling) your life’s purpose.” Additionally, The Today Show, in partnership with AARP, featured people who have found their calling after the age of fifty (Pauley, March, 2010). These examples provide a glimpse of the contemporary attraction to perceptions of work as a calling.
As work calling resonates within individuals, organizations, and society an understanding of what messages exist in communication about work calling is imperative for any field of organizational research, allowing us to transcend routine thinking, and through observation to purposefully increase ways of knowing and judgment. Scholars from multiple disciplines are turning their attention to this concept, most notably in the area of organizational psychology. For example, organizational psychologists have claimed that individuals who perceive of work as a calling report higher levels of life and work-specific well-being and satisfaction, and had the lowest absenteeism compared to people with other work approaches (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Organizational cultures that promote meaningful work demonstrate greater economic successes than those who do not (Duffy, 2006). Yet, while there is some evidence of research about work calling, there remains a significant gap in understanding how people actually talk about work calling and its influence in their lives.

In the current study, I suggest that work calling is particularly significant for the field of communication, in both theory (principles about a particular phenomenon) and praxis (application/enactment of a theory), namely because it is fundamentally a communicative and sensemaking act. Work calling as a sensemaking act involves a dynamic relationship between calling and the individual, how that individual responds to the call, and the ways in which it is communicated to others. Work calling is not merely a way of thinking, it is a way of being and becoming, which is demonstrated in communication.

I argue that work calling is a communicative phenomenon and that the communication discipline has recently created space for the concept to be acknowledged
as such. Conceptualizations of work calling are inclusive of both secular and spiritual references. While work calling can be generated through a spiritual framework (Scott, 2007), recognizing a spiritual component is not necessary to feel a sense of work calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Work calling can also be generated through feelings of being internally compelled by a search for meaning and purpose. Thus, through the inclusion of both of these two reference points, there is a connection to meaningful work and spiritual communication. Communication research about meaningful work (Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008) and spirituality (McGuire, 2010) in the workplace are just beginning to receive notable attention. A few of these studies suggest that future research should include an organizational understanding of calling (Cheney et al., 2008; Scott, 2007). Additionally academic literature (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010; Rodriguez, 2001) suggests that communication research and readership about these topics are growing. This dialogue is also evident in academic journals with scholarly forums on spirituality in the workplace (Communication Studies, 2006, 2007) and meaningful work (Management Communication Quarterly, 2008) which serve to connect subjective organizational experiences to meaningful work and spiritual communication.

The power to name an experience is significant in that the act of naming brings clarity to what was once opaque, empowering the perceiver and the perceived. For example, Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvick, and Alberts (2006) combine theory and praxis to study the naming of what was once considered an intangible work dynamic, workplace bullying. By doing so, they legitimize the experience and the consequences of the act, not only for the organizational member, but also for the organization as a whole. Their findings suggest direct cost to workplace bullying as including, “increased disability,
workers compensation claims, increased medical costs”, with indirect costs being “low-quality work, reduced productivity, high staff turnover, increased absenteeism, and deteriorated customer relationships and public image” (p. 153). Understanding work calling as directly related to communication involves a similar productive outcome. Studying work calling can bring to light actual discursive behaviors previously invisible, enabling analysis of the influences of such perceptions that result in concrete, tangible effects. We can then examine and critically reflect how work calling is talked about, what messages are imbedded in such talk, in what ways workers are constrained and enabled by such a perspective, and how organizational messages constrain or enable individuals with this work approach.

**The Spirit of Organizing**

From an organizational communication perspective, I suggest that work calling interconnects with meaningful work, spiritual communication, and organizational rhetoric. Our search for meaning is connected to our perceptions of work. While there is significant overlap between spiritual communication and meaningful work, the feelings of purpose found in meaningful work do not require a faith commitment or inclusion of the spiritual. However, for individuals who see spirituality as a core dimension of humanity, this can play a major role in the way they communicate about the meaning of work. Additionally, the rhetoric of work calling includes both bright and dark dynamics, embedded in particular persuasive messages. For example, communication about work as a calling can motivate or manipulate, it can satisfy or lead to burnout. With the knowledge that work plays a significant role in the construction of self comes the need to
recognize what aspects of work influence the worker. One such influence is the spiritual nature of human beings.

In an analysis on workplace spirituality and organizational performance, companies promoting a high level of spirituality had a greater number of employees who believed their work made a difference (Jurkiewicz & Gaicalone, 2004). As a result, these employees communicated a high level of perseverance in meeting the goals of the organization “overcoming obstacles” (p. 135), which positively affected the quality of their work. This connection between spirituality and the workplace is significant to the field of organizational communication, particularly when “organizations are beginning to recognize and analyze the distinct costs associated with stress, burnout, and depression at work” (Tracey et al., 2006). While some evidence of scholarly inquiry in the nature of spirituality and organizational life existed, it was not until the last decade that organizational communication scholarship started to consider spiritual communication in direct connection to work identity, motivation, health and well-being, feelings of burnout, employee turnover, and overall life satisfaction (McGuire, 2010, Cheney et al. 2008, Harter & Buzzanell, 2007; Scott, 2007; Kirby et al., 2006; Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006, Rodriguez, 2001). Thus, spirituality in the workplace is a complex and valuable area of study in organizational communication.

This study contributes to organizational communication research by providing an empirical example of how people talk about work as a calling and the underlying messages embedded within such communication. From an interpretive perspective, the present research provides a new heuristic from which to understand the complexity of communication in and about work, thereby deepening our understanding of human
interaction (Rodriguez, 2001). Additionally, by attending to a communication-based approach to work calling from a faith-based (spiritually rooted) as well as secular (internal purpose) perspective, the current research affects two areas. The former, which recognizes a spiritual dimension to work, challenges the hegemonic scholarly discourse that has historically privileged research about secular organizational practices or topics (Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Harter & Buzzanell, 2007). By doing so, our discipline has perpetuated a dominant epistemology of secularism, reinforcing a particular worldview rather than acknowledging a range of beliefs, assumptions, and values (Rodriguez, 2001). The latter, which does not narrow calling to the historical, strictly religious roots, expands an understanding of work calling to include those who do not engage in a faith tradition or spirituality yet still recognize a core, intrinsic passion, which compels them (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This study also contributes to critical scholarship by unearthing taken-for-granted assumptions of work calling relating to particular consequences and contested privileges within the given concept (e.g. Chapter Six), thereby highlighting future avenues of research. As Lair et al., (2008) argues that (p. 178):

…meanings of work are embedded in socially or historically created notions of self and spirituality, taken-for-granted organizational practices, and hierarchical cultural norms, all of which affect workplace members and societal articulations of the possible meanings of work.

Thus, the current study provides a way of understanding how some individuals articulate the value and meaning of work through perceptions of work as a calling. Indeed, work calling exists and studying this concept is worthwhile as it expands our understanding of spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric.
In order to understand the significance of work as a calling from a communication perspective, it is important to trace what other academic disciplines are doing with this concept particularly because they seem to be paying more attention to it than communication scholars. Why is that? What have we missed and how can we contribute to the discussion of work calling? In the section below, I provide exemplars from the disciplines of organizational psychology, sociology, and theology that direct attention to some of the key concepts and approaches related to work calling. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the proceeding chapters and how this study adds to a uniquely communicative understanding of work calling.

Theorizing Calling in Organizational Psychology, Sociology, Theology, and Business

Literature on work-related calling dates back to the early 15th century, when monks wrote of feeling called to monastic life (Hardy, 1990). The concept expanded during the 16th and 17th centuries when Protestant Reformers such as Luther and Calvin contended that any form of work could be spiritually significant (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2009). While often attributed to the Christian faith, work as a calling is a concept not limited to this particular religion (e.g. Buddhism: Dalai Lama & Cutler, 2004). More recently, many scholars and practitioners have diverged from the spiritual emphasis by recognizing a secular understanding of calling that focuses on internal sources of motivation rather than a transcendent or divine call (Hunter et al., 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Even with this current conceptual shift to a secular perspective, the spiritual perspective is experiencing a renaissance by those motivated to enact their faith and a social responsibility in their profession (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Miller, 2003). In the last ten to fifteen years organizational psychology, sociology, theology, and business
have all identified a trend regarding the connection between an intrinsic or transcendent purpose and work and it is here that I address the attention that this reawakening has garnered.

**Organizational Psychology**

Organizational psychology scholars recognize that in contemporary Western society work constitutes more than one third of our adult lives (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). It follows that work success is a highly valued pursuit. Career success has traditionally been a considerable area of interest in this field, with most organizational psychologists analyzing objective success (observable, verifiable), while neglecting what constitutes subjective success (personal, internal) (Helsin, 2005). Yet, some contemporary theorists have begun to assess the direct link between subjective successes and workplace satisfaction, job performance, and health benefits (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Davidson & Caddell, 1994). Identifying calling as both a spiritual and secular construct these scholars agree that calling contributes to a type of subjective career success. However, they continue to wrestle with a cohesive definition of work calling.

Wrzesniewski et al.’s (1997) analysis offers a conceptualization of calling from a secular perspective. In an attempt to clarify how individuals conceptualize work they conducted a study that included 196 participants, from two work sites, with a range of occupations. Their findings revealed that people approach their work from one of three categories: a job, career, and calling (Bellah, 1996). Individuals who approached their work as a *job* viewed it as a means to an end or as a resource that facilitated an
individual’s enjoyment away from work. Participants who understood their work as a *career* described a personal investment in their work but primarily recognized their achievements through financial gain or occupational advancements, such as increased social standing or power. Finally, individuals who perceived what they did for a living as a *calling* viewed their work as an extension of the rest of their life. Work as calling was not associated with a primary desire for financial gain or occupational advancement; instead these individuals were driven by a desire to experience internal fulfillment from work. These tri-part distinctions were found to overlap to a certain extent (Wrzesniewski, 2002). For example, individuals who identified a work calling also acknowledged that at some level, financial needs were important as well.

The extension of work calling beyond the scope of its religious foundation has been beneficial and yet, it is also important to recognize what connections a person’s faith may play in work approach. This is particularly true in contemporary organizational life where spirituality is “experiencing a renaissance in the workplace” (Gockel, 2004, p. 156). The challenge for many scholars is that workplace spirituality is hard to define and can range from “businesses that see themselves as overtly Christian, Jewish, or Muslim,” to secular companies that “focus on promoting universal ethical values such as love or responsibility and a sense of community” (p. 159). Hunter et al.’s (2009) research provides an exemplar of an analysis from a faith based perspective. In their study of college student’s perceptions of calling, as related to work and life, they found that calling was a relevant consideration for more than two thirds of their participants (N = 295). Steger et al. (2010) examined the distinction between calling in religious and secular contexts. Calling that views work as part of the religious or spiritual life, involves
a transcendent source, specifically from God or a Higher Power. A secular work calling, or “work as meaning” (p. 84) includes individuals who primarily seek work that provides meaning, purpose, and contributes to the greater good. Bunderson and Thompson’s (2009) study on zookeepers, revealed that participants highly prioritized work calling, which was described as uniting particular skills with a strong sense of identity, meaningfulness, moral purpose, personal sacrifice, and motivation. Berg et al.’s (2010) study examined unanswered occupational callings and the negative psychological influences of such occurrences. Unanswered callings are often one of two categories: missed callings and additional callings. Unanswered occupational callings exist when work that an individual, “(1) feels drawn to pursue, (2) expects to be intrinsically enjoyable and meaningful, and (3) sees as a central part of his or her identity, but (4) is not formally experiencing in a work role” (p. 974). What is provocative within this study is that Berger et al. also address multiple callings and a desire to experience a sense of calling in activities that may fall outside of what one does for a living. These findings articulate that work calling is inclusive of both a spiritual and secular framework. It involves feeling a transcendent or intrinsic source of motivation, a sense of purpose in the use of skills and passion, in order to make a difference for others.

Even with the attention to workplace spirituality, provided by the aforementioned organizational psychologists and the impact the concept is making on business practitioners; organizational scholars primarily admit that consideration of this topic has been almost completely absent from psychology journals that attend to vocation (Duffy & Sedlacek; 2007; Helsin, 2005; Gockel, 2004). I move now to the discipline of sociology, where at the heart of social activity there exists the enactment and pursuit of meaning in
both micro levels of agency and macro levels of institutional structures. If the complexities of work calling are a part of the sphere of human societies, sociology has not adequately addressed the concept and practice of work approaches. Therefore, since there is almost an entire absence of work calling literature in this field, I also engage in some of the studies related to work and purpose as well as workplace spirituality that open the door for research on calling. In sociology, calling and vocation appear to be synonymous and will therefore be used interchangeably.

**Sociology**

The sociological concept of work calling can be traced back to Max Weber (2008/1904) who argued that Protestantism, particularly the Calvinist perspective on religion and work, greatly influenced Western social innovation and economic, capitalist development. He stated, “Labor must be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling” (p. 62). Weber also suggested that Protestantism projected an ideal type of a Western, capitalistic entrepreneur who is modest and demonstrates his/her salvation through the pursuit of business success, which included accepting the social and economic station into which one had been born. Weber focused on the obligatory nature of calling rather than a relational nature between the Caller (God) and the called (people). Under Weber’s formulation, work became a means of demonstrating God’s favor or election and as such, success at work manifested salvation. His understanding of work calling was tied to a capitalistic point of view, which focused more on “bureaucracies parceling out the soul of the workers” (Grant, O’Neil, & Stephens, 2004, p. 265) instead of the actual meaning of work calling as it relates to the spiritual or intrinsic passions.
Contemporary sociologists have moved beyond Weber’s framework; however, their attention to work almost exclusively highlights the secular components of work (Davidson & Caddell, 1994). This clearly marks a gap in the examination of the spiritual aspects of work, even to the point of discounting “the possibility that the ‘secular’ workplace might be a place where spirituality is practiced, experienced, and discussed” (Grant et al., 2004). When sociologists have accounted for spirituality in the workplace, they typically do little more than acknowledge it. For instance, Parkes, Milner, and Gilbert (2010) recognize that because human beings are meaning-seeking animals, the need for work to signify something more than just a way to make money is obvious. They suggest that in the current economy, business “leaders need to work in a way that appeal to the spirit, the vocation in each person and the team” (p. 14). However, while the title and first page of their article highlight vocation and/or calling, very little of the analysis focused on this concept. Rather, the authors discussed the various aspects of health care services.

Moreover, sociologists, for the most part, have not made a connection between theorizing work calling and engaging in actual empirical research that investigates the local knowledge of participants and the influence of their perceptions work as calling (Sullivan, 2006). Davidson and Caddell’s (1994) analysis is one of the few sociological studies directly engaging work as a calling, which they did from a strictly religious sense. Their empirical study analyzed if and how, religion influences the way individuals think about work. Their findings included a distinction between external religiousness and internal religiousness. For example, “simply being a church member and being exposed to religious influence is not enough” to lead to viewing work as a calling (p. 145). Some
sociologists recognize this missing part of work research, pointing to other domains of academia (e.g. organizational psychology) that have acknowledged the role of subjective success and have engaged in a resurgence of spirituality and meaningfulness in the workplace (Grant et al., 2004). Understanding the structures and patterns of particular work perspectives, such as calling, can lend to a critical engagement of individual agency and social constraints.

What do these studies reveal about work calling as a focus from a sociological perspective? Davidson and Caddell (1994) argue that work perspectives (p. 145):

…ought to give their respondents opportunities to describe in both secular and religious terms, and should incorporate religious as well as secular factors into the theories they use to explain different orientations toward work.

It is clear that workplace spirituality in sociology provides a new avenue for research, and as such it is necessary to name and conceptualize differing work approaches, which includes work calling. It is also clear that attention to meaningful work as it relates to calling is lacking. A communication-based perspective on work calling would contribute to an understanding of work calling as spiritual/transcendent and secular/intrinsic process, in which calling is a way of bringing one’s whole identity to work, experiencing work as having a larger purpose than monetary gain. Organizational psychologists and sociologist, both indicate a discipline blind spot in regards to an overall research focus that includes work calling when considering work approaches. One discipline, with its clear tie to spirituality, which would seem to have a direct connection to particular avenues to work calling is Theology. Yet while scholars in this field approach calling with more veracity, they continue to suffer from a weak focus on work as a calling.
Theology

The discipline of theology systematically seeks to study God and his relationship with the world. From a theological perspective calling is, “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s hunger meet” (Buechner, 1973, p. 95). The theology scholarship engaged with overall life vocation recognizes that this term, calling, is currently experiencing a revival and “has exhibited surprising endurance throughout the last several hundred years” (Jensen, 2006, p. 37). Os Guinness, the great-great grandson of the famous Dublin Brewer, is known as one of the sounding voices on the concept of calling from a religious perspective. He conceptualizes calling as, “everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his [God’s] summons and service” (2003, p. 29). Here, work plays a vital role in our identities and the way we perceive the identity of others, however, for Guinness, the concept of calling is about the whole life of the individual, with work merely being a way of expressing this orientation. Under this framework, the individual call is a person’s unique choice in work and the corporate call is the life-response to faith in God. Yet, specific attention to work calling in theological scholarship is limited (Miller, 2003).

The scholars who do focus on this concept mainly provide theoretical accounts, which engage in the writings of Luther and Calvin in an application of contemporary society (one exception is Thompson & Miller-Perrin, 2008), rather than conducting empirical research or offering contemporary conceptualizations. The following section provides a look at the way in which calling is theorized from a theological account.
Work integrates people into society by orienting our lives, organizing our time, and connecting us with others, and therefore our perceptions of work is of great value. Hardy (1990) integrates Greek, Medieval, and Renaissance, as well as Marxian and Freudian thought with the contributions of Luther and Calvin in order to argue that the concept of work vocation refers to finding the right job that provides an individual with the right fit for his or her core being. In addition, a few theological scholars studying work understanding that social and historical forces construct pervasive messages about organizational life. Thus, there is some recognition that work is both contextual and personal. For example, a work uniform may feel like bondage to some while perceived as a legitimate marker of work status to others. Along these lines, Novak (1996) argues that, “business is a morally serious enterprise, in which it is possible to act either immorally or morally” (p. 9). He describes four key points to work calling. First, calling is unique to each person. Second, it includes a precondition of skills/talents and love of the process (e.g. long hours, struggles, etc.), not just the outcome. Third, calling in the workplace involves a feeling of joy and renewal derived from the work practices. Some days will feel like a burden, yet there is also an odd satisfaction even in the hard times. The fourth element of calling is that it is not always easy to discover. There is rarely one direct, clear path. We may have to “test out” some paths and in trial and error find the one that intersects with our skill, passion, and service.

Some theological scholars focusing on the connection between work and spirituality recognize the risk of a fragmented identity when the spiritual self is not included in work. Highlighting three waves of faith and work in the last one hundred years, Executive Director of the Yale Divinity School’s Center for Faith and Culture,
David Miller (2003) attends to the current blurred boundaries of work, suggesting that our identities cannot sustain the bifurcated lines drawn between work and life (p. 301):

No longer are they willing to leave their souls in the parking lot outside the workplace. They reject the conventional notion that separates one’s spiritual identity from one’s work identity. Intuitively, they know that there is more to business life than just the bottom line, and they know there is more to worship life than Sunday services.

As a consequence of forcing our identities into fixed compartments, work, as the largest compartment then becomes the primary way of experiencing life and deriving meaning from it. With such primacy given to our work lives, what is valued as “real” work becomes more rhetorically significant.

As previously mentioned, many theologians wrestle with Luther and Calvin’s influence on calling as both a reforming and binding paradigm. Luther’s (1522) declaration that the peasant, merchant, mother, father, teacher, etc., can all do God’s work, can experience work as a calling, meant liberation for the everyday person who longed to incorporate faith into labor. No longer was calling meant only for clergy or those directly working in the church (Guiness, 2003). While Luther and Calvin are often joined together in their reformation of work as calling, Luther asserted that we are born into a work station, which is our calling. Whereas, Calvin believed that our gifts/abilities determine our choices for a work calling (Hardy, 1990). The acute problem with viewing work calling as a static place from which a person works is the suppression of agency. Volf (1991) underscores this concern (p. 108):

The understanding of work as vocation is easily misused ideologically... [T]he notion of vocation suggests that every employment is a place of service to God. This notion functions simply to ennoble dehumanizing work in a situation where the quality of work should be improved through structural or other types of change.
We must be free to decide when a work environment is unhealthy, when a family business is no longer our own, and when our calling has changed. In contrast, a dynamic conception of work calling may involve resistance and social change, altering poor working conditions rather than accepting them (Langer, 2009).

One area in academics that may be able to contribute to this discussion is the field of business. In this discipline, the primary focus is business fundamentals, leadership ethics, and career advancement training. It is often touted as the field to help enhance both professional and personal success. Because of this, I briefly mention a few key discussions taking place in business literature before concluding this chapter.

**Business**

According to business scholars, the contemporary work culture is experiencing a growing fascination with a sense of purpose beyond monetary gain and an interest in spirituality. Some business scholars are referring to this fascination as a “spiritual awakening in the American workplace” (Garcia-Zamar, 2003, p. 355). In a review of the last decade’s trend toward spirituality in the workplace, Marques, Dhiman, and King (2005) suggest that there are multiple reasons for this new business orientation, including “the escalating downsizing and layoffs, reengineering, and corporate greed of the 1980’s to the enhanced curiosity about Eastern philosophies, the aging of baby boomers, greater influx of women in the workplace, and the shrinking global work village” (p. 81). While Marques et al. (2005) do not mention the term work calling, their review of spirituality in the workplace and use of phrases like “a sense of purpose” (p. 88) alludes to work calling as a “next step” in research. Additionally, business research reveals direct connections between an orientation focused on intrinsic meaning and enhanced job performance,
financial success, decreased absenteeism, a contributor to stress reduction and overall wellness, and company morale (Lui & Robertson, 2011; Sheep, 2006; Marques et al., 2005; Cisernik & Adams, 2002).

The lack of academic business literature focusing on work calling may be due to the fact that their attention to spirituality is fairly new. Just over a decade ago, in 1999 the Academy of Management formally recognized workplace spirituality and business as a special interest group (e Cunha, Rego, & D’Oliver, 2006). Moreover, the Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion was launched only recently, in 2004 (e Cunha et al., 2006). Some business scholars might be hesitant to delve further into workplace spirituality studies because of the potential controversy rising from an overt inclusion of spirituality in business. However, others argue that the current understanding of workplace spirituality allows for multiple voices to be heard, promoting “the workplace more as a pluralistic community where differences can be not only tolerated but transcended” (Sheep, 2006, p. 359). One unpublished empirical study that does directly address work calling is Dobrow’s (2007) quantitative, longitudinal analysis of musicians. Her research indicates that calling is temporal, that is, it changes over time; and it is socially influenced by the individual’s family and/or peer group. While business scholars may not be directly attending to the concept of calling as of yet, their burgeoning attention to intrinsic meaning and spirituality foreshadows the possibility of a future trend.

In order to map the conceptual terrain of work calling from a communication-based perspective the current dissertation proceeds by synthesizing the connection between, spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric (Chapter
Two). Next, I explain my approach to qualitative, thematic analysis (Chapter Three).

Here, I also address the data collection protocol and logistics. Following this, I provide an analysis and discussion of the three major themes that emerged, using description and exemplars to represent the findings (Chapters Four through Six). Finally, I conclude with a summary of the contributions, constraints, and direction for future studies (Chapter Seven).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, after synthesizing key concepts in communication literature regarding spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric as they relate to work calling, I argue for a distinctly communicative perspective of work calling, noting where such a perspective aligns with and diverges from other disciplines. Using a communicative approach, I differentiate between what previous interdisciplinary research conceptualizes as, “just a job”, career, and calling, with the awareness that analyzing the local knowledge of participants is the necessary next step in recognizing the ways in which this term is constituted.

As Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall (2010) suggest, we never “weave” our understanding of work out of nothing, “the fabric has its threads” (p. 24). The threads that offer three particularly fruitful avenues of research for the current study are spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric.¹ First, I suggest that spiritual communication has the power to influence the construction of organizational practices and structures. Recognition of spirituality in organizational life deepens our understanding of the human condition, addresses the complexity of communication in and about work (Rodriguez, 2001), and offers a tremendous potentiality to speak to the

¹ While the current research more directly incorporates the influence of spiritual communication and meaningful work embedded within participant communication about work calling, the spirit of organizational rhetoric influenced my qualitative inquiry with a focus on how work calling messages (re)produce participant ontology and epistemology of work.
complexities that exist in negotiating our work and lives (McGuire, 2010). The exploration of work calling should include attention to ways in which spirituality influences this approach. Second, Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, and Lair (2008) define meaningful work as, “a job, a coherent set of tasks, or any endeavor requiring mental and/or physical exertion that the individual interprets as having meaning” (p. 144). Thus, communication about meaningful work is (a) a sense-making process in which (b) there is coherence between an individual’s job and life satisfaction, and (c) often experienced in finding intrinsic purpose through one’s occupation. If work calling is imbued with meaningfulness, what types of meanings are derived from communication about work calling? Finally, using a rhetorical lens in organizational research provides a new heuristic which deepens our understanding of the ways in which organizational life are expressed and negotiated (Cheney & Lair, 2004). Here, I focus on the contemporary understanding of rhetoric as identification, which can be applied in organizational studies to analyze the influence messages have on an individual’s relationship to work, and to the “ongoing construction of authority” in organizational as well as societal levels (p. 60). Thus, the question becomes, what rhetorical enterprises are connected to the concept of work as a calling? Together, spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric create academic space for the study of work as a calling.

**Spiritual Communication and Organizations**

While there does appear to be a developing connection between spirituality and organizational communication, it remains “under-theorized by communication scholars” (Scott, 2007, p. 262). I suggest that by incorporating the concept of work as a calling we
can attend to this dilemma. Communication scholars “lag behind organizational practitioners publically acknowledging the importance of an approach to spirituality” in business practices (Krone, 2001). McGuire (2010) argues that, “despite the salience of spirituality in the lives of many organizational members, spirituality has not benefitted from the same scholarly investigations” (p. 75). We no longer need to lag behind. Work calling is a communicative practice that can provide a clear linkage to the spiritual orientation of organizational members, which has vital implications for organizational life.

One of the hurdles that needs to be addressed, is that initially, the definition of spirituality continues to result in vague assertions (Sass, 2000). Perhaps this is because scholars are attempting to describe the metaphysical in aggregate terms when it is contextual and demonstrates an individualized understanding. Another obstacle is that research about spirituality in the workplace is “still in its infancy” (Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008, p. 466), which means that this area can benefit from continued studies focusing on furthering such understandings. Generally, spirituality can be looked at in two separate ways. First, spirituality is a connectedness with nature, others, or a transcendent being, differentiated from organized religion’s typical rule-based approach (McGuire, 2010). Second, spirituality is an internal religiousness, emphasizing a relational rather than rule-oriented understanding (Gockel, 2004; Davidson & Caddell, 1994). Both of these approaches emphasize a belief, or faith, in connectedness and community. Building from the latter assumption of what spirituality includes, I conceptualize spirituality as multidimensional, internal religiousness involving a
relational connection with a transcendent other (e.g. God), often manifested through a holistic ethical or value-based framework. A holistic framework means recognizing that all spheres of life involve the sacred (e.g. personal, professional). That is, spirituality involves a search for the sacred (Egbert, Mickley, & Coeling, 2004); it is an enactment of personal beliefs that can influence all spheres of life, not just limited to institutionally-based practices; it is faith in the intangible, metaphysical, and/or transcendent. Thus, spirituality and organizational life consist of work that encompasses a sense of meaning and purpose beyond extrinsic elements (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Here, the importance of meaningful work can be connected to spiritual communication, where the soul of a person can be nurtured or damaged by work. In studying work as a calling, I seek to facilitate, not only a deeper connection between these two areas and an understanding of its role in organizational life, but also assist in clarifying and validating this phenomenon for the worker.

**Secular Hegemony**

From an interpretive lens, expanding the current analysis of work as a calling through a spiritual framework allows for a greater understanding of multiple perspectives in the meaning-making process of work communication. From a critical approach, it also serves to disrupt hegemonic, binary thinking (Rodriguez, 2001). One form of hegemony existing in organizational communication research is the privileging of secular studies. Thus, scholarship that focuses on faith in the workplace contributes to the reduction of what Buzzanell and Harter (2006) refer to as “secular hegemony” (p. 1). Secular
hegemony highlights the dominant influence of secular studies and calls forth a scholarly responsibility to seek out other worldviews existing in discourses in and about work.

It is significant to note that a disruption of this secular hegemony is beginning to take place in other areas of study within the communication discipline. For instance, *Health Communication* (2004) dedicated an entire volume to what Parrot (2004) calls, “collective amnesia,” which refers to the absence of religious and spiritual discourse in health communication theory and practice. Parrot argues that a person’s drive to intellectually, emotionally, and physically act upon a belief in a higher power has positive and “far-reaching health affects” (p. 1). A group of organizational communication scholars recently considered their own spiritual approach and how it has, or has not influenced their work (e.g. Barker, 2004). While these essays challenge the secular hegemony by recognizing the relevance of spirituality in their own approaches to work, there is still a need for focused attention on the implications of workplace spirituality as a dynamic, significant aspect of work life for others. The forum allows the reader to look into the personal spiritual lives of scholars, which is productive. Yet, it also runs the risk of contributing to the notion that spirituality is merely a personal part of life. Groß (2010) observes that “organizational spirituality is a possible method of creating employee commitment and motivation as well as enhancing productivity” (p. 62). As scholars, we should be asking questions related to how organizations and individual spirituality are related and interact in contemporary work spaces. Sass (2000) suggests that future research in organizational communication should attend to clarifying and extending our understanding of organizational spirituality as part of empirical studies, rather than solely
a theoretical discussion. These researchers make plain the need for further research in this domain.

By analyzing the intersection of work and spirituality, we can significantly “dereify” (Golden, Kirby, & Jorganson, 2006, p. 145) the secular-faith divide, recognizing multiple epistemologies in communication inquiry. Work calling involves the epistemological question of how we come to an understanding of work meaning. By recognizing a contemporary understanding of the spiritual characteristics within work calling, we can both expand and clarify our means of analysis. There are individuals who carry their spirituality, overtly and even covertly, into the workplace and as organizational scholars it is important to ask how they view and talk about their spirituality in relationship to their work. One way of deepening our understanding of spirituality as it is enacted in work is through the concept of work calling.

**Spiritual Organizing, Work Tensions, and Implications for the Discipline**

Spiritual communication is part of organizing. For many individuals, spirituality and work are interconnected in the process of identity construction, what drives life choices, and the pursuit of meaningful work (Buzzanell, 2001). Witmer (2001) argues that recognizing organizational spirituality helps extend the metaphor of organizational culture by paying attention to the ways in which spirituality influences organizational climates, norms, and structures. While spirituality may be ineffable (Goodall, 1993), the communicative interactions involving spirituality in the workplace can still be explicated. Studying work calling from a spiritual perspective allows for this type of analysis and necessitates a look at the political nature of workplace spirituality, which includes
expanding our scope of knowledge about work to include those who are unpaid (Krone, 2001). Additionally, recognizing workplace spirituality extends our understandings of organizational rhetoric by considering the spiritual dimensions embedded in the persuasion of social, material, and spiritual work practices (Smith, 1993).

Some scholars argue that a focus on the spiritual dimensions of work is a less important area of research because it takes into account the non-rational systems of an organization, looking at the connection between meaning, purpose, and community (Ashmos & Duchan, 2000). However, the undertones of such critiques privilege a managerial approach, which is often distracted with productiveness and efficiency, missing the necessary intangible aspects that affect tangible results (Hartelius & Browning, 2008; Tracey, Lutgen-Sandvick, & Alberts, 2006). Additionally, the lines between personal and private lives are far more interconnected in today’s workplace (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). Our personal lives inform our professional identities and vice versa. If we consider ourselves spiritual individuals, it does not follow that this spirituality is compartmentalized; rather it blends into our whole lives. Two different journal forums address spirituality and work. Below, I briefly synthesize the themes derived from these articles.

There is a transformative potentiality located in the dynamics of workplace spirituality. It exists in the “framing and organizing [of] workplace processes and contexts as well as in its relationship to material consequences in everyday lives” (Frye, Kissleburgh, and Butts, 2007, p. 244). In attending to spiritual communication in the workplace, we can address the way “often unacknowledged spiritual assumptions can
expand understandings of the formation and maintenance of communal life” (Buzzanell 
& Harter, 2006, p. 1-2). To do this, empirical research must be conducted to explore the 
lived experiences of others who recognize themselves as spiritual beings. In a 
Communication Studies (2006) forum, five articles contributed to research on the 
relationship between spirituality and communication in organizational contexts. Goodier 
and Eisenberg’s (2006) case study of a healthcare center’s “spiritual organizing” and 
institutional identity, and Kirby et al.’s (2006) analysis on competing discourses of 
secular and sacred practices provide particularly strong examples. Four relevant themes 
emerge from this forum. First, recognizing messages about spirituality in the workplace 
allows us to investigate certain forms of resistance to the bifurcated work-life constraints. 
Second, it provides a way of legitimizing work that is typically viewed as less-than (e.g. 
due to low pay or prestige). Third, it can be a means of organizational control. Lastly, it 
provides a way of highlighting complex tensions related to work.

To begin, spirituality exists beyond the walls of a church building (Leeman, 
2006). Recognizing the spiritual self at work identifies issues of public/private domains 
as “contested discursive spaces” (Leeman, 2006, p. 6). Providing space to acknowledge 
this part of organizational life allows for the “blending” of “spiritual selves with work 
selves” (Feldner, 2006, p. 74). Future studies should work to extend and clarify what this 
means, what it looks like, and what messages represent this “blending” (Sass, 2000). 
Next, spirituality in the workplace can be used as a framework to legitimize work 
typically not seen as valuable (Smith, Arendt, Lahman, Settle, & Duff, 2006). By doing 
so, employees can define their success according to what they deemed as meaningful
work, rather than through a consumerist ideology. Spiritual re-framing transcends the nonprofit sector by pointing to ways that corporate managers can include spirituality in order to “attract and maintain talented employees who seek deeper meaning in their work” (p. 37). Additionally, applying a spiritual frame to an entire organization can be used as a system of inconspicuous control in order to exploit or manipulate organizational members (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006). When this happens, spiritual organizing has the potential of being a covert way of “leading employees into deeper levels of compliance, encouraging active participation in new dialectics of control without full awareness of the ways in which those structures could constrain their behavior over time” (p. 59). This understanding of workplace spirituality highlights both its contradictions and complimentary aspects.

Finally, in addition to the impact of resistance, spiritual framing, and control, workplaces of faith involve complex tensions that play a direct role in organizational communication. For example, Kirby et al.’s (2006) analysis focused on the way non-Catholic professors at a Catholic university live with the tensions of enacting values related to a specific faith as part of the work protocol. Kirby et al. found that as faculty negotiated these workplace tensions their own values were being negotiated, thereby affecting perceptions about organizational values. This resulted in dueling identities that required acts of “embracing/resisting, inclusion/exclusion, and proclamation/silence” (p. 103). These represented tensioned discourses. Rather than constructing their analysis as a means of eliminating organizational tensions, Kirby et al. sought to understand the meaning taking place within these tensions. Their emphasis of what it means to “live with
tension—not merely how to eliminate it” (p. 92) disrupts the binary standards often given to secular and sacred practices. By acknowledging these tensions, this research demonstrates the way spiritual values are often embedded in our work lives. Certainly, disruption and complexities can be uncomfortable; however, it can also lead to productive (re)envisioning of organizing processes. Further scholarly research is needed to understand the negotiation and embracing of competing discourses, values, and practices.

Three additional essays attending to secular hegemony were introduced in the same journal the following year, which more specifically connected spiritual communication in the workplace with meaningful work (Harter & Buzzanell, 2007). These articles question the construction of narratives in and about workplace spirituality, demonstrating a continual pursuit of the intrinsic elements within meaningful work by engaging in ways that narratives “can reinvigorate the spiritual search for and practice of meaning in individuals’ lives” (Harter & Buzzanell, 2007, p. 223). For example, Considine’s (2007) study on healthcare and the spiritual process of organizing identifies the tension and moments of resistance in the negotiation of work and faith obligations. Scott’s (2007) study on college undergraduates’ perceptions of the metaphoric narratives of calling and career, and their desire for meaningful work, established that students are concerned not only with what major they will choose, but also how they will use this major for a greater sense of purpose. Frye et al.’s (2007) analysis operates from an ontology that spirituality is intrinsic to human beings, has multiple meanings and ranges from micro, meso, and macro practices. Together, these articles contribute to the current
discussion by looking at spiritual leadership/followership in the workplace through three dominant paradigms: functional, interpretive, and critical.

While these scholars examined the constructed meaning of spiritual followership, how it can work productively, and what the implications are for this particular disruption to hegemony, they have yet to fully engage with the concept of work perspective as it relates to spirituality. As organizational communication scholars, we need to expand the conversation about work to include the concept of calling. This is no longer just a topic for religious or spiritually-based academic journals. Nor should it only be a special issue in organizational literature that reflectively articulates personal spiritual journeys. It is a vital part of the organizational life, in process and methodology; and as such, further studies in this domain should be pursued from an organizational communication perspective.

Recognizing the spiritual dimensions of work means understanding its political nature. In addition to spiritual framing, complex tensions, and faith narratives in the workplace, spiritual communication and organizations intersect in motivation and manipulation of labor. McGuire’s (2010) thematic analysis of a parochial boarding school faculty/staff is an example of current research attending to the tensions of workplace spirituality and labor. It provides a model for “the systematic examination of spirituality in organizations” (p. 95). McGuire recognizes spirituality as how people live out their lives in relationship to a sense of interconnectedness with the world and with others. Spiritual labor consists of three elements: commodification, codification, and regulation of an organizational member’s spirituality. Specifically, spiritual commodification as
using the member’s spiritual beliefs as part of the service or product an organization offers. Just as physical and emotional labor has been recognized as a consequence of service industries, spiritual labor is part of many workplaces today. However, much like emotional labor, spiritual labor is not necessarily “inherently or unavoidably damaging to organizational members” (p. 76). Organizational members can (re)frame what could be considered spiritual, which demonstrates the rhetorical implications in the construction of workplace spirituality. These aforementioned studies indicate the importance of further research in the area of spirituality and organizational life.

Along with an increased attention to discourses of spirituality in and about the workplace, scholars are shifting their focus from external modes of productivity and efficiency towards notions of quality of life and meaningful work (Zorn & Townsley, 2008; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Organizational life serves as a valuable site for the study of symbolic meaning and persuasive interactions such as mission statements, identity, crisis management, value placement, and feelings of purpose in one’s job (Cheney et al., 2008; Hartelius & Browning, 2008; Johnson & Sellnow 1995). In the following section, I assess contemporary meaningful work literature and the interconnected implications of work as a calling.

**Meaningful Work**

Meaningful work contributes to the production of one’s professional and personal identity. Recognizing the impact of meaningful work means recognizing the disposition of the current “human condition” (Bauman, 2000, p. 8) as it relates to work. The contemporary organizational landscape involves individuals who enjoy the ability to
select an occupation, reject it, and begin another in the name of progress. Work no longer offers security and certainty; instead, it establishes significance in the accumulation of skills leading to “insecurity, uncertainty, and unsafety” for workers (p. 161). Finding meaning at work is even more important in a time when work itself can be precarious. Flexibility in work structure and choice can be empowering but it can also breed loneliness, satiated for only a brief time by a pursuit of the now. The consequences of loneliness or emptiness have upon the sphere of human activity in relation to organizational life are significant. Thus, experiencing meaningful work allows for an anchoring of the self, despite the shift and sway of work itself.

One such consequence is the destabilization within the bonds of community, reducing the depth of relationships and resulting in a greater need for locating a sense of meaning in the workplace. Research reveals that businesses provide a primary sense of community just as family, churches, and civic groups once did. Thus, the identity of the individual is shaped now more than ever by the workplace (Tracey & Trethewey, 2005). Additionally, finding meaning at work has a direct connection to organizational identification, motivation and satisfaction, and well-being (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2009; Smith et al., 2006; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

In today’s workplace, we have exchanged the “victory of order over chaos” for “immediacy, playfulness, subjectivity, and performativity” (Bauman, 2000, p. 126). That is, contemporary workers desire an eclectic, nonlinear work life with the goal of self-management. In many ways, this could mean a greater pursuit of work calling as a right rather than a privilege. Workers are no longer dependent on an organization to provide
them with a structure and certainty of greater purpose; rather individuals enjoy the hunt, the picking and choosing of occupations like a surveyor of the best brand names. There is a strong connection between the associations one belongs to and the construction of their identity. With the loosening of the bonds of associations identity begins to lack coherence. As identity has become untethered and fragmentary, it is has become an infinite construction project with the individual constantly engaging in a continual rebuilding through the dynamic process of choice. However, there are significant costs associated with how individuals experience this fundamental binary in their work life (Bauman, 2000). Driven by the continual act of becoming means that connections are transitory and ultimately dissolve, as identities are worn and discarded whenever an individual may chose. Organizations and institutions cognizant of this shift could use a disingenuous attention to work as calling in order to substitute for adequate pay and benefits (e.g., Bousquet, 2008).

The connection between meaningfulness and work has attracted scholarly attention in the fields of ethics, business management, organizational psychology, and communication (Harter & Buzanell, 2007; Jurkiewicz & Giacolone, 2004; Howard, 2002; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 1999). With an increase of workers as “free agents” (Kuhn et al., 2008, p. 162), our perceptions of work are influence by the new role of workers as bricoleurs (Bauman, 2000). A bricoleur is a person who uses “bits and pieces…a montage” of improvisational assemblage in a new formation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The bricoleur worker is not governed by an obligation to stay at one company, rather by a desire to acquire an array of skills and individual improvement.
This understanding of work points to new complexities, unquestioned assumptions and concepts that should guide the inquiries made by organizational communication scholars (Zorn & Townsley, 2008). In the current research study, I attend to the contemporary developments of meaningful work from a communicative lens, drawing a connection between meaningful work and work calling. In addition to Cheney et al.’s (2008) article on meaningful work, which I use as a primary framework and scholarly compass, I highlight some of the implications of a forum on meaning construction in *Management Communication Quarterly* (2008). This forum was designed to spark a deeper conversation, as well as precede empirical studies that engage the given concept. While these scholars use a reflective tone and an ethic of care, they focus on theory application and social change. Zorn and Townsley (2008) articulate this well stating, “The time is right for organizational communication scholars to join in the conversation,” to contribute to the “awareness of unstated assumptions that are inherent in this endeavor” (p. 150). Here, meaningful work is not merely a transparent moment of personal reflection, but a charge to scholarly action.

**Communicating Meaningful Work**

Communication about meaningful work exists at the micro (everyday), meso (organizational), and macro (social-cultural) discursive levels (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Arguing from a communication-based perspective on meaningful work, Cheney et al. (2008) address the historical-cultural meanings of work, current research foci, popular culture trends, and social concerns. Recognizing that meaningful work is a socially constructed concept means understanding how individuals and groups perceive work as
well as the larger socio-cultural messages that influence these perceptions. Thus, the meaning of work is subjective and historically and culturally situated. For some individuals it can derive from extrinsic value (instrumental rewards), or intrinsic value (self-expression, social purpose). For most people meaningful work includes a sense of agency, relational belonging, opportunities for influence, the use and development of one’s skills/talents, contributing to the greater good, and providing adequate income.

Contemporary work is recognized as no longer involving “lifelong employment” at the same company; instead, workers now experience mobile careers, valuing the accumulation of multiple skills and self-improvement (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 154). With these considerations at the forefront, there is a great need for further study regarding meaningful work in domains beyond the typical organizational boundaries, such as interpersonal/family, health, and spiritual communication (Cheney et al., 2008).

Meaningful work provides a clear academic space for analyzing the components of work that are spiritual, lending to a further theorizing of the persuasive implications located in work calling.

**Intersubjective, Boundary-Blurring, and Political**

There is unfixed and intersubjective nature within meaningful work communication (Cheney et al., 2010; Cheney & Nadeson, 2008; Lair et al., 2008). What one person finds enriching, another might find incredibly dull or pointless. The key point, however, is that meaningful work involves feeling a sense of self-worth and purpose (Lucas, 2011). Culturally situated values and attitudes exist within meaningful work concepts, meaning that our research should stretch across work domains in order to
recognize the influence of different contexts (Golden, 2009). Communicatively, we must also recognize the delineation between the meaning of work and meaningful work in order to better grasp what types of messages are occurring in a given context. The meaning of work “refers to the significance and/or purpose of work, as attributed to the worker,” while meaningful work “refers to the culturally privileged qualities of work itself” (Lair et al., 2008, p. 173). The former focuses on “the role work plays in the context of one’s life” (p. 173). The latter attends to the “nature of work itself” (p. 173). For the current study on work calling, both aspects are important in order to understand the connection between an individual’s assigned meaning to work and the societal implications of such perceptions.

The nature of meaning/ful work consists of multiple perspectives and underlying ideologies (Cheney & Nadeson, 2008), privilege, power, the body, and intrinsic components such as spirituality (Lair et al., 2008), cultural contexts and blurred boundaries (Broadfoot et al., 2008), and discursive resources (Khun et al., 2008). It is value-laden and has ethical implications, intrinsically connected “to human flourishing” (Cheney et al., 2010, p. 99). For example, a devaluation of work exists when we name various endeavors such as household labor, volunteer positions, or children’s domestic chores as not being real forms of work (Cheney et al., 2010; Jorgenson, 2006). Clair’s (1996) study on the manner in which people (de)value certain professions as not being real jobs underscores the impact that colloquial discourse has on meaning/ful work, and spurs us on to readdress questions such as, “what is work?”, “meaningful to who?”, and “what is the meaning of this work?” (Broadfoot et al., 2008; Cheney & Nadesan, 2008,
Lair et al., 2008). Organizational communication scholars provide a unique perspective for problematizing these types of questions, particularly by giving greater attention to the implications of race, class, and gender located the conceptualization of meaningful work (Broadfoot et al., 2008). This understanding of work includes social organizing and collaboration of individuals across “bounded spheres of life.” This means recognizing activities that may seem outside a concrete organization but are in fact rich sites of organizing, such as the “home, house of worship, backyard studio, and playground” (p. 154). Consequently, communication about meaning/ful work acts as a discursive resource, which contributes to the (de)regulation of work identity through formal organizations, occupational subcultures (socializing agents), and commercial organizing systems such as work/life messages (Kuhn et al., 2008).

Taking an organizational communication approach to meaning/ful work also means acknowledging the politics enmeshed in such endeavors (Lair et al., 2008). People seeking meaningful work risk manipulation under the guise of meaningful or spiritual work pursuits (Matiaske & Grozinger, 2010). Recognizing the politics within meaning/ful work includes an acknowledgment of the ethical position scholars are faced with, including the “potential for narcissistic elitism of meaningful work and for the condescension of the meaning of work” (Lair et al., 2008, p. 173). Thus, work and ethics are inextricably related (Cheney et al. 2010) and have implications in our scholarly pursuits.

Responding to these generative conversations regarding meaningful work and organizational communication research, Dempsey and Sanders (2010) connect a
Weberian understanding of work as a calling in an analysis of popular culture accounts of meaningful work and social entrepreneurship (a desire to proactively respond to social problems; contributing to the common good). They suggest that workplaces such as schools and churches are being subverted by the techniques and reasoning of the market. They argue that this conceptual and instrumental colonization presents a strain on work/life management, increasing the risk of underpaid and unpaid labor due to a manipulated desire of self-sacrifice for a greater good. Dempsey and Sanders apply Weber’s concept of calling to represent cautionary tales of the dark side of meaningful work. They argue that the risk of assuming meaningful work is “inherently inspiring and highly fulfilling,” rhetorically implies that there is less of a need to protect workers motivated by meaningful work, “or to inquire about the costs of the resulting overwork, exhaustion, and self-sacrifice” (p. 452). The implication is that, in addition to the organizing, sense making, and intrinsic rewards that result from work calling, it is also terrain for political contestation.

Another conclusion they reach points to the contributions of a critical perspective of workplace spirituality and motivations of a transcendent purpose. This study contributes to the intersecting spaces of meaningful work and spiritual communication. It also points to a connection between meaningful work and work as a calling. However, their conclusion of calling is limited in scope and understanding. In order to categorize peoples’ perceptions of calling, they analyze three popular culture books. While popular culture artifacts provide a significant resource for analysis they can only provide a limited understanding of a phenomenon that is lived out daily in the interactions of individuals.
The limitations of their study, likely influenced their perception of calling as a primary cause of the overworked, underpaid worker. Another factor that influenced their understanding was applying Weberian concepts to calling as their primary frame, which provided them with only a partial understanding of calling. Future scholars must include a more expansive definition of calling by including how participants talk about work as a calling and what the rhetoric of work calling reveals.

We must operate with a variety of research lenses and points of view in our future studies regarding meaningful work, which includes a greater recognition of the rhetorical implications as well as a connection to spirituality in the workplace. Meaningful work is inevitably complicated, contextual and culturally influenced, and able to break through reified boundaries. Cheney et al. (2010) suggest that, “words can alternately narrow or broaden our vision, just as optical lenses can do” (p. 6). Solely focusing on secular practices within organizations to account for meaningfulness is similar to using one type of lens to survey a particular landscape. As scholars, we must account for multiple viewpoints that demonstrate the depth of the world around us, such as the intrinsic richness of work calling as an avenue for realizing meaningfulness.

Certainly meaningful work and spirituality are not the same thing. However, honoring multiple perspectives and marginalized voices also includes paying more attention to the complementarity existing between spiritual communication and meaningful work, one of which is the concept of work calling. Recognizing the political nature of meaningful work suggests that meaningful/work derived from a sense of calling is inherently rhetorical. Lair et al., (2008) argues that (p. 178):
...meanings of work are embedded in socially or historically created notions of self and spirituality, taken-for-granted organizational practices, and hierarchical cultural norms, all of which affect workplace members’ and societal articulations of the possible meanings of work.

When scholars recognize an individual’s orientation to work as being framed through his or her perception of a work calling, they can better comprehend how individuals negotiate organizational practices, hierarchical cultural norms, and experience meaningfulness. For example, when work is viewed as toil it may negatively affect one’s job satisfaction, motivation, and faith in the workplace. Work can be elevated through “spiritual reframing,” which could transform one’s understanding of work as a sense of duty to meditation/form of worship. (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 141; see also Krone 2001). Identification with a work calling is not only related to spiritual communication and/or meaningful work, it also points to the underlying power of organizational rhetoric.

Organizational Rhetoric

Organizational communication continues to reveal new ways of what constitutes as organizing, evident in the evolving rhythm of defining and redefining the current and future foci in which boundaries are challenged or blurred. This is apparent in the emergence of organizational rhetoric. As one of the “new directions” discussed at the 1981 Alta conference, organizational rhetoric has sustained a growing interest over the last two decades, proving that it is not merely a passing trend, but a significant contributor to the present and future development of organizational communication.

---

2 Krone (2001) analyzed an organization that conducted monthly public meetings between union leaders and managers to discuss budgetary information. “While each supervisor dutifully reported the data required in each of these areas, one of these enlivened his presentation by going on to reframe absenteeism as something called ‘presenteesim’ in which he then publically recognized two of his employees for not having missed a day of work in 17 years” (p. 30).

3 First Conference on Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Communication at Alta, Utah in 1981. See also Tompkins & Wanca-Thibault, 2001.
For example, interpretive and critical paradigms employ organizational rhetoric to demonstrate that organizations are dynamic, not static. Interpretive scholars motivated by organizational rhetoric acknowledge agency and view language as an action-oriented process, recognizing that work identities are central in providing us with a sense of personal meaning (Cheney, 1983; Burke 1973). Some critical scholars contend that organizational rhetoric lacks a more direct focus on power-laden issues; however, I argue that communication which persuades us to identify with a given message intrinsically involves power (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Therefore, the ontology of organizational rhetoric and a critical paradigm can be quite complimentary. For example, organizational rhetoric assumes that power is located within what an organization “recognize[s] as what is, what is good and what is possible” (Mumby, 1989, p. 302, emphasis in original). For the worker, this implicitly sanctions or legitimates what is valued and silences what is perceived as unacceptable.

Organizational rhetoric assumes that communication in and about work can function as an argument and as a means of identification. The inherent persuasion (Cheney, 1983; Crable, 1990) in organizing and the collective rhetorical messages imbedded in work communication suggests that organizational rhetoric is a multivocal and contested term. It is a multivocal, contested term in that meaning is best understood in the context it is constructed and in the recognition that work has more than one appropriate meaning. The same message can mean different things to different people, can inspire acceptance and identification in one individual, and aversion in another. I
understand organizational rhetoric as the “description, interpretation, analysis, and critique of organized persuasion” (Cheney & Lair, 2004, p. 60; see also Cheney & McMillan, 1990); which can be located in discourses and meaning-making processes in and about work. Based on this definition, I suggest that work calling is part of the organized persuasion that exists in work life. Organizational rhetoric encompasses not only internal and external rhetoric produced by and within an organization, but it also incorporates any rhetorical messages about how individuals are to understand their work roles and identities within work life and the organizing process itself (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Therefore, how we make sense of organizational life is inherently rhetorical. As soon as we begin the process of organizing, we make choices. As soon as we involve the act of making choices, we are including and excluding; making choices based on messages that influence sensemaking, such as what is considered to be good and not good, appropriate and not appropriate. The act of organizing means the selection between alternatives and in choosing alternatives we identify with certain messages over others. The process of message selection involves what we are persuaded will be a fit for the type of organizing we are conducting. It follows then that the construction of what work means to an individual is inherently a rhetorical process. Work calling is one way of understanding what work means and what identity in work involves.

This approach enriches my own study by incorporating the local knowledge of workers to document the organizing power of naming and labels that generate work values and strategies. Relevant scholarship includes Cheney and McMillan’s (1990) application of Weber’s (1987) concept of an organization as a social entity in order to
identify the distinct strategies of corporate rhetoric. Their researcher revealed particular messages that enabled workers to find personal meaning within the context of the workplace. Clair’s (1996) study on the colloquialism, “a real job” demonstrates the power of labels and the way individuals identify with them. Her research reveals the persuasive dynamic of everyday discourse regarding what constitutes a real job, and what is not valued as legitimate work. Participants described feeling compelled by this colloquialism, accepting or resisting the definition of a real job based on its dominant social meaning rather than what their work really meant to them. Clair’s piece provides a clear example of how a collection of individual voices can be used to analyze organizational rhetoric. It demonstrates the ways in which people conceptualize work, how this understanding influences worker identities, and how it legitimizes certain forms of work over others. Rhetoric influences how organizations are perceived, how workers are perceived, and how workers perceive themselves. It shapes the conception of their identities within organizational life. Thus, organizational rhetoric attends to the way messages in and about work are created, sustained, and challenged (Hartelius & Browning, 2008).

Moreover, critical scholars motivated by organizational rhetoric focus on the way dominant work meanings marginalize other interpretations (e.g. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). This perspective takes into account who is making the argument and how these messages are embedded in organizational communication, allowing for an uncovering of workplace behaviors that are communicatively (de)valued, and the societal consequences (e.g. Crawford, 2009). Organizational rhetoric can also be used to examine underlying values systems that are privileged within work life choices. For example, Hoffman and
Cowan (2008) analyzed the corporate ideology of *Fortune* Magazine’s 2004 “100 Best Companies to Work for” based on the use of work/family policies (p. 227). The rhetorical implications of this study include understanding the power and politics located within the term “work/family.” While this term may appear ambiguous, it rhetorically privileges families with children and the privacy of the traditional family, rather than including alternative possibilities for valuing personal life outside of the workplace (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). The key point here is that rhetoric is not an “add-on” for organizational communication research, rather it is interconnected with the human experience of work (Cheney et al., 2010). When the subjective components of work, such as a search for meaning or inclusion of the spiritual are not recognized, organizations marginalize or deny certain identities rhetorically. Previous research informs us that individuals choose to identify with particular messages about work. Organizational rhetoric allows us to look at how those particular meaning constructions occur. The negotiated tensions existing in the domains of meaning and spiritual dimensions of work necessarily involve an underlying rhetoric.

I suggest that organizational rhetoric can provide a direct connection between meaningful work and spiritual communication as it relates to work calling. The intersubjectivity of meaningful work as well as spirituality (Cheney et al., 2008; Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008) calls for a greater look at the rhetorical implications, contributions, and consequences of what motivates and satisfies organizational members who ascribe to work as a calling. If work is understood as way of expressing and constructing meaning, and persuasion is an inherent part of this process, a
key question to ask is what rhetorical components influence the interpretation of meaningful work, spirituality, and work as a calling?

Within the framework of organizational rhetoric, the concepts of meaningful work and spiritual communication merit further study in connection with work calling. At times, they may even coalesce. For example, Cheney et al. (2008) maintain that work which may not be perceived as meaningful can be “spiritually reframed” in order to contribute to a larger purpose, enact a sense of worship, or honor God and thereby motivate the worker. Therefore, work becomes a means of exhibiting one’s relationship the transcendent other. Similarly, when an individual is able to view work as having a clear connectedness to a greater purpose, it reframes the labor by attributing it with more meaning than “just a job” or career. Understanding work as a calling can spiritually or internally reframe labor by underlying it with responsibility, purpose, and agency. We cannot overlook the persuasive activity in language choice during spiritual reframing. McGuire’s (2010) research supports the idea that spiritual communication is part of the organizing structure within organizational communication. She specifically analyzes the commodification of spiritual labor, defining it as using the worker’s spiritual beliefs as part of the service or products an organization offers. Organizational rhetoric involves asking questions such as, what rhetorical strategies compel an organizational member to submit to a commodification of deeply held beliefs? How do individuals communicatively reframe labor to be understood as a calling?

The nature of work calling necessitates research that acknowledges multiple perspectives from secular and spiritual positions, as well as the recognition of how it can
both constrain and enable organizational members. Communication research on meaningful work (Cheney et al., 2008), intrinsic motivation and work purpose (Scott, 2007), emotional and spiritual labor (McGuire, 2010; Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2007), faith and identity in the workplace (Feldner, 2007), and managing tensions between secular and sacred practices within a religious institution (Kirby et al., 2006) create academic space for the study of work calling through an organizational communication perspective. While the last decade has generated communication research relevant to the topic of meaningful work and spirituality (Cheney et al., 2010; Cheney et al., 2008; Harter & Buzzanell, 2007; Scott, 2007; Kirby et al., 2006; Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006), there remains a gap in analyses involving how workers communicate about work as a calling and implications of such messages. The current study seeks to contribute to filling this gap.

Work calling is a compelling term. Rhetorically, it requires us to sort through distinctions such as whether work calling is an occupation that a person has (has chosen) or what a person’s work is (was given to them), or both. Then, the question becomes, “to what degree is work calling constituted by rhetoric” (Cheney & Lair, 2004). At its core, work calling bespeaks of interaction, a visceral connectedness between the individual and the work they are called to do. Guinness (2003) describes calling as “the most comprehensive reorientation and the most profound motivation in human experiences” (p. 7). While the concept of calling has religious roots, referring to people who were “called by God to do morally and socially significant work” (McGuire, 2010), perceptions of calling can also encapsulate feelings of a general higher purpose. Calling
has been attributed to figuring out one’s niche as a worker, and using it for service to the world (Cheney et al. 2008) resulting in a high quality of life. While who or what calls a person may differ from a spiritual or secular perspective, I argue that communication about work as a calling disrupts the reified understanding of organizations as concrete, blurring the lines between public and private spheres, namely because the personal beliefs and perceptions of work have a bearing on one’s overall life. How we approach our work in some part reflects how we approach life.

Consequently, the current economy and contemporary notions of work have created an “overworked culture” (Cheney et al., 2008), which can result in physical and emotional deterioration as well as a decrease in work productivity and efficiency. Because people are meaning-making beings, this deficit an organizational quality of life can have significant costs to a person’s identity. Similarly, for many individuals spirituality resides at the core of their identity, not merely a character decoration that can be discarded “at some nebulous threshold between their private and organizational lives” (Lair et al., 2008, p. 173) like a jacket or pair of shoes. However, in order for scholars to analyze and understand how communication about calling “competes and collides” with other work concept such as “just a job” or career, we need to listen and learn about actual calling messages (Scott, 2007, p. 263). Thus, further investigation is needed in the use of a calling “framework” from the perspective of the worker. This could include questions such as, what does the called self look like in the context of organizational communication? How do organizations make use of work as a calling? What messages contribute to a person’s understanding of work calling? Organizational rhetoric
particularly provides a unique investigation into persuasion and identity embedded in the social implication of work calling.

I argue that the intersection between spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric provides compelling reasoning for future research in work calling. Towards that end, I have reviewed prominent spiritual communication scholarship as it relates to organizations, emphasizing particular complexities and tensions related to faith in the workplace, including the role of secular hegemony and means for disrupting such power. The implications for organizational communication are clear: workplace spirituality merits scholarly attention as a meaning-making construct in the process of organizing in the lives of many individuals. Secondly, I assessed contemporary literature about meaningful work in organizational communication, which revealed that this concept is intersubjective, blurs professional and personal spheres of life, and is inherently political. Lastly, I demonstrated how spiritual communication and meaningful work are integrated in my own research on work calling and its rhetoric. In the following section, I argue for the study of work calling from a distinctively communicative perspective, noting where such an approach aligns with and diverges from organizational psychology, sociology, theology, and business.

**Calling as a Distinctively Communicative Act**

Communication researchers have much to gain, and much to contribute, by paying sustained attention to the way people, as well as organizations and society as a whole, talk about work as a calling. The meaning we attribute to work, whether we view it as job, career, or calling is embedded with rhetorical power. Yet, at the current time,
there is very little research on this concept in communication literature. In order to construct a contemporary conceptualization of work calling it is necessary to go back to the major themes existing in interdisciplinary fields. Based on the discussion in Chapter One of the domains of psychology, sociology, theology and business, they offer four overarching themes of work calling as: (a) both a spiritual and secular perspective, (b) historically, culturally, and socially situated, (c) a potentially liberating and marginalizing construct, and (d) interconnected between extrinsic (outcomes) and intrinsic (needs/well-being). By highlighting the aforementioned themes, I demonstrate that an organizational communication approach can enhance the investigation of work calling in theory and praxis.

**Calling includes both spiritual and secular perspectives**

Work calling includes both spiritual (Dik et al., 2009) and secular (Hall & Chandler, 2005) perspectives. As previously noted, Hardy (1990) framed his book as interdisciplinary, incorporating “theology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, and economics” (p. xii). Notably missing is the field of communication. Why is that? Calling, particularly from a theological point of view, is inherently communication-based. It involves a caller and the called, the former calling the latter into a relationship expressed through every sphere of life, including work. This notable exclusion of communication as a worthy field of study should not continue. As communication scholars, we must establish our own voice into the current dialogue. Work is a major contributor in the process of orienting and integrating people into society (Hardy, 1990). Often our lives, approach to time, and relationships are connected to our work. Yet within
these assertions, there is an implicit “how.” A “how” that communication studies can seek to answer. How does the institution of work as calling integrate persons in our society? How does work calling orient our lives and organize our time? How does it put us in touch with people? The answer is, in and through communication.

Spirituality is part of work calling perceptions for many people; however, it is not a necessary factor in a work calling approach. While Novak’s (1996) theological predisposition points to an inclusion of the spiritual, he argues that calling can be an entirely secular experience as well: “Atheists and agnostics and those who are just not particularly religious are likely to have just as strong a sense of calling as religious persons, although they would not use the word God” (p. 39). Instead, a secular approach is one that connects with an inner drive for purpose found in the combination of skill, passion, and influence for the greater good. Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) exploratory study examined the degree to which first-year college students are motivated by a work calling. They found that, “more than 40% of students believed that having a calling was mostly or totally true of themselves” (p. 35). A second finding revealed that while spirituality or religion may be a part of some individual’s perceived work calling, it is not inherent in a work calling approach. Duffy and Sedlacek point out (p. 37):

It seems that students are not connecting their levels of religiousness with their levels of calling. It may be that for incoming students, a calling has little religious connection but rather refers to a career one is “meant to do.”

They suggest that “a more thorough understanding is needed of how college students interpret the term calling, and this may be best accomplished through qualitative studies” (p. 39). By providing evidence of the lived experiences of participants through analysis of
their local knowledge, communicative scholars can engage in question about what messages influence people in an understanding of occupational calling.

Work calling recognizes the intrinsic joy and meaning that can be derived from work, which allows an individual to express a central part of his or her identity while also serving the community in a fulfilling way (Berg et al., 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzensniewski et al., 1997). While we cannot ignore the need for economic stability, finding meaning beyond monetary gain is a significant factor for many workers. The way people perceive their work yields influence over their general happiness (Steger et al., 2010). Research also shows that people have shifted their view of work from sole function of paying the bills, to a way of seeking and experiencing “life purpose and spirituality fulfillment from their careers” (Steel & Bullock, 2009, p. 273). Studies indicate that this attitude towards work has a stronger connection to job satisfaction than “objective job characteristics” and “has shown promise as a predictor of better individual and organizational functioning (Steger et al. 2010, p. 82). It is a way of anchoring the self by intrinsic means. Yet, what does work calling actually mean to the individual? What narratives, themes, or metaphors exist in a person’s communication about work calling? Work perceptions related to both the spiritual and secular notions of calling involve an understanding that work is not just an individual act; it can be extended beyond personal goals, to a greater purpose (Cheney et al., 2008).

While the concept of calling may be irrelevant to some people and the importance of calling may vary, “across individuals and groups”, the growing evidence “suggests the terms are relevant for a large enough proportion of research participants to warrant the
attention of scholars and practitioners” (Dik et al., 2009, p. 62). From organizational psychology and business literature, it is clear that spirituality and religion are no longer taboo in corporate America. For example, “as employees search for more meaning at work and as business leaders seek more socially responsible approaches to business and new ways to motivate and inspire workers” (Garcia-Zamar, 2003, p. 355). Organizational communication scholars are starting to address the fact that solely focusing on work as “secular representations fails to capture the range of possibilities for communicating and organizing” (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006). Further empirical research about work calling seems like the logical next step.

**Calling as historically, culturally, and socially situated**

In response to the current workforce uncertainties, the rapidly changing social and cultural expectations of the contemporary worker (Bauman 2008, 2000), organizational communication can illuminate particular tensions within work calling by analyzing everyday discourse, organizational messages, and societal ideologies regarding work approach. Given that the meaning of work calling varies across history, it is important to acknowledge the main historical roots of calling and the contemporary perspectives. Weber’s analysis of the “Protestant Ethic” included a focus on, “individualism, asceticism, and work as a calling productive of rational economic behavior” (Goldstein & Eichorn, 1961, p. 557). Historically, calling focuses primarily on religious obligations to secure salvation through work success. However, a contemporary perspective of calling focuses on “a sphere of responsibility” (Guinness, 2003), which includes intentionally using one’s abilities and passions for the good of local and/or global communities (Steger

Communication studies can enrich the understanding of relationships between organizational cultures and work calling. To maintain the pace of the new culture of the flexible worker some managers are seeking to “contribute to worker satisfaction and community well-being through a thorough and thoughtful implementation of the philosophy” (Garcia-Zamar, 2003, p. 162). However there is also a (p. 162):

…temptation to graft superficial changes onto existing corporate structures, and thus acquiring employee loyalty by changing the packaging but not the end product, is one of the principal pitfalls of this trend.

Here again is where a critical organizational communication perspective is vital in understanding power differentials within organizational structures, expressed in a work culture, which could constrain and/or enable the perception of calling.

The social and cultural situated nature of work calling can be also demonstrated through the study of communicative dynamics such as material rhetoric and discourse about blurred boundaries. Material rhetoric is any work artifact or physical representation of work, which functions as strategic persuasion. Organizational communication scholars attending to material rhetoric, focus on aesthetics/art, building structures and even the physical body as a constitutive force (Aschcraft & Mumby, 2004; Blair & Michel, 2004). Studying the influence of material rhetoric provides a means of extrapolating the deeper meaning of the site’s surroundings and objects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Spiritual life is not bound to religious institutions, and what an organization values is often revealed in material rhetoric (Ratner, 2009). The opportunity for material rhetoric to serve as a
persuasive ruse for capitalistic approaches to production could also serve as a hegemonic relocation of finding purpose. Companies today, “to a higher degree aim to provide a spiritual world where employees can invest their knowledge, feelings and identity to produce fertile ground for growth and prosperity” in order to keep them at work for longer hours (Ratner, p. 108). The tangible nature of material rhetoric provides a certainty that could serve as an anchoring source making “the sacred durable and hereby stabiliz[ing] the contingent and fluid character of the sacred in modern life” (Ratner, p. 108). This socio-cultural manipulation of a person’s pursuit of work calling is a communication issue. Analyzing organizational artifacts as material rhetoric related to work calling could contribute to an understanding of how work culture influences such meanings, as well as what possible message organizations choose to highlight to their workers in various hierarchical levels. This leads to a discussion on work as life or work as part of life.

The situatedness of work calling is evident in the recognition in the blurring spheres of time, place, and space. For example, Oats, Hall, Anderson, and Willingham (2008) specifically engage in the idea of multiple callings for career women who are also mothers. They suggest that acknowledging the fact that more than one work calling can exist for an individual, allows these callings to act as mediators between two or more significant workspaces. Critical and feminist organizational communication scholars would do well to engage in this area of research by analyzing the narratives of workers with multiple workplace callings, particularly where one type of work is marginalized as “less than” others. Ashcraft (2005) suggests that narratives shape our lives, providing a
vital arena in the study of resistance and social change. Additionally, the domains of psychology, sociology, and theology all note the tendency of blurred boundaries between work and personal life. For example, a growing number of workers in contemporary society “find that leading compartmentalized lives is no longer a viable strategy for life or for work. They want to bridge the gap between Sunday and Monday” (Miller, 2003, p. 310). Research shows that community outside of work has greatly diminished. Work now acts as our dominant socializing force, “the plain fact is that for most people, community is either a rare experience or a distant, even mocking, ideal” (Guinness, 2003, p. 94). Because people link their personal identity with who they are professionally, it is no longer realistic to think that home life does not influence work life and vice versa (Garcia-Zamar, 2003).

Communication scholars taking note of this articulate a re-envisioning of organizational boundaries, based on empowerment theory and practice, addressing four problematics: (a) questioning boundaries, (b) integrating identity, (c) embracing practical knowledge, emotionality, and spirituality, and (d) seeking diverse voices (Kirby et al., 2003). Therefore, a communicative understanding of work calling necessarily includes social organizing and the collaboration of individuals across “bounded spheres of life” (Broadfoot et al., 2008, p.154).

**Calling as a liberating and marginalizing construct**

Interdisciplinary research on work calling reveals situations in which it serves as a liberating mechanism and other instances where it could be used to marginalize individuals or groups. Organizational psychologists have linked workplace calling to
“higher levels of work satisfaction, life satisfaction, and self-concept, clarity, and lower levels of depression” (Steger et al., 2010, p. 83). Studies also reveal that individuals with a work calling perspective “were more likely to make personal sacrifices and devote extra time to their jobs” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, p. 593). Individuals who give primacy to an intrinsic work motivation are more likely to lack work boundaries (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Few communication scholars have taken a direct look at this notion of burnout and work approaches involving subjective success (e.g., meaningful work, spirituality in the workplace, etc.) One exception is Golden, Piedmond, Ciarrocchi, and Rodgerson’s (2004) empirical study on burnout among clergy members. Burnout is conceptualized as a “growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment” (p. 115). They found that burnout could be a significant threat, not only to one’s work, but also to one’s sense of calling and identity. Golden et al.’s findings suggest that when a person with a perceived work calling experiences a disconnect with the transcendent or internal motivation, work becomes disorienting to one’s whole sense of self.

Aspects of communication that remain poorly understood and pushed back into the shadowy corners of scholarly activity, gather the dust of ignorance. Organizational communication scholars cannot afford to miss the dark side of work calling. Wrzesniewski (2002) maintains that people who perceive of their work as a calling are more likely to work overtime regardless of whether the company pays for this time. Experiencing burnout from either a self-inflicted, overzealous passion or corporatized instrumentality of the overworked is one example of how work calling could be misappropriated and misused (Lips-Wiersma, Dean, and Fornaciari, 2009). Clearly, there
is a lovely bright side to calling that serves to inspire workers, organizational culture, and even society. Yet, Cheney et al. (2008) encourage us to “inquire about the value of work and the reasons why people continue to focus so much energy on work” (p. 153). This involves examining the darker motivations as well.

Marginalization also occurs when work calling only references certain jobs, or those viewed as “real” (Clair, 1996). Hardy (1990) recognizes that pursuing work as a calling is often a privilege and that this perspective is not fixed. First, many people do not have the luxury of choosing between jobs, based on financial needs or the current economy. Second, work calling, like any other part of identity is not fixed or static. It is dynamic and complex. Research shows that a dominant assumption in contemporary Western society is that “work is what persons do for wages: real work is paid work” (Jensen, 2006, p. 2). The reduction of labor to pay eliminates a variety of work such as domestic, volunteer, and artistic activities. This concern echoes communication scholar, Clair’s (1996) study on the colloquialism, “a real job.” Clair’s research demonstrates that for many people, an individual’s worth and general life satisfaction, is attributed to their perception of work in and through the way it is communicated. Similarly, Jensen (2006) points out that “defining work as paid labor ignores much of the world’s work and marginalizes millions of workers” (p. 3). With this in mind, the conceptualization of work perspectives as a “calling, career, or job” may not be comprehensive enough, because it does not allow for work callings to be expressed outside of what one is paid to do. This greatly limits people who view their primary source of work as a way of funding what they really feel is their occupational calling (Hardy, 1990). An individual’s primary work
calling may be outside of his or her primary place of employment. Furthermore, an
individual’s socio-economic or socio-cultural status may impact his or her ability to enact
a work calling as the primary source of income (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Organizational
communication scholars can shed light on these gaps of understanding by seeking out
multiple perspectives and the voices of the “other”.

Within organizational communication literature, there does not appear to be many
examples of how calling is demonstrated through the lives of organizational members.
Two organizational communication studies stand out as exceptions. Scott’s (2007)
empirical study analyzed the narrative metaphors of calling and career at a small
Christian university. Smith et al. (2006) investigated the use of a spiritual framework,
such as calling, to socially construct and legitimate nonprofit work. The former looked at
calling articulated by undergraduates the latter as one of several spiritual framing
constructs. However, further understanding of workplace calling is needed.

Calling as intrinsically and extrinsically connected

The subjective, intrinsic pursuit of work as a calling has very tangible results.
Researchers have found that there is a direct connection to workplace spirituality and
profitability (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005). Not only is there a (p. 84):

…dramatic correlation between an organization’s spirited culture and its
profitability but also found that, in some cases, the more spirited companies
outperformed the others by 400 percent-500 percent in terms of net earnings,
return on investment, and shareholder values.

Sauser’s (2005) essay on business ethics is one of the only studies that does includes a
look at business as a calling. Sauser describes ways that business leaders can apply their
own sense of calling in the corporate world by paying “particular attention focused on (a)
creating an ethical organizational culture, (b) demonstrating corporate social responsibility, and (c) providing servant leadership” (p. 345). However, his analysis is strictly theoretical. The next step is to examine how working adults actually talk about calling as it relates to their organizational lives.

Recognizing that in today’s Western culture people spend more time at work than anywhere else (Roels, 2003) and that work is not amoral (Cheney et al, 2010), means understanding what values people place upon their work and how those values guide work perceptions. The very ethics of business are often driven by a goal of productivity and efficiency, over the quality of the work environment, culture, and mission. Organizational communication scholars attending to meaningful work and spiritual communication should explore how the different approaches to work calling encourage particular views of work and how these views are enacted. A strong sense of work calling is related to better health, psychological support in times of job stress, loss of job, or occupational transition (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). This is significant when the most powerful form of decreased job satisfaction is occupational stress (Jensen, 2006). It is important to note that experiencing work as a calling does not inoculate an individual from negative work outcomes. However, objective success typically feels most satisfying when psychological success also occurs.

Several academic domains do point to a scholarly gap in the theory and praxis of work calling. However, there is only a certain amount of accolade for those who point out such a gap. What is to be done after realizing this? I suggest that qualitative analyses of everyday interactions involving work calling are necessary. In the concluding section, I
provide a brief summary of how previous interdisciplinary literature has distinguished between work as a job, career, and calling. In the next chapter (Chapter Three) I further explain why a qualitative analysis, derived from the local knowledge of participants, offers a deeper glimpse at the way work calling is conceptualized and enacted.

**Differentiating between “Just a Job,” Career, and Calling**

As previously mentioned, within other scholarly domains (e.g., organizational psychology), studies are starting to connect meaningful work and spiritual communication with the concept of work calling. However, one current challenge facing researchers is “how to characterize the key facets of a calling,” which includes understanding what makes it distinct “from separate, but similar constructs” (Hall and Chandler, 2005, p. 161). Wrzensiewksi et al. (1997) seminal study recognizes that viewing work as “just a job” means that work is a necessary source of income rather than pleasure; a career as a focus on power advancement through monetary gain and social recognition; and calling as a focus on work as a fulfilling and positive social impact. Dik et al. (2009) understand calling as involving three overlapping dimensions: (a) a transcendent summons experienced as originating beyond the self, (b) deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness, and (c) holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. Thus, I suggest Wrzensiewksi et al. (1997) Dik et al.’s (2009) research demonstrates the distinctions between job, career, and calling well. However, by situating their conceptualizations from a communicative lens, I also underscore how such understandings remain limited without further knowledge of the way in which participants’ articulate work calling through their own lived experiences.
Work as “Just a Job”

Individuals who view work as a job view it as a means of making enough money to support their lives outside of their work. It does not necessarily offer financially security or the promise of any worthwhile advancement; rather, it is just a necessity of life, similar to breathing or sleeping. They do not apply significant talents, nor do they perceive their job as particularly valuable to society. Here, the weekends are the reward for suffering through five days of toil at work.

Based on the aforementioned literature, from a communicative lens, work as “just a job” involves communication in and about work that references this activity as primarily a means to an end, rather than connected to any type of skill, passion, and greater good. Discourse is focused on financial rewards as a necessity rather than pleasure or fulfillment. Work as a job is not a major part of life, nor does the individual feel that this work contributes to the greater good of society. With this communication-based definition in mind, I also suggest that what is missing in Wrzesniewski et al.’s (1997) tri-part conceptualization of job, career, and calling is the understanding that multiple work callings exist (e.g., Berg et al., 2010; Oats et al., 2008). If multiple callings exist, it is shortsighted to assume that if one type of work is a means to an end, that the individual does not experience work calling in another aspect of life. For example, many aspiring actors obtain local jobs to pay their bills, while pursuing their love of the theater; or someone who values being a parent as a worthwhile job, applying skill, passion, and service in this role, but is also dedicated to his or her occupation as a professor. In fact, Berg et al.’s (2010) suggest that, “individuals with additional callings are less prone to
long-term regret than individuals with missed callings…individuals are able to use
crafting techniques to pursue their occupational callings outside of the workplace” (p.
989). This concept of multiple work callings is further attended to in the section on work
as a calling.

Work as a Career

Individuals who view their work as a career are primarily motivated by role/rank
advancement often related to a Western cultural dynamic of bureaucratic, traditional,
corporate, or managerial emphasis (Smith et al., 2006). Successful careers are identified
by performance outcomes, concrete and measurable items such as salary and promotion.
These individuals do not expect to be in their current work position five years from now,
rather they hope to move on to a better, higher level role either within the same company
or with a new one. Not all of the work they do is motivating, but these individuals know
that if they perform well in their current position, it will catapult them to the one they
really want. According to Scott (2007), a career ethic is not necessarily as self-serving as
Wrzesniewski et al.’s (1997) model. Rather, Scott refers to this type of worker as having
an “entrepreneurial self”, with the goal of cultivating “the ethos of self-guidance and self-
respectability” (p. 264). The techniques of the careerist worker include, “self-packaging,
self-promotion, and self-regulation” (p. 264). Scott connects the “life-long careerist” to
the decentering and uncertainty of the contemporary workplace (p. 265, e.g. Bauman
2008, 2000). For the careerist worker this means learning and mastering new sets of
norms that differentiate everyday process, behaviors, and interactions with the world.
These individuals certainly may desire to make a contribution to society, but it does not feel like a success unless there is also an external recognition of success.

Thus, a communication-based understanding of \textit{work as a career} includes communication in and about work that primarily focuses on personal investment in their work in order to experience success through financial achievements, social recognition, promotions, and increased power in occupational structure. Their discourse is about occupational advancement (e.g., external rewards). One particular difference demonstrated in the exploration of motivations for careerists verses workers with a calling is that in calling narratives, intrinsic motivation includes a connectedness to a greater sense of purpose or social responsibility.

\textbf{Work as a Calling}

As previously noted, work calling can be perceived as a spiritual or secular construct. From a secular perspective (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) individuals who perceive of work as a calling include a strong belief that work is one of the most important parts of expressing their identity and experiencing overall life satisfaction. They feel good about their work because they love what they do and believe it helps make the world a better place. They often experience the majority of their community of friends from their place of employment, because of a shared value system. They most likely belong to several organizations and clubs relating to their work. From a spiritual perspective (Dik et al., 2009), individuals with a work calling approach their work as a multifaceted opportunity to exercise social responsibility, particular talents, and service to others. Work calling is unique to the individual and incorporates one’s skill in a way that
feeds an intrinsic desire. Hall and Chandler (2005) suggest that for an individual to recognize a personal work calling “that the person have a clear sense of identity, or self-awareness,” which is also referred to as “enhanced metacompetencies” (p. 163). Work calling also helps individuals to navigate their occupational path and their psychological success, demonstrating a strong self-awareness, drive, and adaptability, which allow them to “engage in the actions that are necessary to acquire those skills” (p. 163). Thus, work calling involving a spiritual or transcendent call influences the values embedded in work perspectives, “helps participants cope with challenges in their career developments, serves as sources of career-related support, and positively correlates with career decision self-efficacy and job satisfaction” (Dik et al., 2009, p. 626).

Therefore, a communicative understanding of work as a calling includes communication in and about work that involves an overarching sense of meaning and purpose, motivated by a transcendent or internal desire to utilize one’s talents and passions, in order to positively contribute to society. These individuals believe what they do for a living is a direct reflection of their whole identity; they are driven by an enjoyment of fulfilling and socially useful work. They recognize their work as their sphere of responsibility, conscious of communicating with integrity, and an ethic of compassionate justice. When work calling is experienced from a spiritual perspective, the individual is motivated to pursue their work for the sake of the internal religious/spiritual experiences itself, not for any secondary gain. If work is pursued for external religious recognition, this approach would fall under the careerist worker mentality.
I also acknowledge the presence of multiple callings. Here, the primary work itself may not fully capture the individual’s passion or focus directly on his or her abilities, but it is a part of work calling rhetoric. Either work provides financial security which allows an occupational calling to exist outside of the workplace, or the work itself feeds a certain part of the individual’s sense of work calling but is not the complete fulfillment of a work calling. Within both perspectives, the primary occupation is distinctive from work as a “just a job”, in that it is not a means to an end, but a dynamic moderator of multiple callings. Therefore, if multiple occupational callings exist, then the inquiry moves beyond a tri-part conceptualization of work approach. The necessary next step is research that involves qualitative analyses that engages with the voices of participants.

Summary

Communication in and about work continues to point to a general fascination with the core motivations that drive a person’s pursuit for purpose and meaning. In a recent study on multiple workplace callings from a psychology perspective, Berg et al. (2010) suggest that “organizational and occupational ideologies can provide rhetoric that legitimates the experience of one’s current occupation as a calling or marginalizes the experience of a calling as unprofessional or inappropriate in a work context” (p. 990). They call for future studies to focus more on qualitative (rather than quantitative) research, specifically because it could explore factors such as “the ways in which organizational cultures, social structures, and interpersonal interactions impact the process of pursuing callings” (p. 990). Grounded in a particular understanding of spiritual
communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric the present study contributes to the knowledge about how we communicatively (re) produce our perceptions of work as a calling by giving primacy to the lived experiences of participants.

In sum, as an area of study, work calling is not currently well defined. I sought to contribute to an organizational communication-based theory and understanding of work calling by mapping its conceptual terrain navigated through the local language and experiences of participants. In the following chapter (Chapter Three), I explain my inductive, qualitative approach to data gathering and data analysis. In Chapters Four through Six I provide analysis and discussion of the current findings. I end this study with a summary of my claims, contributions, constraints, and implications for future research.
Chapter Three: Methods

The manner in which I seek to obtain knowledge begins with my understanding that it is within everyday communication that the formation of what people know of themselves, of others, and of the world around them becomes cemented in their minds as reality (Shotter & Gergen, 1997; Burger & Luckman, 1967). In the previous two chapters, I suggested that interweaving spiritual communication, meaningful work, and organizational rhetoric creates academic space for the study of work as a calling from a communication-based perspective. I place primacy on inquiries from the “inside” and the use of empirical and conceptual research to engage in analysis of meaning construction. Throughout the project, I advocate for the strengths of a qualitative approach to work calling, as it offers rich insights into this lived experience. Furthermore, qualitative methods and organizational rhetoric permit me to explore work calling as communicative—another key contribution of this project.

Work calling is what McGee (1980/1999) might call “pregnant with meaning” (p. 427), and in that understanding, I investigated how people talk about their experiences of work as a calling. As I previously demonstrated, while work calling has been theoretically conceptualized in interdisciplinary fields, it remains lacking in evidence of how the lived experiences and sensemaking discourses of participants serve to construct
this concept. Therefore, I conducted the present study with the following research question in mind:⁴

**RQ:** How do people from different professional domains communicate about their experiences of work as a calling?

In order to respond to the guiding question, I embrace qualitative inquiry, which allows for the traversing of worlds, deepening our insights into how individuals communicate in and about work calling.

Specifically, as I elaborate in this chapter, I recruited individuals who possess lived experiences of this work approach. My method for inquiry is qualitative, recognizing a particular strength in foregrounding an interpretive perspective, while also including a critical lens.⁵ I chose this method of gathering, interpreting, and presenting research in order to (a) analyze symbolic meaning-making processes located in multiple perspectives, and (b) begin mapping the conceptual terrain of the given concept. Thus, I embraced situated knowledge and reflective consideration of the ways in which my position as the researcher, and the research process itself, influenced the analysis of the local language of participants.

To better position readers for the data analysis that follows in Chapters Four through Six, in the current chapter I explain my methodological approach, protocol and

---

⁴ Originally, I also approached the data with rhetorical criticism, but as the project grew, I realized I was finding more salience at the interview level and decided to bracket the organizational level. However, the spirit of organizational rhetoric continued to inform my approach to this study through attention to how messages of work calling constituted identification among participants with work calling as a formative organizational worldview.

⁵ As an interpretive-critical scholar, I see an importance of letting the participants bring their own expertise to the study in order to analyze significant communicative patterns, which include but are not limited to issues of power. If power took up the entire scholarly gaze, researchers could miss the multiple perspectives sought in the interpretive.
logistics. First, I briefly address key characteristics of qualitative inquiry, as well as the spirit of organizational rhetoric which informed my methodological approach. Second, I provide a justification for using Owen’s (1984) thematic analysis. Lastly, I address the protocol and logistics, which explains the steps I took in data collection and data analysis.

**Qualitative Methods**

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to cover every turning point that shaped qualitative research, it is important to note what philosophical components contributed to its foundation (particularly within the organizational communication area, where the present study is positioned). The three primary theoretical traditions that influenced qualitative inquiry are: the *phenomenological* tradition (Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl, Alfred Shultz), the *sociocultural* tradition (focusing on ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, social construction, ethnography structuration theory, actor network theory), and the *critical* tradition (feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory, cultural studies) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Qualitative communication research began receiving consideration as its own legitimate form of study during the interpretive turn of the 1980’s, when many organizational communication theorists shifted their scholarly gaze toward organizational culture, meaning-making systems, performances, and everyday interaction. Qualitative communication research is emergent, interactionally constructed through the local knowledge of participants (Deetz, 1996), and concerned with the complexity of human interaction through interpreted meanings (Ellingson, 2009). More specifically, applying qualitative inquiry in organizational studies involves identifying the participants in the
organizing process and how they organize their activities. For example, Lewis, Hamel, and Richardson (2001) used twenty-six interviews with nonprofit administrators from twenty-three different organizations to develop a communication model for interactions with stakeholder groups. Qualitative inquiry prioritizes a focus on multiple perspectives and lived experiences of human behavior.

Originally, I also approached the data collection with a stronger inclusion of organizational rhetoric. As the project grew, I realized I was finding more salience in the micro level of the interviews, and decided to bracket the meso (organizational) level. However, the spirit of organizational rhetoric influenced my qualitative inquiry with a focus on how work calling messages influenced participant ontology and epistemology of work. In that understanding, I provide a short description of the perspective of organizational rhetoric which informed my own methodological approach.

Communication serves to shape and constrain work messages that we adopt as our own value systems, as our own way of living. Using qualitative methodology with an understanding of organizational rhetoric allows for a nuanced range of possibilities in the study of work calling (Deetz, 2005; Cheney & Lair, 2004). Work calling is a type of organizational message embedded with rhetorical implications relating to how and why individuals perform the work of organizing in a specific ways to achieve particular outcomes. Operating from the assumptions that multiple perspectives exist in a given context (Shotter & Gergen 1997; Berger & Luckman, 1965), and communication research serves to identify the taken for granted discursive practices that influence ways of organizing, it seems logical that incorporating organizational rhetoric contributes to
this endeavor. The constitutive nature within organizational rhetoric provides us with tools to examine “the range of persuasive activities,” within work life, in both implicit and explicit ways, with the goal of influencing a particular type of work identification (Cheney & Lair, 2004, p. 64). The meaning and rhetoric behind our symbolic use of language actively structures our work lives (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Thus, organizational life is constituted by rhetoric. Organizations and its members (re)produce rhetorical messages about work and its purpose. It follows then, that part of the identity of a worker includes their approach to work, which is constituted by rhetoric.

Weber (2008/1904) provided valuable insight to this phenomenon when he analyzed the Protestant work ethic. As a pervasive cultural construct of the period, Protestantism, and specifically Calvinism, rhetorically framed an individual’s orientation or approach to work. Work and success in work was a means for living out one’s religious beliefs, and even more significantly, manifested one’s temporal success and eternal favor. The Protestant work ethic did not emerge innocuously; rather, it developed over time through a rhetorical contestation of ideologies about the meaning of work and how a person should approach it. The current work culture and climate (as discussed in Chapter Two) has witnessed a shift from the environment Weber studied. Historically, work was thoroughly enmeshed in the messages of the Church to a context in which individuals negotiated and identified with a multitude of messages about work and approaches to work based on a desire to demonstrate and ensure eternal salvation.

This does not mean that the same rhetorical forces are not at work in the constitution of a person’s approach to work at present. It means that the rhetorical
messages are now more diffused, pluralistic, and offer a greater range of options with which individuals can identify. Yet, as noted previously, the space and place vacated by voluntary and familial associations has been consumed, in large part, by organizations and organizational life. Thus, the spirit of organizational rhetoric informed my qualitative inquiry as I sought to engage in participants’ worlds and particular work messages they identified with, in order to take a representative position while not attempting to generalize these messages to a broader population. Presently, I turn to my justification for using thematic analysis to assist me in an inductive, qualitative approach in data collection and analysis.

**Thematic Analysis**

Themes centralize subjects, distinguishing between the quality and characteristics of one subject from another. In communication scholarship, themes are the “building blocks” (Owen, 1985), used to identify particular communicative concepts that people assign to a given subject and/or context. Thematic analysis as a method allows researchers to render the local worlds of participants as understandable; they signify a “range of interpretations that are used to conceptualize and constitute” communication dynamics (Owen, 1984, p. 274). Certainly meanings exist outside of a given theme; however, thematic analysis disseminates concepts that participants foreground (versus background).

Thematic Analysis has evolved over the last decade, moving away from deductive theorizing to a means of organizing inductive data. That is, originally, Owen’s (1985, 1984) usage of thematic analysis in studying interpersonal communication held to the
dominant language of post-positive structures. However, in the last ten years, several interpretive and critical organizational communication scholars have applied Owen’s thematic analysis in their research methodologies. Thematic analysis has been used in studies about blue collar workers in a mining town (Lucas, 2011; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004) and Maoist influence in Chinese organizations (Lin & Clair, 2007). Gill and Ganesh (2007) incorporated Owen’s thematic analysis in a study of white women entrepreneurs. Using a snowball method, through several civic and private groups related to women entrepreneurs, Gill and Ganesh interviewed 23 women and applied thematic analysis as a means of examining the nature of empowerment in their discourse. Similarly, I sought to feature participants’ voices and deconstruct messages in the data related to unquestioned assumptions about work calling, in order to turn the abstract and hidden into something understandable and visible. I turn now to the protocol and logistics of my methodology.

Data Collection

Using qualitative inquiry, I sought to recognize multiple perspectives, where data is inductively constructed through the local knowledge of participants. To address the current research question, I analyzed the discursive practices of individuals from different work domains. In the sub-sections that follow, I address participant criteria and recruitment, as well as my approach to data collection and data analysis. My data collection primarily involved interviews, with some informal observations and artifact analysis.
Recruitment

In order to theorize calling as an organizational communication concept, given the different forms of work that exist today, my data selection process included criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling is appropriate when gathering participants who meet “some predetermined criterion of importance” (Smith, Arendt, Lahman, Settle, & Duff, 2006, p. 32; Patton, 2002). In the current study, the key was that participants identified themselves as being called to their work in some way. My criteria for determining if participants would qualify for the current study was if they perceived of themselves as having a work calling, not just the gatekeepers who identified them.

Thus, a few participants emailed me with questions before readily agreeing to be involved. For example: “I am someone who wrestled with the concept of ‘call’ in terms of ministry in the church in my previous career (10 years as an associate pastor) and now feel compelled for personal reasons to be working toward ending childhood cancer” (email from Ben, founder and CEO of a nonprofit child cancer research center). Similarly, in an email, Charlie, the musician, inquired if he still qualified for the study, even if he was not aware that he had pursued his work calling until several years into his profession. I encouraged participants with any concerns that I was not looking for “the” answer, but rather, wanted to hear from different people about their perspectives on work calling. I suggested that they decide for themselves whether they felt that they fit this category. Most participants responded with great enthusiasm, such as: “I was very intentional in my pursuit of employment in relation to calling!” (email from Carrie, Nonprofit Financial Development Officer).
I used criterion sampling in order to gather voices rather than an organizational voice. Thus, having multiple work domain perspectives provided more than one organizational culture/voice. Focusing solely on nonprofit companies would have been limiting for this study in at least two ways: first, nonprofits are known to give primacy to relational/social issues (e.g., to be mission-driven) which leaves out the corporate culture; second, corporations provide a large segment of organizational life, making it relevant to incorporate work calling research in this sector as well. Therefore, my criterion for data gathering included locating people from different socio-economic (lower, middle, and upper class) occupations, as well as for-profit and nonprofit sectors who view their work as a calling.

My intention in recruitment was to include a bouquet of voices, perspectives from various work professions such as individuals from: for-profit and nonprofit companies, the academic sphere, art sector, service industries, unpaid work, sports, and healthcare. The aforementioned list of possible participants was certainly not exhaustive. I generated a type of snowball sampling based on personal contacts I had within differing professional domains. The gatekeepers I initially contacted were from multi-national, for-profit companies, nonprofit organizations (large and small), stay-at-home parents, churches, and service industries.

The following steps outline how I connected with the potential participants identified by the gatekeepers: Step one, I sent an email to gatekeepers in these fields, with a letter attached and embedded in the email (See Appendix A). The email requested that they identify people who talk about work as a calling and asked if the gatekeepers were
willing to send possible participants an email with a summary of my study, including my contact information. *Step two,* gatekeepers who were willing to be involved, contacted the potential participants, providing the summary of my study and my contact information (See Appendix B). *Step three,* willing participants contacted me via email or phone. *Step four,* I provided options for a meeting time and stated that I was happy to meet wherever it was most convenient for them. Participants selected a meeting time that worked best for them and provided a designated location.

**Participants**

Not knowing whether individuals who perceive of their work as a calling would result in a small or large group of participants, my initial goal for recruitment was approximately 15-20 individuals. However, the response among participants was so positive—with most participants enthusiastically suggesting several other individuals I should interview—that I ended up interviewing 29 participants.

I obtained participant demographic information through a brief Demographic Questionnaire (See Appendix E). The participants were all from the United States. They ranged from 18 to 65+ years of age, with an average age ranging from 30-49. Two participants were between 18-29 years of age, fifteen were between 30-49, nine were between 50-64, and three were 65 years old and over. Twenty-three participants self-identified as white, with two participants identifying as Jewish-American, and one identifying as African American. Twenty-three participants self-identified as spiritual or religious; sixteen of the twenty-three specified their spirituality in terms of Christianity, while other responses included statements like “I believe in a higher power that manifests
itself through all life forms,” or “raised Catholic.” Four participants self-identified as nonspiritual or nonreligious. In terms of the educational level, participants were highly educated. One participant was a high school graduate, three participants had some college; seven were college graduates; two had some post-graduate work, and sixteen had post-graduate degrees. Income ranged from $0 - $80,000+ per year. Two participants did not answer this portion of the questionnaire. Three participants ranged in the $0 – $20,000; two ranged from $20,000 - $40,000; seven ranged from $50,000 - $75,000; fifteen ranged from $80,000+. Fourteen participants were women and fifteen participants were men. Professional occupations included: education, law, medical, wellness (massage therapy and acupuncture), psychology, business/for-profit, nonprofit, ministry, social work, artist (music, theatre, and painting), athletics, consulting, service industry, and stay-at-home parenting.

**Interviews, Informal Observations, and Artifact Analysis**

Studying communication about work as a calling based on the aforementioned research question and methodological approach involved an exploration of the complex and varying perspectives of workers from multiple work domains. By engaging with participants from different work domains, I observed and analyzed the ways in which participants talked about work calling. I turn now to explain the data collection process, which primarily included interviews with active field notes, informal observations, and some artifact analysis.

Interviews allowed me to analyze how participants organized work calling messages in their own words, providing an opportunity to explore their “experience,
knowledge, and worldviews” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 173). Field notes during interviews, informal observations, and artifact analyses focused on participants’ communicative environment as well as discourse they used, taking into account communicative meanings of key artifacts, work experiences, and cultural normative behaviors. This means of data collection offered me the ability to map the conceptual terrain of an emergent concept.

Data gathering primarily included recording social action through semi-structured interviews. I collected twenty-nine interviews from twenty-nine participants between January 2012 and April 2012 in the Northwest, West Coast, West, Midwest, and East Coast. Twenty-six interviews were conducted in-person in the Northwest or West. Three interviews, one in the East coast, one in the Midwest, and in the West coast, took place using video internet software (Skype). Interviews were conducted in various locations, designated by the participants. Ten interviews were conducted at local coffee shops, eleven interviews were conducted at participants’ place of work, six interviews were conducted in participants’ home, and two interviews were conducted at restaurants. My interview protocol was guided by my research question, regarding how people from various work domains communicate about work calling. As previously mentioned, the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, meaning that I provided questions to help orient the initial conversation with participants and their approach to work as a calling. However, participants were welcome to share whatever came to their minds. That is, using the initial questions as a starting place, participants were invited to share experiences of work that may or may not have derived from the intended question, co-
constructing the conversation process. Each interview began with friendly, informal conversation, after which I provided the participant with a consent form (Appendix D). Once s/he signed the consent form, I reviewed the main purpose of the study, reminding each participant what the initial email requesting participation stated, that the interview process was completely voluntary, confidential, and at any time during our conversation, s/he could refuse to answer any question or stop the interview. After the participants verbally acknowledged that they understood, we began the interview. All interviews were recorded. Once the interviews concluded, participants were given a brief Demographic Questionnaire to fill out (Appendix E).

After the interviews ended, I emailed each participant, thanking them for their time and inviting them to feel free to contact me with any other thoughts, or if they knew of anyone else who might be interested in participating in this study. As previously stated, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted between 20-90 minutes, with an average length of 52 minutes. I transferred the recorded interviews from the audio-recording device to my personal computer. Once these files were transferred, the existing files on the recording device were deleted. At this stage, all participants were given pseudonyms, with their audio files saved on my personal computer under those pseudonyms. The transcribed interviews totaled 671 pages (single space, twelve-point font, New Times Roman, with 1 inch margins).

During data collection, in order to provide further context for interview analysis, I incorporated active field notes, informal observations, and some artifact analysis. Field notes provided further description of the context surrounding transcriptions (Lindlof &
Taylor, 2011). Active field notes allowed me to record (verbal and nonverbal) interactions that may not have been evident on the audio-recordings. For example, when participants nonverbally emphasized their experiences (using hand gestures, eyes widening, long pauses, etc.), field notes about these instances signified such encounters as a type of forcefulness in discourse (Owen, 1984). In other words, if a participant paused for an extended period of time, or wiped a tear from his or her eye, this context placed greater priority on what was said, because of the manner in which it was communicated. Informal observations provided opportunities for me to investigate participants’ work environments. Eleven informal observations took place with participants who were willing to let me observe their work lives in action. Witnessing participants’ work spaces, interactions with other workers, clients, and/or family members, allowed me to explore the connection between what was said in the interviews and how such discourses were enacted.

I also incorporated artifact analysis, paying sustained attention to the material culture in the work lives of participants. Objects are not passive; their influence contributes to meaning construction, therefore within artifact analysis of material culture we can also explore organizational rhetoric (Clair’s, 1993). Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hack Barth, and Mathes (2008) suggest that analyzing the material practices in and about work is significant: “Examining why we work, how we work, and under whose yoke we work forces us to assess our role in the world of work, our place in this social scheme of labor” (p. 3). Including analysis of material culture allowed me to understand what participants “count as valuable work” and how they engaged with assigned meanings of
work (p. 4). In the same way, by visiting participants’ work environments and encountering their material worlds, I was able to contribute to an initial understanding of organizational rhetoric embedded in the lives of participants who perceive of their work as a calling. Examining the messages represented in corporeal, tangible objects enabled me to investigate how these often unquestioned, but powerful forms of persuasion contribute to message construction of work calling.

I looked for artifacts during interviews and informal observations. I was particularly interested in artifacts that represent the participants’ different meanings related to their work. For some, the artifact included the actual walls in their office, for others a cluster of pictures above their desk. Thus, I explored underlying messages that influenced individuals to identify with, or reinforce their identification related to, the concept of work calling. While each of these qualitative data gathering techniques contributed to the overall analysis, as readers will discover in Chapters Four through Six, the heart of the analysis is a thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions. Accordingly, I explore Owen’s (1984) thematic analysis, the contemporary uses of this method, and my own approach to thematic analysis.

**Data Analysis**

What we know to be true and how we know it to be true, establishes what we value as true (Charmaz, 2008). Language is perceived as a resource, particularly in building meaning (or truth) (Reissman, 2008; Owen, 1984). The value is on the

---

6 For example, Bell and Forbes’ (1994) study of office folklore engaged in textual analysis by theorizing how organizational members communicated resistance and pleasure through office decoration (e.g. cartoons, posters, etc.). By investigating the visual and verbal messages constructed in office spaces, Bell and Forbes contributed to an understanding of alternative and subverted discourses constructed in response to organizational control.
uniqueness of each individual’s experience. At the same time, qualitatively analyzing patterned sets of ideas in the local language of participants allows for a range of interpretations in the constituting and conceptualizing of human interaction (Owen, 1984). While patterns can occur, patterns do not take away humanness or agency. For example, Riessman (2008) argues that qualitative case studies are not population generalizations, but can lead to “theoretical propositions” which can often be “transferable” (p. 13). With this recognition, qualitative scholars can examine the organizational members’ stocks of knowledge (Berger & Luckman, 1965), constituted in the articulation of lived experiences, allowing for assumed common understandings and values within the participants’ accounts to become apparent.

My approach to the analysis of data is inductive, emphasizing an emergent, invested knowledge of situated practices within the lives of my participants. I sought to apply a “theoretical vocabulary” based on the local knowledge of my participants, observation of their work lives, and artifact analysis (Deetz, 1996, p. 196). A theoretical vocabulary is the product of using the participants’ terms and meanings to help make sense of the given concept by organizing data using their own words. As a result, my research process included repetitively testing “my tentative explanations against knowledge gained from ongoing interaction” with participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 9). As stated above, data collection involved interviews, informal observations, and artifact analysis. This included obtaining IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval and using informed consent documents for any participants involved.
There were several stages of analysis in the interpretive process. In the first round, I intentionally immersed myself in the data. Here, I listened to each audio-recorded interview and read through each interview transcript. The process of an initial “close reading” helped me to gain an overview of the data (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). This was followed by further readings, during which I looked for communicative patterns that materialized from the participants. Second, I used Owen’s thematic (1984) methodology to help unearth the patterns embedded in participant communication. Owen’s method involves paying attention to themes exhibited in recurrence (same thread of meaning in different words), repetition (repeated words, phrases, or even sentences), and forcefulness (dramatic pauses, major changes in volume, emphasizing an idea in a list of explanations such as “Here’s the main point I want you to get…”) (Zorn & Ruccio, 1998; Owen, 1984). During the second phase of data analysis, I also synthesized the complexities and paradoxes found in participants’ organizational life. Such messages located in the interviews, field notes, informal observations, and artifact analysis, allowed me to encounter the possible meanings of the work context in order to uncover the disseminations and enactments of work calling messages (Bell & Forbes, 1994). Third, I examined congruence and collapsed the patterned groups into thematic categories found in the participants’ communication.

From data analysis of participant communication, I found three dominant themes related to communication about work calling experiences. They are: (a) definitional markers, (b) inherent interaction, and (c) significant costs. I explore each of these themes in great detail, with their own particular sub-themes, in the following three chapters. For
now, I conclude with attention to ways I engaged in qualitative strengths, standards, and norms.

**Standards for Qualitative Process Evaluations**

Qualitative analysis and interpretation emphasizes reflexive intentionality. I recognize that my role as a researcher played a part in the type of data I collected and in how I interpreted the data. Rather than measurability and predictability being the goal, qualitative validity refers to researcher accountability and the rigorous seeking of multiple perspectives (Cho & Trent, 2006). Researcher accountability means having a commitment to the integrity of the given study and an ethic of care for the voices involved in the research process. The focus is on ways of knowing, taking into account what and how the participants communicate. Using multiple sources of data gathering helped me address the empirical richness of work calling messages (Ellingson, 2009).

However, applying the conventional concept of validity in interpretive research is challenging based on the “culturally situated” and individual nature of the case (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In order to address this challenge and rigorously report my findings, I used thickly described data and exemplars of the participants’ discourse from interviews, informal observations, and artifact analysis. Thick description (Geertz, 2000/1973) helped keep a record of “highly detailed observation of people in organizational contexts” (Taylor, Flanagan, Cheney, & Seibold, 2000). By doing so, I demonstrated the link between my interpretation of the data and my results.

Research of any kind includes ethical implications that require an acknowledgement of the researcher’s own subjectivity. Researchers must reflect on their
own agenda, the persuasion inherent in their own set of belief systems that drive how they gather and assess information. I believe that the reflective spirit of a researcher begins by acknowledging personal assumptions guiding the given study, including why and how these assumptions may affect the data collection protocol and logistics. My research was driven by the following assumptions: (a) people are inherently searching for meaning, (b) work is a primary means of experiencing meaning, (c) work involves the whole person, which can include a spiritual dimension, and (d) one way of understanding meaning in work is through a sense of calling as good, preferable, and/or acceptable.

Within qualitative research, reliability (like validity) is problematic due to the multiple, changing realities of participants (Cho & Trent, 2006; Deetz, 1982). Additionally, the conventional concept of reliability in interpretive research is challenging based on the “culturally situated” and individual nature of the given contexts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, an interview with a particular respondent may not be replicable. I sought data collection until I discovered coherence within the data analysis, thereby reaching a point of information saturation (Deetz, 1982). Credibility, integrity, and trust are a necessary component to this process. Operating from an inductive approach meant being willing to let the data take me places I may not have anticipated, while simultaneously staying close to my general research question so as not to “get lost” in data collection.

Summary

Thus, the current study is guided by asking how people from different professional domains talk about their experiences of work as a calling. In answer to this question, I identify the three most common themes embedded in participant
communication about experiences of work as a calling. They are: (a) definitional markers, (b) inherent interaction, and (c) significant costs. It could be argued that inherent interaction and significant costs should be subsumed under definitional markers. However, I contend that while there is overlap within these themes, there are also significant distinctions. Based on participant discourse, definitional markers highlight the ontological nature of work calling; that is, what they believe to be true about work calling. The inherently interactive component of work calling points to an epistemological enactment; that is, work calling interactions provide ways of knowing what the participants know. Finally, significant costs of work calling make explicit calling’s relationship to power by revealing the contested nature and underlying risks of choosing to pursue work as a calling.

These themes, then, illuminate how participants make sense of work calling, what communicative messages exist within the very fabric of this perspective, and the distinct costs or risks when pursuing this work approach (e.g. sacrifice of time, money, or social judgment). In the following three chapters, I develop these themes in order to identify the implications, contributions, and consequences that exist within a communication-based concept of work as a calling. Each chapter presents exemplars of participant discourse followed by an analysis and discussion.
“So I didn’t even know it was my calling until I actually found it and did it, then now in retrospect say that I couldn’t imagine any other career…I literally get charged up every time I walk into that hospital. I always think of it as kind of that fire in your belly” (Lisa, Hospital Performance Improvement Consultant, Line 501-503).

“And the epiphany moment was, I heard God say to me, not audibly but in my spirit, I heard Him say to me, why are you denying who you are? What He was saying to me was, I’ve created you and endowed you with certain talents and gifts, when you live your life in sync with those skills, you are operating in a sacred capacity. Because I feel that I have a higher calling with my career and my business, to touch and impact somebody’s life in a way that’s consistent with what God’s trying to do in their life…my heart is that I want to have significance” (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 130-132, 139-145).

Chapter IV: Definitional Markers & Metaphors

“It’s that kind of fire in your belly.” In the epigrams above, the words through which Lisa and Stephen communicate about their experiences of their own work callings belie particular assumptions. When joined with the other discourses in this chapter, they construct a robust meaning of the concept and reveal key metaphors that aid in its understanding. Stephen, the wealth manager, articulates a “common sense” understanding of a work calling, from a sacred perspective. His comment, “Why are you denying who you are?,” reveals an underlying value of expressing identity in work through the syncing of individualized skills and passions, with the outcome of making a positive difference in other’s lives. For Stephen, his work calling was manifested in a moment of epiphany, whereas Lisa, the hospital performance consultant also feels called, but not in the way a calling is typically framed. Her understanding calling surfaced in hindsight, in a growing awareness that her occupation viscerally and continuously reinforced a feeling of being
called. These stories from the lived experiences of participants extend *and* challenge the way that work calling has been framed in survey-based research. From Chapter Two, we know how previous research has theoretically and quantitatively conceptualized work calling, however the current study provides insight into how participants communicatively make sense of work calling experiences. In doing so, we can begin to analyze the assumptions embedded within the meanings that participants assign to the given concept (e.g. work calling as a journey and as an epiphany). In the current research, I focus on investigating communicative assumptions within work calling experiences in the hope that we can engage in questions such as, why do these assumptions about work calling matter in the first place? What do these assumptions reveal about the individual and collective voices involved?

In the present chapter, I identify and interpret definitional markers of work as a calling, as (re)presented in the communication of participants from different professional domains. Definitional markers refer to statements, phrases, or words used by the participants in their own conceptualizations of work calling. This discourse provides evidence of the themes that emerged directly from participant talk, meeting the standards of thematic analysis (Owen, 1985, 1984). Here I also attend to primary sense-making devices used by participants themselves—namely, how participants conceive work calling through thematic metaphors. The significance of this chapter is in the demonstration and discussion of the constructed reality of work as a calling by the very ways participants choose to define it. Understanding how participants actually discursively construct and experience work calling is crucial, considering its direct
connection to issues such as work motivation, satisfaction, general well-being, and burnout (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Davidson & Caddell, 1994). By paying sustained attention to such discourse, I found that at the core of these experiences of work calling a strong communicative component exists.

**Definitional Markers Exemplars**

The definitional markers of work as a calling emerged as a dominant theme from participant communication through four sub-themes, which are: (a) overarching meaningfulness, (b) a transcendent/internal compelling or reckoning, (c) a necessary integration of skill-set and passion, and (d) a positive contribution to society. I present these four sub-themes under the broader theme of definitional markers, rather than inherent interaction or significant costs, because they directly relate to what participants understand work calling to be—unlike the discourse I profile in Chapter Five and Six, which relates to the particularities of how work calling is enacted and the consequences this phenomenon may have on workers’ lives.

Not surprisingly, the defining qualities of work calling as meaningful; driven by a transcendent or internal compelling or reckoning; integrating skills and passion; and supported by a positive contribution to society; affirm the conceptualizations of work as a calling that surfaced from a review of extant literature. However, this chapter also provides insight into how people understand and interpret these definitional markers as they relate to work as a calling, thereby extending the current scholarly dialogue through qualitative, empirical examples. This chapter’s definitional markers provide a promising
avenue for understanding ways that participants frame and make sense of the complex assumptions associated within the definitions of work calling. These four sub-themes within definitional markers (overarching meaningfulness, a transcendent/internal compelling or reckoning, a necessary integration of skill-set and passion, and positively contributing to society) generate a premise of work calling, helping participants further explicate their experiences of work calling interactions and costs. In the next section, I develop each of the definitional marker sub-themes.

**Overarching Meaningfulness**

Participant communication revealed that work as a calling is imbued with meaningfulness. For example, Katie, a palliative care social worker, echoes many of the participants’ comments when she says, “I don’t think I could do more meaningful work in the world” (Line 122). We know from previous literature that meaningful work is intersubjective, boundary-blurring, and political (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010; Cheney & Nadeson, 2008; Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008). While what is meaningful may vary, it typically involves a sense of self-worth and purpose. Work calling connects both a person’s assigned meaning for work and the larger implications of such assumptions (Lair et al., 2008).

Work as a calling has both an inward focus and an outward focus. Professor and Gallup consultant, Nancy, underscores this saying, “You do it because you love what you do and you really have this sense of purpose and meaning, and that’s what’s driven me” (Line 182-183). Here, the meaning of their work is the focus. However, participants also articulated an awareness that meaningful work was not a common feeling in most
occupations, that in a sense it requires a different perspective than that of general society.

For example, Lisa, a hospital performance improvement consultant, expressed (Line 524, 532-533, 541):

I love being around patients. I need to work where care is being provided to people. There’s something about a hospital that…so many people hate hospitals and get so freaked out, but it’s just like I feel like a sense of relief almost being there.

These exemplars demonstrate an understanding of meaningful work at an individual and collective framework.

In the present study, participant language revealed that meaningful work, situated within the context of work as a calling, involves three primary components: fulfillment, purpose, and significance. Participants in this study frequently (re)produced discourse about feeling fulfilled by the work they do. For example, Erin, a high school psychologist repeated the phrase that her job “feels good” throughout the interview, by which I took her to mean that her work offered intrinsic enjoyment, or fulfillment. Josh, an acupuncturist specializing in fertility needs, stated: “I love what I do. I don’t play the lottery, but if I did and I won $10 million…I’d be doing this…I love what I do. I feel incredibly, unbelievably blessed” (Line 237-239). Similarly, Bill, an NFL (National Football League) coach shared, “To be a coach and to see those guys physically go to war every week and put everything on the line physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, you know, it’s an incredible game that way” (Line 430-432).

Participants were also quick to distinguish between fulfilling work (work calling) and non-fulfilling work (job). Nancy, professor and Gallup consultant, provides a unique expression of work calling, which helps underscore what is meant by an intrinsic
fulfillment through work versus work as a money-making means to an ends (Line 75-77, 579):

God has gifted us and God has designed us and if we follow God’s design there’s fulfillment, and that’s where I connect it to calling. There’s a sense of, I’m doing what I was designed to do, and in that I have found my calling…sometimes we just need job…I had a job in college, I chopped up salads on the weekend and worked in the cafeteria because I needed some money. It was not a calling. There was no purpose and meaning in it.

Nancy uses the word “designed” when alluding to her occupation as a professor, implying an almost predetermined endowment of skill. Several other participants describe this concept of being endowed with skill or talents, which require cultivation, but that exist within a person’s core being prior to even recognizing a work calling (e.g. Ted, Stephen, Megan, Hannah). The question arises, how do voices of power appeal to this notion of predetermined skills when drawing upon work calling to influence work performance? The driving force in Nancy’s job at the cafeteria was to make money, not to use her skills or apply her passion, thus her endowment of skill was dormant within her during that time. Because she was not operating in her design, she did not experience fulfillment. Here, the message of fulfillment is connected to a distinctive intention, the enactment of purpose.7

While purpose can relate to a functional, external practicality, in the current study, the ethos of purpose refers to the intrinsic, is described as priceless, and revolves around achieving a moral impact. For example, Ted, a pastor of a multi-ethnic church, shares (Line 529-532):

While definitional markers of work calling did not consistently address privilege, the theme of privilege does emerge in the sixth chapter addressing calling costs. Presently, it should be noted that Nancy follows the aforementioned comment with, “It’s an honest privilege because for so many it’s absurd to talk calling when they have no food on the table” (Line 779-780).
I’d rather be doing this with all its problems than back to the suburban church where it’s kind of cushy and there’s a salary and all that, and with sort of a meaninglessness to it. This has so much purpose. This has so much gleaning purpose.

Purpose, as one of the core threads in meaningful work located within work calling, is both motivating and demanding.

This kind of purpose is not limited to overtly “ministry”-oriented occupations. For example, Grant, who is the Vice-President of Client Engagement in digital advertisement agency, explains, “It’s [work calling] full involvement. It has a purpose…Requires action, requires sacrifice, it can’t really be half-assed” (Line 861, 865). Book publisher and entrepreneur, Matthew, demonstrates this well in his comment that there is “a sense of something bigger than you that you’re a part of” (Line 266). Purpose is also a worldview, or a way of being. Participants demonstrated this worldview in comments like, “I think calling is this innate sense of purpose that we all crave…It’s a specific way that I view life… I am here for a purpose” (Carrie, Nonprofit Financial Development Officer, Line 720, 955). This emphasis upon the need for work purpose to be connected to a larger, life purpose illustrates participants’ assumption that purpose goes beyond a functional, external role and involves a desire to have a moral, collective impact.

Participants’ discourse (re)produced messages of finding deep significance in their work, which I understood as part of a greater sense of meaningfulness in the context of a calling. Cheney and Nadesan (2008) point out that the meaning of work is best understood through an investigation of intersubjective experiences, particularly through “penetrating interviews” (p. 183), where participants willingly express their understanding of what work means to them. Within the definitional marker of
overarching meaningfulness, participants attribute meaningfulness to feelings of significance in micro and macro layers of work. For example, Matthew, a book publisher and entrepreneur, connects the impact of what this means in his everyday work life: “So the small things then become more meaningful…you get more enjoyment out of it…and you view your work as having significance” (Line 481, 485-486). Purpose is necessary for work to feel meaningful, however the impact of the work is also an important component. Finding significance in the everyday tasks is also paired with finding significance in having influence through organizational life. For example, in his profession as a wealth manager, Stephen describes his underlying motivation (Line 247-248, 252-255):

[I] endeavor into something that has greater significance…that’s where my heart is. My heart is that I want to have significance. It’s not about having money, though I enjoy that. It’s not about having success, though I enjoy that. I’m motivated by those. But the deeper thing is it’s got to be wrapped in significance.

Yet, other participants demonstrate how a desire for significance in work may be an expression of a desire for significance in life. Lillian, the founder and artistic director of a nonprofit after-school program (which combines performing arts and mentorship), echoes this when she says, “You know, as a young kid, I always felt that it was kind of my job to make the space that I’m taking up in this world count for something” (Line 451-452). Thus, the components of meaningful work found in work calling prioritize a sense of fulfillment, purpose, and significance.

In this way, I interpret the participant responses as indicating that a definitional marker of work calling is an overarching meaningfulness. It should be noted that among the twenty-nine interviews, the consistent pattern of talk about fulfillment, purpose, and
significance within an expression of overarching meaningfulness is representative of a Westernized, capitalistic idea of work. That is, finding essential life fulfillment through work is not necessarily a universal imperative (Lair et al., 2008). Implicit within the current research is the ontological assumption that all people desire fulfillment, purpose, and significance. When work calling is associated with these feelings it is imbued with power that reaches beyond the work sphere. Work becomes a place where an individual can find meaning for life generally, and as such when individuals who recognize a work calling for their lives do not find fulfillment, purpose, or significance at work, they may feel as though their lives lack meaning as well. While participants define work calling in terms of an overarching meaningfulness, they endow work calling with other traits. Participants also refer to a sense of experiencing a reckoning or a compelling from a transcendent or internal power.

**Compelling Processes and Reckoning Moments**

Participants indicated that they defined work calling as including a compelling or a reckoning moment. This compulsion or reckoning serves to organize their work lives and orient their time. For example, Nancy, a professor and Gallup consultant, shares, “I really felt compelled to teach…I always talked about it as a calling” (Line 173-174). Charlie, a critically acclaimed singer, songwriter, and guitarist articulates this well: “…it was a reckoning or a realization that this is who I am” (Line 284, 287). Whether participants view their work calling as transcendent/spiritual (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009; Scott, 2007) or internal/secular (Duffy & Seldlacek, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005), further naming this experience as a compulsion or reckoning identifies that people may
experience calling as a process, with a distinct point of entry. In other words, for many participants there may be a moment where a work calling is realized, but the enactment of that realization that unfold through a process, discovered over time. Participant communication in the current research provides context and richness through local language about work calling as a compelling process or reckoning moment. Both spiritual and secular callings were identified and experienced as ongoing processes or as a distinct moment.

Messages about being compelled surfaced in two distinct ways. Specifically, that being compelled is (a) a process of surrender, and (b) a syncing between the mental and spiritual/intuitive. Whereas, messages about a reckoning emerged in participant language related to: (a) a moment, and (b) a realization. As the participants described these definitional markers, the distinction between being compelled as a process and a reckoning as a moment are key components.

A recurrent pattern of discourse among participants referenced being compelled as a process of surrender. From previous research, we know that perceiving work as a calling involves feelings of being compelled and can be viewed from a transcendent or internal source (Scott, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005). This concept was (re)produced in participant communication about experiences of work as a calling. More specifically, participants attribute being compelled to a process of surrender. Lillian, founder and artistic director of a nonprofit after-school program, repeatedly referred to knowing in a quiet way: “that no matter what you want to do with your life you can’t escape doing this particular thing, whatever it is. No matter how hard you try, and you just have to
surrender to it” (Line 312-315). Lillian describes this quiet knowing as an all-encompassing, almost magnetic pull. Later in her interview, she explains that it takes a certain amount of reflective thinking, a choice to commit to this powerful connection within the self. For her, missing out on this magnetic pull is like missing out on the connection you might have as a parent with your child. It is an unconditional, never-ending relationship. For example, Lillian shares that her romantic partner of fifteen years has sons. Lillian knows that if her partner’s children need something, “she puts them ahead of me” (Line 733). Lillian expresses that the commitment her partner has to her sons is the same type of intense commitment she has for her work. In fact, she explains that her work is her child, “and I’m launching my child, and my child is now in college and I’m launching my child out into the world…that takes a lot of time and dedication” (Line 740-742). Here the process of surrender is one of hard work, beauty, and full commitment.

Wealth manager, Stephen, points out, “One of the primary values is a willingness to surrender to what God has planned for you” (Line 279). Megan, a pastor and chaplain for a city police department states, “I think it’s that whole submission to what the Lord has…work calling is walking in obedience, a willing posture of obedience” (Line 748, 1280). While Lillian’s comment does not attribute the quiet knowing to a higher power as both Stephen’s and Megan’s do, their responses echo some unifying assumptions within the definitional markers of work calling. That is, a willingness of surrender. This surrender is a “posture” or a process of “walking it out,” meaning that calling is an embodied way of living. Here we see that overtly ministry-oriented, spiritually-minded
and secular, nonspiritually-minded individuals, recognize a process of complete surrender to what compels their organizational lives. Participants do not appear to characterize the process of surrender as “victim and dominator,” but rather like falling in love. First, there is recognition of a work calling (of love). This recognition may happen over time as a process or may be an epiphany moment. Then, there is a choice to surrender to the work calling (to love). Some may argue that there is no choice in compulsion; however as I point out in chapter six, participants referred to significant costs that stop many people from pursuing a work calling (e.g., fear, finances, social judgment). Much like the recognition of being in love and the choice to allow this all-encompassing, potentially life-altering relationship to continue and mature, work calling as an act of surrender still implies a choice. Thus, work calling is about convergence with work as an un/realized love. As a work calling is realized and chosen, there appears to be a sense of union between the called and the calling.

Participants also described this feeling of being compelled as a marriage between their cognitive and spiritual/intuitive awareness. Gill and Ganesh (2007) reference female entrepreneurs who described their work as a self-expression of being called to their particular profession. Longman, Dahlvig, Wikkerink, Cunningham, and O’Conner (2011) conducted a similar study of women leaders in the workplace, and found that many participants who felt called to their profession did so through a combination of theological influences and an innate awareness of their own abilities. The current

---

8 One of the primary metaphors participants used to describe work calling is love, which will be explored towards the end of this chapter.
research underscores the reach of work as a calling and demonstrates that there is a link between a person’s worldview and profession.

When work is no longer a means to an end, it can become a demonstration of sacred capacity, a syncing between what we know of ourselves and the world through the expression of our work. John, entrepreneur and CEO of a for-profit organization, states enthusiastically (Line 427-436):

I think the church or the thinking has been around work as means to an end. Although it helps the end, so I can share my faith…but it’s actually the work itself that’s ministry, and that is the difference. And when that happens, your whole day is sacred.

Often described as metaphysical, this sacred capacity is confirmed for participants through the connection between thoughts and feelings of peace. For instance, Ted, pastor of a multi-ethnic church, states (Line 268-260):

This is a bit more mystical or lacking in some real defining things, objective things, but I feel that this is what God wants me to do, and I get that from reading scripture, from where I find my mind directed.

While Stephen, the wealth manager comments, “And so there’s peace right now that I’m in sync with that” (Line, 302). Ironically, the pastor who is trained to focus on the spiritual points out the cognitive affirmation, while the person skilled in finances highlights an emotional centeredness. These exemplars demonstrate that part of the definitional marker of a transcendent/internal compelling includes a syncing of mental and spiritual/intuitive elements.

In addition to a process of being compelled, some participants attributed their work calling through a particular moment or reckoning. A reckoning moment serves as a point of appraising work as a calling in a particular instance. For example, “I had an
epiphany moment…in that moment, what He [God] was saying to me was, I’ve created you and endowed you with certain talents and gifts” (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 126, 139-140). Not all moments are positive, as participants described. As chapter six will explore, work callings have costs, one of which can be the very impetus for pursuing a particular type of work. For example, Ben, founder and CEO of a nonprofit child cancer research center shares, “The impetuous for all this is that we lost our son Ben, so this is done in his memory and his honor, his name” (Line 18-19). The reckoning moment here is the loss of a three-year old boy, robbed of his life through an age-blind form of cancer. Ben and his wife took an account, an appraisal of their work and their lives and could see no other avenue worthy of their time, emotions, and finances than this work.

Participants not only articulated moments of reckoning, but also reckoning as a rite of passage that serves to reorient their thoughts. Here, a reckoning moment is described as a distinct realization, an awareness that demands a reframing of their work approach. It is an epiphany, understood as a burden for some and a type of eruption for others. For example, while Ben describes a reckoning moment in the loss of his son, he also accounts for a realization of what such a moment means (Line 333-334, 338, 342-244, 354-355):

We lost him to cancer three years ago…what I can’t say is everything happens for a reason, because that implies that Ben got cancer and died for a reason…we’re not doing it because we’re trying to change a negative into a positive…There’s a burden that sort of, we knew we didn’t want to just walk away from…it’s a weight that we just chose…[to] carry.

Ben’s reckoning points to the impetus of his work calling. This dark calling is one that comes from realizing the loss of his son through an internal burden that would not move.
The option he saw was to carry that burden, to make use of that burden, and accept this consuming urge to use his work for his son’s legacy (Line 571). Here, we see that what initiates a work calling may have nothing to do with choice. The choice, the acceptance of a work calling, rests in the response. Ben’s words reveal a heart that longs for a world in which his son is still with him: playing, walking, learning, growing, living, etc. Ben’s choice, in his reckoning moment, is to follow a work calling that he would rather not have at all. Ben’s interview illustrates that a work calling may not always surface out of optimism, it may rise from despair. The loss of Ben’s son may never be a positive experience; its essence is loss and pain. As such, his work calling may require a commitment to live in a state of mourning. Regardless, the calling appears as a moment of reckoning to which Ben chooses to commit.

Other participants described the impetus for pursuing work calling as something being unearthed or birthed. For instance, Charlie, the musician, comments on other musicians he knows who feel called to their occupation: “It wasn’t just an intellectual decision that they made, that they, this was, uh, this was something that was in them that had to come out” (Line 492-493). Renowned painter and teacher, Laurel, echoes this saying: “It’s not that I want to do this, it’s that I need to do this” (Line 1050). Again, participants describe a driving awareness that something or someone has affected their approach to work, resulting in the pursuit of work as a calling. Reckoning moments or realizations, as well as being compelled through a process of surrender or a syncing of the mental and spiritual/internal, are two of the main definitional markers in work as a calling.
Being compelled, through a process of surrender or a syncing of the mental and spiritual or internal, as well as reckoning moments or reorientations, are two of the main definitional markers in work as a calling. The process of surrender involves an awareness, and willingness to release control. Here, agency can be demonstrated in the act of surrender to the reckoning. Syncing is an ongoing dynamic process of intentional cultivation between mental and spiritual/internal, to ensure that one is corresponding with the other and vice versa. Syncing also involves making continual choices to facilitate and align the knowledge and skills a person has in order to transition into, and remain in a work calling. This ongoing process of following a call means that agency is at the point of choice; however it is also found in other choices necessitated by a process of calling. Thus, syncing is a dynamic process, involving a continuation of choices and development, requiring full commitment.

Syncing of the mental and spiritual/internal implicates a type of interweaving of logic and emotion; a demand for a whole-person involvement: “jump into it with both feet. Don’t put in one foot in, one foot out” (Charlie, Musician, Line 1294, 1298). This full investment means there cannot be a half-hearted attempt to follow the calling, according to participants. When participants experienced reckoning moments or realizations, it was less about control and more about response. As with Ben, this reckoning did not originate from a choice at the impetus, at the death of his child, but a choice in the response to what the disease did to his child, his family, and his work. For Charlie, the reckoning moment was much more visceral than logical. He talked about work calling being something inside him, needing to come out. Here again we see that
work calling is not straightforward as survey-based research may indicate; it is messy and subjective. Participant talk disrupts a belief in the mythic moment, pointing instead to the temporal process of work calling; the idea that the actual recognition of a work calling may take place over time. While conventionally, it might be assumed that a spiritual work calling is found in the reckoning (Oats, Hall, Anderson, & Willingham, 2005), participant talk demonstrates that a spiritual work calling is just as likely to be experienced as a process. In the current study, further troubling the assumptions about work calling definitions allows for the underlying messages to be examined. Thus, I turn now to the final two definitional markers that emerged from participant communication, which are the integration of one’s skills and passions, and positively contributing to society.

**Skill-Set and Passion**

Participants in this study discussed a clear connection between work as a calling and the integration of their skill-sets and passions. Such messages emerged as definitional markers through comments like (Erin, School Psychologist, Line 1236-1252):

> It [work calling], to me, it seems like a balance of two things. A pull that draws you toward a subject or type of work that kind of feeds you with energy to do that work. In addition to that pull you also have natural gifts or strengths that allow you to do that work in a natural, dynamic and successful way.

Erin references this idea of “natural gifts or strengths” as skills that feel easy to develop, as if there one has a natural proclivity towards these skills which do require cultivation, but are inherently rooted inside a person. From this paradigm, education becomes a primary means of cultivation. Educators may not be able to fully ascertain what types of “calling seeds” exist within an individual, but they can provide a healthy environment for

---

9 This reference to essential skills is further developed in metaphorical definitional markers, in work calling as a seed.
growth and development. This also infers a partnered responsibility between the person housing the seed of calling and the gardener who is entrusted to help it grow.

Given the paradigmatic context of work calling, which involves meaningfulness and a compelling or reckoning, it may not be surprising that passion is another component to the conceptualization of work calling. However, participants consistently joined passion with skill-set. For participants, passion alone produces a great fan but not necessarily a great worker. Likewise, skill absent of passion is not motivationally sustaining. Here, I highlight how participants describe passion, skill-set, and the integration of the two.

Participants talked about work as their passion in descriptive statements like, “the best job you could have” (Hannah, Stay-At-Home Parent, Line 368). Dog trainer, Stacey, who was quick to identify herself as nonspiritual/nonreligious, describes her view of work calling as “the type of work that feeds your soul. You wake up in the morning and you’re looking forward to doing it and you go to bed at night and you’re proud that you did it” (Line 774-776). Later in her interview, she also distinguishes between work as a calling and work as a career: “When I was in college and starting out my career, it was all about, I want to be financially independent and nothing about what’s feeding my soul…it’s just a shame because it was… a colossal waste” (Line 850-852). Passion is distinctly different from being compelled, primarily because passion directly relates to feelings of love, whereas being compelled was attributed to an unexplainable need. The connection between passion and love showed up in every participants’ discourse as they shared what work calling meant to them. For example, the acupuncture fertility
expert, Josh, enthusiastically states, “I love what I do and I love coming to work and I love dealing with patients” (Line 460-461). Similarly, Bethany, a hairdresser, shares:

I think since I was about two I always knew I wanted to be a hairdresser. I loved going to the salon. I loved watching, I just loved hair. I loved playing with hair. I loved the smells of the salons. I loved the sounds. I loved watching the transformations. I loved going with my mom or my grandma when they would get their hair done.

Bethany’s passion for her profession is rooted in a love that began as a child. Such statements reveal the formative impact of work even upon individuals during childhood. These statements also specify that participants connect love of work with loving the people they work with, the everydayness of their work, and the actual work environment. The pleasure derived from employing skills and strengths seems also to drive a love for work that connects the person to work on a deep level. Love of work is also the result of pleasure from using skills and strengths.

Participants articulated skill-set as an ongoing education, talents (being good at something), or gifts (implying that the talents were bestowed upon them from an external source). For example, Stephen, the wealth manager, explains that one’s skills need to be exercised and strengthened (Line 145). Massage therapist, Nicole, also articulates a dedication to continuous education (Line 135). Erin, a school psychologist explains (Line 328-329, 333):

I felt myself being called to it because I wanted to do it more than other things. And I felt also like I was, you know, when you just feel a little more talented at doing something. I felt that way.

Participants’ recognition of talents as a primary motivating factor, or the use of one’s skill as a gift, highlights their assumption that skill-set is a necessary component of
work calling. Several participants acknowledged that there were jobs they would have liked to pursue but did not, because they knew they did not have the skill-set. Pastor of a multi-ethnic church, Ted, talked about his desire to become a trumpet player, but recognized he did not have the skill. After having his left arm amputated, he realized it would never be achievable. Charlie, a musician, dreamed of being a professional baseball player. While admittedly, he was better than average, he also talked of not having the skill to continue and the process of realizing that disparity.

Individually and collectively, participant discourse constituted an understanding of work calling as necessarily involving the integration of skill-set and passion. During an interview with Bill, the NFL coach, he described a moment of potential work transition. Facing the prospect of changing teams or pursuing another line of work, Bill talks about his wife’s reaction (Line 209-212):

So she saw the passion that I had for coaching and I think she saw how the Lord put it in my heart and not from a phony standpoint, and not a [job to] have to at all costs but I think she saw the genuine love I had to, to be a coach, and she saw my effectiveness.

Bill’s discourse emphasizes the integration of his passion and skill-set. He speaks about the two characteristics as if they are interwoven in the meaning he assigns to work calling. Carrie, nonprofit financial development officer, succinctly articulates this as well, when she describes her understanding of work calling: “When one assesses their talents and skill sets and aligns them with their internal passions in a formal work environment” (Line 943-945). Similarly, stay-at-home parent, Hannah, articulates her integration of skill-set and passion when she shares, “To use my education background to school our
children at home and continue teaching and helping them with their growth every day. It’s my dream job. I’m doing my dream job” (Line 315-317).

Participants consistently connected the definitional marker of passion and skill-set, with an insistence that integrating the two involves knowing who they are, articulated in phrases about work as an extension of self. In other words, participants framed the combination of passion and skill-set as part of self-knowledge, in phrases like: “honoring who I am as a person” (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 214), or “at its very core is understanding who I am” (Ted, Pastor of Multi-Ethnic Church, Line 204).

Organizational psychologists have been pointing to this concept of “knowing” for at least a decade. Hall and Chandler (2005) argue that in order for individuals to recognize their work as a calling, they must have a strong sense of self, clarity of competency and identity. Through this knowing, work calling becomes an extension of self. As Nicole, the massage therapist explains (Line 1083-1085):

It’s not just a job you go interview for, it’s not just circling something in the newspaper or online. I think it definitely has to be a piece of you…in a sense where you love what you do and you’re dedicated to that work.

Work calling as an extension of self is not easy, it means knowing how to trust oneself, and trusting in what one feels called to do. As Charlie, the musician, describes: “trust, trust, trusting in, believing in yourself and…being who you are…feeling comfortable expressing who you are and being who you are” (Line 1416, 1421). Hairdresser and salon manager, Bethany, summarizes this well (Line 595-597):

We pretty much all have to work so if you can find something that you have an interest or a passion, find a way to pursue that, to make it into a job where it in turn won’t seem like you’re really working, um, I guess for me it was pretty
simple. I just always, I knew that whenever I walked into a salon that’s always where I felt like I belonged.

Thus, an integration of skill-set and passion emerged from participant discourse as the third definitional marker of work calling. Within this theme is the understanding of what passion and skill are, and how this integration involves a knowing of the self. The final definitional marker is the theme of contributing to society.

**Contributing to Society**

In the fourth definitional marker of work calling, participant communication focused on work calling as constituting socially useful work. Messages about contributing to society included an emphasis on people instead of money. For example, Matthew, the book publisher and entrepreneur, explains (Line 74-77):

> I wanted to publish books that could make a difference…. I have to be personally passionate about the topic and that it can impact the world. My purpose for working is not simply to make money, it’s to contribute to society and then be sustained in the process. So, profits are important but it’s not the driver of my business.

Importantly, financial stability is not off of the motivational radar for participants who feel called to their career; rather their core of motivation is making a difference.

Participants are quick to recognize that not all people feel this way. For instance, Frank, a physician, shares: “I try to improve the health and happiness and wellbeing of the people I come in contact with, and that happiness and wellbeing part is something that maybe every doctor doesn’t bite off that big a chunk of goal” (177-180). Professor and Gallup consultant, Nancy, echoes this statement that work calling involves “making a positive contribution to, to your world, and not getting stuck on, um, prestige and title and salary…[you] want to contribute so that you’re not just going through life without
giving it a thought” (Line 562, 569-570). Participants like Dan, who is a lawyer, consistently used the word “contribute” when describing what defines their work calling. More specifically, within this concept of contributing to society, participants recognized their work as a sphere of influence and responsibility.

Influence involves power. Within the definitional marker of contributing to society as part of work calling, messages of influence consistently emerged within participant discourse. This capacity to affect others is described at a worthy and beautiful value. For instance, Bill, the NFL coach states (Line 354-356, 398-399):

One of the reasons that I continue to do this is because there are men in this world who have been under my watch, who I think are outstanding young men and husbands…that part of it, a calling as well…NFL coaching is a worthy profession when you look at some of the great men that have influenced and impacted other men’s lives.

Influence may be derived from social or financial power; however, participants emphasize contributing to others, not self-promotion. While Bill demonstrates influence at the macro level, other participants described the importance of influence at the micro level. For example, Hannah, a stay-at-home parent, uses phrases like “making an impact” and “making a difference in the actual future” (Line 459, 461). She stresses this point at the very beginning of her interview, saying that her work is about: “investing into the future because we won’t be around with our children someday and they’re gonna be the ones making the difference” (Line 93-94). Based on participant discourse, influence within the concept of contributing to society is other focused.

Therefore, what further distinguishes influence in the context of this study is that the “one” is just as important as “the many.” For participants, a work calling appears to
focus on the *quality* of their impact rather than *quantity* of those influenced. That is, the significance rests on impacting those who are in the person’s sphere of influence, whether that starts with one person or one hundred people. Josh, the acupuncturist specializing in fertility issues, shares, “Work to me is something that gives me a sense that I’m making hopefully situations better, couples better, environments better, affecting other people” (Line 907-909). For Josh, his influence upon a couple will affect other people. Painter and art teacher, Kay, explains that in today’s rushed society, people miss the great beauty around them. She sees her contribution to society as getting “people to just stop long enough to smell those roses, to look at the beautiful cast shadows, to see the grandeur and the beauty that’s all around them that they take for granted” (1040-1041). For Hannah, her contribution to greater society begins by investing in her child, while Josh focuses making an impact on a couple or a family, and Kay seeks to reach out to people she does not necessarily know. Thus, the power of influence can spread through familial, social, financial, medical, and aesthetic power.

Finally, participants in this study discussed contributing to society as a responsibility. As mentioned in chapter two, historical Westernized conceptions of calling underscore religious obligations to solidify eternal salvation by a person’s success as a worker (Dempsey & Sanders 2010; Weber, 2008/1904). However, contemporary understandings of calling lend more to the recognition of calling as “a sphere of responsibility” (Guiness, 2003; Steger et al, 2010). That is, those who perceive of their work as a calling are responsible to make use of this calling for the good of local and/or
global communities. Participant language attributed responsibility to honoring a charge they felt came from a higher power, or a charge that came from within themselves. Primarily, the charge refers to intentionally using skill and passion and an ethical use of authority. For instance, Alexis, a clinical psychologist, mentioned a feeling of responsibility throughout her interview in statements like, “I still think it goes back to that, you almost are feeling a responsibility to your natural strengths” (Line 904-905). Towards the end of her interview, Alexis shares: “I feel like I would be being disobedient if I was not doing this. That the Lord has specifically given me…and it would be wasteful…to do anything else” (Line 729-730, 732). Responsibility to oneself is exemplified in a statement by Stephen, the wealth manager, who commented that people who ignore their work calling do not honor who they are: “There’s only so much the heart will allow someone to dishonor who they are as a person before there’s that internal struggle and conflict that becomes pronounced” (Line, 849-850). These excerpts shape the meaning about how participants define work calling as it relates to contributing to society through a means of influence and responsibility. Next, I attend to the way participants further conceptualize work calling through sense-making metaphors.

**Sense-Making Metaphors**

Communication about work calling, as expressed by participants in the current study, focuses on three themes: definitional or conceptual markers, inherent interaction, and significant costs. The present chapter detailed conceptual markers of work calling, revealed in participant discourse about: (a) overarching meaningfulness, (b) a transcendent/internal compelling or reckoning, (c) a necessary integration of skill-set and
passion, and (d) a positive contribution to society. During participant interviews, I found that participants used metaphorical language as they tried to articulate what work calling means.

Thus, one of the main sense-making devices used by participants to define work as a calling was thematic metaphors. Metaphors play a central role in shaping the way we define our realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They allow us to understand and experience one thing in terms of another, providing a type of short hand for abstract concepts (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvick, & Alberts, 2006). Here, participants conceived of work calling through three metaphors: (a) a journey or epiphany, (b) organic and material, and (c) love. These metaphors illuminate the “unshared experiences” (Lakoff & Johnshon, 1980, p. 231) of work as a calling, thus contributing to a communication-based understanding of this concept through the local language of workers themselves. In attending to participants’ metaphors, we can legitimize the experiences and the consequences of work calling, shedding light on actual discursive behaviors previously invisible and the influences of such perceptions.

**Work Calling is a Journey or Epiphany**

Participants referred to work calling as a journey more than any other sense-making metaphor. Phrases such as, “faith in your journey” (Lillian, founder and artistic director of nonprofit after-school program, Line 363), or “an incredible journey” (Bill, NFL Coach, Line 609), illustrate its use. Participants also used words like “pathway” or “doorway” to conceive of calling as a journey: For instance, “God will open the door…that’s how my whole path has been” (Grant, Vice President of Client Engagement
at a Digital Advertising Agency, Line 545, 557). These descriptors implicate a process, some uncertainty, and the adventure that are a part of what makes up a journey. They augment the definitions (and tensions) of calling as a process and moment of reckoning.

The distinction between journey and epiphany is also apparent in exemplars like Matthew, the book publisher and entrepreneur, who explains (Line 146-148):

There was not a single moment of epiphany, but my journey was one where… I’d say it’s an approach that has been refined over the years. So it’s not like from the day I started, I had everything figured out.

Megan, the pastor and police department chaplain, also shares (Line 575-577, 606-608):

It was a complicated, I don’t feel like I had one of those, my son-in-law is a pastor, he was sitting on a mountain, playing guitar with people, campfire, worship, all of that, and the Lord said I want you to be a pastor. I didn’t have that kind of experience. I don’t feel any less created or called to this… I didn’t get a telegram in the mail or hear a voice. I just kept walking through doors… that He kept flinging wide open.

Very simply, a journey involves movement, an act of traveling from one place to another, over time. A journey highlights the temporal component of a calling. The philosophy of time infers a transitory element as well as chronology potential, or a sequence of events leading up to something, a meaningfulness behind what may otherwise seem incidental. Calling as a journey does not necessarily imply a specific destination. It does, however, allow for unknown components, distance that requires time, and choice of pathways. It is not necessarily obvious. Unlike work calling as a journey, work calling as an epiphany is an “ah ha” moment.

In contrast, other participants describe their calling through moments of epiphany (such descriptions were more rare in participant discourse as a whole). Work calling as an epiphany represents a sudden manifestation of intuitive awareness. It suggests a
revelation derived from new information, an illumination that extends vision like a spotlight that has suddenly turned on, drawing focused attention to something that was once in the shadows of our perceptions. However, when it was a feature of their experience, participants continuously returned to their epiphany moments. Grant, Vice President of Client Engagement at a digital advertisement agency, describes epiphany as “Where opportunity and mission collide” (Line 577-578). Here, the emphasis is on impact. Work calling is a specific, life-altering moment. For example, Stephen, the wealth manager describes being in a different occupation but being drawn to finance. One day, looking at the books on his bookshelf, he realized they were all finance books. He shares (Line 130-132):

I had an epiphany moment. And the epiphany moment was I heard God say to me, not audibly but in my spirit, I heard Him say to me, why are you denying who you are? It’s that pivotal moment that transformed, my life…it was a moment that struck me, an ah-ha moment.

For the participants who talked about work calling as an epiphany, the epiphany was not necessarily obvious. Lillian, the founder and artistic director of a nonprofit, demonstrates this when she shares: “But there’s a kind of, uh, a softness and, it’s a moment of, I don’t want to sound too weird, but it’s a moment, it’s a kind of a holy moment, you know, it really is” (Line 1153-1154). She goes on to share that some people miss their epiphany moment because they are not listening for it, or they were never raised in an environment that valued such a moment.

The metaphors of work calling as a journey and an epiphany are particularly relevant in our understanding of how work calling is communicated. These two metaphors highlight the tensions between a process and a moment. They demonstrate that
work calling is imbued with multiple meanings and messages. The journey metaphor is especially useful in clarifying perceptions and experiences of work calling as occurring over time, demanding interpretation and highlighting the individualized nature of the concept. This understanding differs substantially from the idea that work calling as “transmissional,” an immediately rendered truth. The former invites complexity and ambiguity, while the latter infers simplification and potentially mythic obviousness.

**Work Calling is Organic and Material**

Organic metaphors included references to work calling as a seed, light, or fire. An exemplar of work calling is a seed is demonstrated well when Ted, pastor of a multi-ethnic church, explains (Line 732-735):

> Work calling starts as a seed that’s buried in the ground and over time it begins to grow roots down and it envelopes your soul before you even see a sprout coming up from the ground. It’s there before you know it. And then in time and in the right soil and setting, it begins to manifest itself.

Here, an understanding of cultivating the seed of work calling is significant. With statements like, “it started as a seed in my heart,” (Josh, Acupuncturist Specializing in Fertility Needs, Line 423) it becomes apparent that there are many factors that may help or hinder a work calling. The seed metaphor explicates this well. A seed is a small, embryonic promise of something much larger. It is fragile but enclosed with a great potential.

> The development of a seed growing into a plant is similar to a personal journey. As a seed sprouts, its roots penetrate deeper into the ground and its stem and leaves reach toward the sky. A seed follows its nature, but is also affected by the environment surrounding it; similarly, a journey involves personal agency to select the road taken, but
also the influence of the surrounding environment/context. The meaning derived from the seed metaphor is complimentary to that of work calling as a journey. Both imply a temporal philosophy that suggests a gradual and potentially vulnerable process. The seed metaphor especially points to the understanding that some of what influences the development of a calling is out of a person’s control. That is, while there are elements to calling that are within a person’s control (e.g. making good choices, personal cultivation), calling is also situated and contextual. It is affected by socio-cultural and historical elements; much like a seed is affected by its climate.

Work calling as organic was also described as something that has been “kindled or ignited” (Gary, Pastor, Line 954), or feeling “a spark for your work” (Erin, High School Psychologist, Line 1180). While fire is an elemental substance, the way it manifests can be organic. It has a life of its own that is shaped and influenced by its surroundings. Participants in this study attend to fire as a process, describing fire by the way it can grow into a roaring (potentially out of control) inferno, or dwindle into a shivering flame—the key is attention to kindling or igniting the flame. Again, the issue is one of cultivation, the care-taking of the burning light. As Lisa, a hospital performance improvement consultant, says (Line 501-503):

So I didn’t even know it was my calling until I actually found it and did it, to then now in retrospect say that I couldn’t imagine any other career…I literally get charged up every time I walk into that hospital. And it’s just like, I always think of it as kind of that fire in your belly.

Participants who used this sense-making device of work calling as light or a spark attribute work calling as something that can start small (a spark), and has the potential to
grow into an all-consuming (fire) way of viewing work. Thus, the fire metaphor points to a similar tension that exists in the journey (process) and epiphany (moment) metaphors. If the participants focus more on ignition, they seem to be suggesting calling is an epiphany or moment. If they attend more to cultivation (keeping the fire going), they seem to suggest calling is more of a process or journey.

Participants referenced material metaphors as something tactile, or physical. Here, metaphors incorporating physical substances involved clothing, tapestries and threads, and puzzles. Embedded within the understanding of work calling as substance is an assumption that work calling is traceable and changeable. Messages about material as traceable are shown in references to work calling as “tapestry” (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 362) or “a consistent thread” (John, Entrepreneur and CEO of For-Profit Organization, Line 1018). For participants in this study, messages about work calling as changeable often related to trying on different items of clothing or shoes. For instance, (Ted, Pastor of a Multi-Ethnic Church, Line 705-707):

It’s like a pair, like a suit, like clothes. You have to try it on and you have to work in it for a while. I don’t think it’s something you just decide and then go do. In my view, it’s something you ease into.

Here, the approach to work calling as material allows for some sense of control and autonomy. Work calling takes time. It is not necessarily obvious. It may require moving things around.

---

Participant discourse did not appear to address the out-of-control and potentially destructive element of fire. However, within the fire metaphor of work calling, destruction could allude to issues of burnout or sacrifice. Future studies attending to the meso and macro levels of work calling should pay attention to the fire metaphor as a way of explaining (mis)uses of power in the (de)legitimation of work calling.
Participants’ use of material metaphors extends the underlying message of calling as a journey or epiphany. When calling is a journey and or material (e.g. clothing) the perception involves “shopping around,” trying out certain pathways to see if they feel right. Moreover, material goods are often made by others and then purchased or used. Likewise, calling is not an isolated development; it pulls from different contexts, experiences, and preferences to become something. Calling as an epiphany and as material points to a moment of recognition—like seeing a material substance in a display window and thinking, “I want that. That is totally me.” Here, there is a background to the epiphany, to the material; but the moment of awareness, of trying it on, is an “ah ha” moment.

Another material-substance metaphor used to reinforce this message is, work calling is a puzzle. A work calling can involve a complexity of pieces that must be arranged in order to realize its implications. Carrie, the nonprofit financial development officer, demonstrates this well (Line 842-843, 847-848, 852-853):

It’s like a giant puzzle…I didn’t know what the picture was gonna look like until I completed the puzzle. So now I feel like I completed this puzzle and I’m kind of starting a new puzzle…I can’t see what that puzzle is gonna look like. I just have to do, start laying down the pieces and let it all come together.

There is ownership, discovery, mastery, and perhaps an element of play within the description of work calling as a puzzle. Work calling as material involves a hands-on, connectedness, whereas the final metaphor, work calling is love, focuses on romance and commitment.
Work Calling is Romantic and Committed Love

Several participants framed work calling as love. Love is often viewed as a virtue, one in which the attachment to the object of love is worthy of pursuit at any cost. Love is at once simple and complex, confusing and clear. Work calling as love implies all these characteristics. More specifically, work calling as love was described by participants as an act of falling in love and as a commitment.

Several participants described work calling as an intimate process of falling in love. Nicole, the massage therapist, articulates locating her work calling like being aware of a particular moment of “fall[ing] in love” (Line 59). Stacey, the dog trainer, connects the relationship she has with her work like the relationship she has with her husband. She explains, “It almost felt like when I met my husband…I wasn’t sure what I was going to do with dogs but I knew that I was my happiest when I was with them” (Line 187, 195-196). Work calling as falling in love implies a strong emotional response, a connectedness or attachment. Falling in love can be an instantaneous moment; much like an epiphany, it designates a particular moment of awareness.

While love is clearly an emotion, it can also be argued that love is a commitment. In that way, choosing love is almost a deeper virtue, for it is not swayed by circumstances or seasons, it is steadfast. Much like work calling as a journey, love as a commitment prioritizes dedication and perseverance. It involves not being swayed by difficult circumstances; it is the maturation of romantic love. During each interview, participants responded to a question about how they react to work when it is hard. Bill, the NFL coach, states (Line 565-566, 579, 588-589):
I decide, I just decide…And, have you ever heard the statement that love is a decision? It’s completely a biblical principle. So, if I’m really called to do this job sometimes the circumstances are really lousy and, and you just have to decide that, you know, this is, this is what I’m called to do, let’s go.

This exemplar of work calling as a decision to love communicates a process of maturity in connection with a person’s approach to work. The metaphor of work calling is love includes both a young adolescent sense of romance and a mature commitment to something deeper and richer. It involves the will and the heart.

Implications and Applications

This chapter provides a needed foundation for mapping the conceptual terrain of work calling. In particular, previous literature about work calling offered theoretical or quantitative conceptualizations of work as a calling leaving a gap in understanding how people actually communicate about this concept in their own language. Through the interviews conducted for this study, I begin to address the gap by engaging in the local knowledge of participants. By bringing to light the discursive themes and thematic metaphors used to define work calling by the workers themselves, we can examine and critically reflect how work calling is talked about and what messages are imbedded in such talk. In Chapters Five and Six, I identify and analyze two main messages of work calling; that is work calling is interactional and work calling involves significant costs. Here, I conclude by synthesizing the theoretical and practical implications of the definitional markers of work calling and the sense-making devices of thematic metaphors within work calling discourse.

Previous studies primarily focus on survey-based research, which does provide some evidence of these connections (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger et al., 2010; Hall &
Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). However, solely quantifying participants’
experience of work calling only reveals part of the picture. That is, previous studies are
limited in an understanding of how participants actually discursively construct this way
of viewing organizational life. I pay sustained attention to what work calling experiences
communicatively involve, demonstrated in participant exemplars. I now propose a
grounded definition of work calling as: An overarching sense of meaningfulness in one’s
work; brought to awareness through a process of being compelled or a moment of
reckoning instigated by a higher power or the internal self; enacted through the
integration of the individual’s passion and skill-set; in ways that positively contribute to
society through one’s work.

Given the nature and context of work calling experiences by participants within
this study, I suggest that scholars should examine work calling as a type of organizational
rhetoric that involves meaningful work (see Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008; Lair et
al, 2008) and spiritual communication. Espoused in context and through experience, work
calling is not objective and cannot be considered in absolute terms. It is influenced by
historical, cultural, and economic spheres, and yet there are commonly acknowledged
components to work as calling that merit attention. The bounds of work as a calling
within this study are evident in four themes related to definitional markers. Recall, work
calling is: (a) meaningfulness (fulfillment, purpose, significance), (b) a compelling
(process of surrender, mental and spiritual/intuitive syncing) or reckoning (a moment, a
realization), (c) integrating passion and skill-set (knowing who you are), (d) contributing
to society (responsibility, influence).
First, this study deepens our understanding of how meaningful work is expressed and experienced, through the concept of work as a calling. Cheney et al. (2008) suggest that future studies about meaningful work analyze how belief systems influence specific views of work and how these views are enacted. The current study provides an answer to Cheney et al.’s call. Work calling emphasizes fulfillment, purpose, and significance, providing a compelling space to deepen the exploration of meaningful work.

Furthermore, Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth, and Mathes (2008) argue what signifies as meaningful work reveals “how people approach work, undertake work, and judge others by their work” (p. 4). The ontological and epistemological nature of work calling reveals an ordering and organizing of how some people make sense of their work and the organizational rhetoric embedded within this concept. That is, work calling is radically intersected by a political nature, intersubjectivity, and blurred boundaries. The current research provides a richness derived from the local language of work calling which anticipates future studies about the way work calling “organizes society and how society organizes” work calling (p. 4). Future studies might also include investigating the emphasis participants make about workplace calling verse workplace calling, uncovering assumptions about the way people, organizations, and society rhetorically create meanings of work calling. Thus, work calling is a means to realize meaning in work, but it also is a way to frame meaningfulness in work.

These findings also offer insight into discourse about contributing to society and more specifically how people construct the meaning of this term. Given the “other” focus in this particular component of definitional markers within work calling, it is important to
understand the potential organizational rhetoric within themes of responsibility and influence. Future studies could engage in the connection between manipulation and/or marginalization of a person’s work calling through messages of responsibility. Responsibility is often viewed as an honor, but can also be an obligation. Inherent in this term is a sense of accountability. Here, scholars can ask, accountability to who or what? Who is on the other side of this feeling and how is this being treated as it relates to work boundaries?

Second, this study highlights some of the important collective aspects of a transcendent or internal desire, in the discourse of being compelled or a moment of reckoning. Previous quantitative, organizational psychology research has either conceptualized work calling as involving “a transcendent summons” (Dik et al., 2009, p. 625), or “a strong sense of inner direction” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 160). While these distinctions may be helpful, they tell us very little about how a person actually communicates about this form of direction. The current study contributes to a deeper understanding of thematic discourses related to the concept of being compelled or a reckoning moment.

Work calling metaphors fundamentally and rhetorically guide sense-making experiences. The current study contributes to this understanding by revealing the embedded assumptions within what it means to experience a transcendent summons or inner direction of a work calling. Institutions promising to provide direction, meaning, and purpose to individuals may be alluding to the idea that they can manufacture the calling epiphany for them. Whereas, in this study it appears that a work calling is framed
as type of cultivation process and moment-based experience. Thus, the metaphoric choices the participants’ make provide a rich insight into how they are conceiving of work calling as a compelling or a reckoning moment. When a person falls in love or a flame ignites into an uncontrollable wild fire, a work calling can be understood almost as having a life of its own. In both instances, a work calling must be reckoned with in order to harness its potential, influence, and meaning.

The metaphors of work calling as a commitment in love, and work calling as a seed, have an immediate presence; however, they function over a period of time and emphasize development, dedication, and perseverance. Here a work calling involves active engagement to feed and nurture its development. There is choice, an implication of time investment, and expenditure that demonstrates one’s dedication even through rough or extended periods. In addition, to extinguish a flame or foreclose an infatuation (love) one often walks away from the experience burned, hurt and likely scared from the encounter. Understanding how people make sense of what it means to feel called in their occupation, allows us to examine what messages influence this calling, how these messages are constructed, and who is part of the message construction process. Future studies could assess what patterns exist within reckoning moments as well as how being compelled is interpreted. For instance, do participants who feel compelled also feel like they have a choice? How does autonomy play in this understanding?

Finally, the current research suggests that within the integration of passion and skill-set there is a deeper need of “knowing who you are” that is part of experiencing work as a calling. This idea of “knowing who you are” is significant in at least two ways.
Implicitly this statement points to the question, how do you come to know who you are? Then deeper questions arise, such as: who is trying to tell you who you are? And why does understanding who you are matter so much? Such questions highlight what Bauman (2000) describes as part of liquid modernity in that it provides a framework of malleable and unfixed work identities. In his assessment, the worker is now a consumer looking to satiate a lack of self-confidence with the accumulation of skill. Work calling could appeal to people who are self-authorizing agents in relation to their work paths/choices. Additionally, the longing for a work calling or clarification of a calling can then be manipulated by voices who appeal to such a search—that is, whoever markets calling in the most attractive manner.

Given the implications of the study, I recommend two more practical courses of action. First, it is clear from the present findings that participants recognized work as a calling through a sense of overarching meaningfulness, through a process of being compelled or a moment of reckoning, which incorporated their passion and skill-set, in such a way that positively contributed to society. Returning to concept of “knowing who you are,” if work calling is taken as identity development and maturation, it underscores the importance of reflective and reflexive thinking and pedagogy. For example, what role should the university have in socializing college students towards a focus of learning as an expression of using their passion and skill-set rather than merely learning as a means to an end. The corporatization of the Academy has focused the higher educational experience toward equipping students to being productive workers in a field that promises high returns. By encouraging students to consider their passions as they pursue
their life choices, it is possible that they will be more engaged throughout the journey of their education. This could also lead to further questions about work calling as “real work” (see Clair, 1996) depending on the external components of that work. Future studies might also explore how volunteers, part-time workers, and full-time workers articulate their sense of passion and skill-set. Is there a difference? If so, what and why?

Second, from an organizational standpoint, knowing how participants may define work calling can help distinguish whether or not a person feels called to the work they are doing, or are hoping to do. From a pedagogical or consulting standpoint, helping participants know how to articulate what they mean when they describe their work approach can help them locate where they can derive the most satisfaction in a work environment. Sustainable satisfaction means feeling an inward and outward connection to meaningfulness. It is also important to recognize that concepts of work calling in the current study focus solely on a Westernized understanding of the term. Practitioners should also attend to the way people perceive of work calling in other areas of the world.

Metaphors have the capacity to move people in a visceral way, to unify or divide because at their very core, they enliven the construction of reality. By incorporating metaphors such as, work calling is: a journey or epiphany, organic and material, and romantic and committed love, participants were able to bring to light the experiences of work calling through communication.

What is surprising about the journey or epiphany metaphors used by participants is that the journey metaphors far outweighed the epiphany metaphors. Through common spiritual understandings of calling, many people expect it to be a defining moment of
realization; but participants experience work calling as a process. Future research should engage in what types of messages affect this process. Who or what influences this process? For example, what degree of gravitational pull does family socialization have verses academic socializing in the formation of work approaches? Practitioners can also gain from this awareness of work calling as a process by implementing work review times with a focus on the experience of work itself as a journey. What is the worker charting in their own course and how does this personal journey interact with the journey of the organization?

As the organic metaphors alluded to, work calling requires (seed) cultivation and (light, fire) kindling. It is not an isolated experience, it influences and is influenced by the given context and culture. As with other types of organic substances and material, area influences results. Here is where attending to the particular cultural elements of work calling may surface deeper discussions in future research. Pragmatically, it also takes into account the responsibility of the worker to cultivate and kindle this work approach. In a society of consumers, it may be more of a challenge to initiate the accountability needed in such a pursuit. How can organizations and the academy help in this process? How do organizational structures and academic settings hinder it?

Finally, participants described work calling as love, which is both a feeling and a commitment. Many participants talked of needing to have the patience and the drive to pursue work as a calling. Just as romantic love drives the lover’s act towards his or her beloved; and mature love willingly works with his or her partner to relational success; the love of a work calling can function as a deep desire and a dedicated decision. Lakoff and
Johnson (1980) state that, through metaphorical conceptualizing, there is, “a kind of reverberation down through the network of entailments that awakens and connects our memories” of particular experiences and “serves as a possible guide for future ones” (p. 140). This terminology of reverberation is of course a metaphor in and of itself, creating an imaginative picture of something that ripples through layers, spreading its influence in a felt manner. Lakoff and Johnson describe the negotiated meaning that each individual has as an opportunity to share, become aware of, and develop respect for differences in human experience and background. Here is where we may understand more deeply the commonalities and distinctions within messages about work as calling. In the next chapter, I explore participant communication about work calling experiences as inherently interactive. Such messages extend the definitional concepts of Chapter Four, particularly the idea of work calling as a journey and as an epiphany, by addressing how work calling is enacted. Thus, Chapter Five further demonstrates the need for an interactional, communicative understanding of work calling.
“I thought this after we parted ways...calling....it involves some kind of drawing to something AND a response to that draw. A person calls another person to do something and that person has to respond in order for the calling to be “fulfilled.” In a different sense, the calling regarding work, there is something intrinsic to a person that longs for something to be fulfilled and it is that longing which draws them to that duty, that task for which they may willingly divert their life or even lay it down. Furthermore, when we discuss work calling, the calling comes from within, but is met or initiated by the external world...and that internal response is simply catalyzed by the external stimulus” (Ted, Pastor of a Multi-Ethnic Church, Email, January 18, 2012).

**Chapter V: Inherently Interactional**

At its core, work calling bespeaks of constitutive interaction. It implies a visceral connectedness between a caller and a called. Threading the internal and external, it overlays the individual and community. It blurs the boundaries of professional and personal life, conflicting and colliding with other spheres of calling. In the current study, I ask the question, “How do individuals from different professional domains communicate about their experiences of work as a calling?” As the previous chapter explored, the first theme revealed through participant talk is definitional markers of work as a calling. That is, work calling is recognized as an overarching sense of meaningfulness, inspired through a process of being compelled or a moment of reckoning, in which a person integrates skill and passion at work, in order to positively contribute to society. The theme of *definitional markers* provides a conceptualizing basis, whereas the theme of *inherently interactional* points to the communicative framework of work calling. Lastly, the theme *significant costs* (taken up in the next chapter), describes the consequences of this work approach.
To conceive of work calling as inherently interactional, participants spoke more specifically of: (a) interactions with a caller, (b) interactions with community, and (c) interactions with work/family. Here, I refer to interaction as a socially constructed (Shotter & Gergen, 1997; Berger & Luckman, 1965) and constitutive process involving action and agency (Charland, 1987). Interactivity is not only evident in participant talk but also in their embodiment of work, as well as engaging in the spatial rhetoric of participants’ organizational lives. At the beginning of each section, I offer and analyze conceptual exemplars of a caller, community, and work/family, through the participant talk, as they cohere Owen’s (1985; 1984) thematic analysis. Finally, I elaborate on how the theme of interactivity furthers the understanding that work calling is a distinctly communication-based concept.

**Interacting with a Caller**

It is hardly surprising that interaction is central to the enactment of work calling. The concept a calling connotes interplay, a procedural interchange of (re)constructed and shared meanings. A work calling involves interactivity between a caller and a called, which constructs work in a particular way, constituting particular practices and ways of communicating. Exploring the interactional component of work calling contributes to an understanding of how the formation of a person’s knowledge of self, others, and the world is discursively constructed (Shotter & Gergen, 1997). As we communicate, we (re)constitute what we believe to be true. Thus, by recognizing that communication about work calling is inherently interactional, we can examine the way messages about particular interactions that exist within this concept influence the formation of self,
others, and the world. One primary way this is demonstrated, is in the sub-theme of interacting with a caller. The (re)construction of participants’ knowledge of work calling is revealed in material representations of interaction with a caller. I provide two exemplars of this interaction. The first exemplar is Charlie, the singer, song-writer, and guitarist, and his guitar. Here, the caller is represented in a physical element, the embodiment of music in the form of his guitar. Thus, Charlie’s relationship with the guitar reveals an interaction between a caller (the guitar) and the called (Charlie). The second exemplar is Laurel, painter and art teacher, and her banner of stenciled quotes along the four walls of her art studio. For Laurel, these quotes are representative of the interaction she has with her caller, God. I address each of these exemplars below.

**Charlie and the Guitar**

I am immediately struck by Charlie’s presence when he opens the door to his recording studio, located in his home near the city. Charlie is an African-American male, in his middle sixties, but looks about ten years younger. He is tall and lean, with chin-length dreadlocks and thin glasses. His smile is full and sincere. There is a cadence to his speech, a rhythmic pace in his discourse. He is dressed in a hooded red fleece, brown corduroy pants, and running shoes. The recording studio is small room and covered in music artifacts: three guitars, a drum set, two laptops on a corner desk with microphones, and an electric piano. Music artwork and pictures of his life decorate the walls, providing glimpses of Charlie’s past performances, musician colleagues and family. Almost every picture of Charlie includes his guitar. While Charlie self-identified as having a nonreligious or spiritual orientation, there is also a small Buddha statute behind his chair.
Two questions I ask in each interview are, what is the hardest part of your work, and when it gets hard, what do you do? After asking these questions to Charlie, he pauses, then picks up the guitar nearest to him and says (Line 1150-1153):

If I’m feeling really sad or down about something, not necessarily specific to music, then I pick up my guitar and I’ll just sing. And I’ll usually go into something that is, um, bluesy and I’ll close my eyes, and I’ll go in the room, cut the windows, lights out [Charlie closes his eyes and starts strumming his guitar, humming]…and I just, it just pulls me in.

Charlie’s soft plucking of the guitar and melodic humming seem to create a holy moment. After a few minutes, I found myself closing my eyes as well. He stops playing. I open my eyes and smile. He smiles back and says, “But [I] just go into that space where, it’s…I can feel it right now. It’s almost like saying I need to cry. You know? And the music is saying to me, it’s okay” (Line 1242, 1250). As Charlie shares this with me, he holds his guitar. It rests in his arms with an easy posture, an extension of his body, his self. Charlie talks about his guitar as part of his family and as the marker of his epiphany that music would be his profession. It is his healing instrument, his mode of interacting with who he feels he is meant to be, and a means of influencing others in a positive way.

Laurel and the Banner

The second vignette of interaction with a caller is from Laurel’s interview. I arrive at Laurel’s home art studio on a cold morning, where the grass looks mint green from a frost coating. She greets me with coffee cup in hand, wearing a faded long sleeved cotton shirt and jeans. Laurel is a white female in her late fifties, with blond hair that comes to her shoulders. She leads me to an area in her studio that has a leather couch by a fireplace. An old golden retriever greets me there, snuggling against my leg and leaving a
hairy imprint on my slacks. I notice that her spacious studio, with water color paintings everywhere in all stages of development, also has stenciled sayings spaced out near the top of each wall. Halfway through the interview, Laurel says she wants to give me a tour of the room and explain a few things. Here is where she identifies the banner of quotes: “I want you to come with me...And I will show you my quotes that I love, and I thought a lot about these” (Line 596, 598). Laurel walks me around the entire studio, reading each quotation aloud, and explaining why she has included it. For example: “Art is divine collaboration” (Line 734). She explains (Line 734, 738, 746-748):

We are conduits of the Creator....He works through us...God has no other hands than ours...And, that’s a calling that all of us have...to use our hands, our hearts and our heads in the creative pursuit of a better place, a better world.

Laurel’s words written across the top of each wall reveal underlying messages about her work calling experiences. Laurel’s understanding of God as the caller is not only evident in her discourse, it is reflected in her physical surroundings. It represents what she values in work, her approach to work as a calling, and her interactions with her caller.

**A Caller**

Whether a caller is transcendent, internal, or material, what unifies the understanding of a caller is an articulation of agency. I understand agency as the capacity to act and the ability to reflect on that action. Work calling involves (re)action. For many participants, a caller is understood as a higher power. This is evident in statements such as, “I think God asks us to take steps and then He directs our path” (Bill, NFL Coach, Line 659). Participants who describe God as the caller, talk of an interactive

---

11 See also Burke’s (1945) view of agency as the “how” (or means by which) an actor accomplishes an act; or Sandel’s (1982) articulation of agency as a combination of, “the faculty of will” and the faculty of cognitive reflection (p. 152).
Being who cares about and engages in their everyday lives. Participants who understood the caller as a “still small voice,” (e.g., Lillian, Founder and Artistic Director of a Nonprofit, Line 877-878) describe it as an internal presence. For example, Lillian, continually mentions listening to a still small voice within, “…so I kept just listening to that voice because it just said I belong here” (Line 970). Here, the assumption is that there is a communicative compass within each of us, and if we listen well to it, this still small voice will guide us in our endeavors. Some participants who referenced the still small voice framed it as coming from a physical object or environment in their lives like a guitar or a hair salon. For instance, a caller as a physical or material other is demonstrated in statements like, “For me it was pretty simple. I just always knew that whenever I walked into a salon that’s always where I felt like I belonged” (Bethany, Hair Dresser and Salon Manager, Line 595-597).

Painter and art teacher, Laurel, connects work calling interaction with the recognition that interaction is a choice. She shares, “When you listen and you heed the call, it’s an adventure in faith. And most people will listen; most people don’t heed the call” (Line 535-536). By analyzing communication about interactions with a caller, we can examine how particular discourses powerfully work to (re)produce work callings. In the present study, interactions with a caller, are (re)produced in participant talk about: (a) receiving and responding, (b) the caller as a higher power (conversations with God), and (c) the caller as the inner self, or a material other.

Participants in this study frequently (re)produced discourse about work calling as a dynamic process of receiving and responding. This is not a linear or passive experience.
Receiving and responding demonstrate the constitutive process of work calling experiences. They are filtered through our cultural standpoints and individual experience. The meanings that are derived through this process are inherently ambiguous and multiple, demanding interpretation on our part. Thus, receiving and responding to a work calling requires navigating through possible misunderstandings or disruptions, as well as physical, cultural, and historical contexts. It means engaging in conscious listening and necessitates action.

Stephen, the wealth manager, describes this dynamic of responding to his calling and the necessary “environment that would allow for the expression of that” (Line, 802). Stephen graduated college with an accounting degree: “After four years of studying for it and several part-time jobs of implementing what I’ve learned decided I didn’t like it” (Line 91-92). A few years later he went to seminary and became a licensed minister: “I decided I wanted to learn what the bible really had to say, and not just follow someone’s religious dictates” (Line 98, 102). Shortly afterwards, Stephen took a summer position in Calcutta, India. There, during his downtime, he bought books from local street vendors. He shares that one day, looking at his books: “it dawned on me, they were all on the stock market” (Line 121). He explains that he had a sharp realization that the skills and passion he had for finance did not need to be separate from his religious faith.

The story of Stephen’s own historical and cultural contexts, and how they play a part in the construction of his work calling, as well as the different disruptions that occurred for him during his work calling development, exemplify the interactive
characteristics of calling. Lisa, hospital performance improvement consultant, also
demonstrates a receiving and responding process, saying (Line 1202, 1204, 1208):

I think there’s that component of what’s pulling you to do the work that you’re
doing, but I also think you have to push…I think the calling gives you that desire
to do it…but you have to really be creative and think.

Using words like “pulling” and “push” highlight an interactive process within the
development of work calling, through a back and forth series of communicative
moments. Lisa’s comment emphasizes the agency involved in experiencing a work
calling. A caller may help highlight the call, but the called must respond, must preserver
in pursuit of the call. Thus, receiving the call and responding to this call requires the
dance of reflective seeking.

During my conversation with Lillian, the founder and artistic director of a
nonprofit, she articulates a belief that everyone has a moment in their lives where they
realize a potential for a work calling. It is the response part of receiving and responding,
that delineates those who pursue work as a calling from those who do not. She explains,
“How they choose to accept, or how they choose to deal with that moment is the setup for
the rest of their lives” (Line 1137-1138). However, Lillian also believes that receiving
and responding to a work calling is bound within cultural and historical contexts of
privilege. For instance (Lillian, Line 1158-1160):

If you haven’t been raised with that possibility, or to respect it, or to trust it or
understand that it even exists, it’s just one of many things that happens to you and
away it goes, and away you go.
Lillian’s statement reinforces the constitutive nature of work calling, suggesting that our ability to “receive” the message is constrained and enabled by cultural standpoints and contexts.

There were marked and differing opinions as to whether pursuing work as a calling is something only a few could afford to do, or something merely requiring the right amount of determination. This notion is further explored in the next chapter. For now, the point is that work calling is not static, but dynamic and agentic. It requires awareness and ownership. Bethany, the hairdresser and salon manager, highlights this well. Coming from an east coast, blue-collar family, Bethany contends that her life is an example that anyone can pursue their work as a calling if they want it badly enough and pursue it at all costs (Line 601-602, 607, 611-612):

So I feel that within everybody there’s something that they love, they just either need to admit it, face it, pursue it, accept it and do something about it. Because…nobody was gonna make it happen for me. So I had to bite the bullet, find a way to make the money to go to school, admit to my parents that this was what I wanted to do.

For Bethany, the process of receiving and responding is about finding a way to pursue what she loves in her work. Her exemplar also reveals that the response element of a work calling means such a calling is not enacted in isolation. Choices to pursue a work calling affect, and are affected by, those around us.

As previously mentioned, I conceptualize spirituality as multidimensional, internal religiousness involving a relational connectedness with a transcendent other (e.g. God), often manifesting through a holistic ethical or value-based framework. The inclusion of the phrase, *relational connectedness* is significant here. It is not merely the
belief in a transcendent Other, it is an interactive, personal knowing. Megan, pastor and chaplain for a city police department, shares: “I heard it [the call] through the filter of how can I love Him [God] more, how can I respond to Him more… because this isn’t my job, this is my response to my savior” (Line 801, 1213). Thus, work is the expression of response to a calling. The calling itself is null and void if there is no response.

The interaction of receiving and responding is further explicated in an understanding of who or what is in dialogue with the individual. Participants articulated the caller as a higher power or a still small voice. Carrie, nonprofit financial development officer, echoes this understanding in her comment: “I have to do my part but I also have to trust that God will do His part” (Line 765-766). Some participants characterize these interactions with God through talk about prayer or contemplative dialogue with God. For instance, as previously mentioned, Stephen, the wealth manager, discusses his initial pursuit of a different occupation and his growing awareness of disinterest in the actual job. He comments on looking at his bookshelf and noticing that all of the texts he was interested in had nothing to do with his current profession, but related to the finance world. He shares, “I heard God say to me, not audibly but in my spirit, I heard Him say to me, why are you denying who you are?” (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 130-131). For these participants, their spirituality plays a primary role in the way they communicate in and about their work as a calling.

Within this sub theme of interactions with a caller as God, participants explain that interactions involve conversation. Walker (2004) describes this act as the processing of vocational discernment; where responding and recognizing a work calling involves
conversations with God and with others who are seeking God. Among the participants who described receiving and responding to work as a calling from God, the message of interaction is best exemplified in the interview with Stephen (Line 209-216):

This morning as I was having my coffee, I had a moment of prayer and I said, God, help me to understand what my assignment is today. What do you have for me today? Whom I’m supposed to be talking to today? What decisions am I supposed to be making that’s in sync with what your plan is for me today? And, I believe my higher calling is not just to operate in sync with who I am, to honor who I am as a person, and not just to exercise the skills to honor God, but to take that a step further and to lay before Him and ask Him, how can I do that in sync with what your plan is for me today.

Here, Stephen demonstrates an interactive knowing, a relational connectedness to a transcendent other that guides his everyday work practices. God is not a distant boss at the head of a company; rather the discourse here indicates the role of counselor and guide. Guides are most valuable when they are reliable and have accurate knowledge. Participants in this study did not attribute God as the caller in the role of a judge who decreed an order; instead, they characterized God as more of an esteemed mentor. This may not be evident in all experiences of God as the caller.\(^\text{12}\) Other participants who sought guidance, found it within themselves or in a material artifact in their lives: Here, we may better understand work calling as interactions between self and spirituality more generally.

A relationship with a caller as the inner self or a material other does not necessitate an affiliation with any form of spirituality or religion. What it does imply is the ability and priority of reflexivity. Reflexivity allows for the individual to look at

\(^{12}\) Previous literature has referred to a potential obligatory nature, a summoning that is less conversational and more commanding. The deeper question then, is how does their understanding of who God is, influence how they receive calling messages? This question goes beyond the scope of the current study, attending to a deeper probing of the socio-historical and socio-cultural reference to God in the lives of the participants.
herself/himself as well as the expression used or situation observed (Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney, & Seibold 2000). By a priority of reflexivity, I mean taking stock of our own actions, asking, “what do I know?” and “how do I know it?” This also involves listening for ways that messages reflect our identity at work, personal goals, understanding of an issue or problem, and sensitivity to the needs of others. Participants who articulate interaction with a caller, without reference to a transcendent other, do so by describing a still small voice that is manifested internally or through a material other.

In this study, individuals attribute the still small voice as in the inner self. For example, Lillian, the founder and artistic director of a nonprofit, explains, “…to me I feel successful because I have listened to the still small voice and followed it, and trust it” (Line 877-878). Laurel, the painter and art teacher, echoes this framework, “Heed the call. Listen to your heart…allow your inner voice to speak” (Line 1169, 1176). Again, work calling experiences are not are passive; rather they involve relationships by which thoughts, values, and beliefs are produced (generating) and reproduced (reinforcing, reifying enduring thoughts, values, and beliefs) (Mumby, 1989; Berger & Luckman). Interaction with the still small voice requires a conscious listening, ongoing interpretation, the choice to trust it, and the enactment of that choice.

While only a select few mentioned a caller as a material other, it was such a strong point of conversation with participants who did, that it merits attention. My interview with Charlie, singer, songwriter, and guitarist, best exemplifies the concept of a caller as a material other. For Charlie, the caller is his guitar. He describes growing up in a very economically poor, but relationally rich household. Whenever Charlie and his
three siblings were given a present (e.g., a bike), it was shared by everyone. When he was seven, he received a guitar. However, he explains that for some reason it was not a communal gift, it was his and his alone (Line 103, 105, 109):

I just would love it, because I would sit there in the room, and not go to sleep, and I’d just look at my guitar…And then somebody broke into our house and smashed up the house and smashed up the guitar…and another guitar didn’t make its way into our house until I was about sixteen.

Charlie goes on to describe the role of the guitar in his family, sharing that his mom would sit on the front porch and sing, while Charlie would play the guitar, “and people would come around all the time. So, the guitar was kind of like a part of the family, it was part of the identity” (Line 142-143). The guitar went from a childhood playmate to a member of the family.

The evolution of the guitar as the caller in Charlie’s professional identity began surfacing after college. Charlie took a job working in the psychiatric ward of a hospital: “Everybody would say the best therapy they ever got there was when I would bring my guitar to work and sing to the patients” (Line 252-253). Still searching for his occupational place in the world, Charlie left the hospital and went to Europe, traveling in a Volkswagen van throughout Paris. He shares that at one point he just stopped and said to himself: “I think it’s time for me to start looking at my music…So that’s when the transition started to happen…in terms of a profession” (Line 264, 268). At this point in the interview, Charlie looks down at his guitar and shares in a hushed voice, almost like this last part is between him and his guitar: “I remember talking with a good friend of mine…he said, ‘your work is healing.’… that’s kind of where it all began…was when I was in France and it dawned on me that this is who I am” (Line 293-294, 298, 316, 320).
Charlie’s interview is an example of the introspective stirring, which initiates an interaction between a caller, as a material other, and the called. The processural nature of a work calling is compellingly constitutive. While meanings may be ambiguous, they can accrete over time, until an individual reaches a moment of clarity.

To this point, I have explicated how the theme of work calling as inherently interactional, surfacing in an understanding of interaction between a caller and the called. That is, the former calls the latter into a relationship enacted through an expression through organizational life. As Guinness (2003) suggests, interaction between a caller and the called is “the most comprehensive reorientation” (p. 7) in a person’s life. This receiving and responding, whether it be through conversations with God, a priority of reflexivity, or an introspective stirring initiated by a material other, the process of enactment in work calling is clearly tied to interaction with a caller. This notion is not just about an upward or inward dynamic, it is also about an outward connection. Work calling as inherently interaction also gives primacy to community.

**Interactions with Community**

Within the theme of work calling as inherently interactional, participant talk revealed a sub theme of interactions with community. For instance, Erin, a school psychologist shares, “…the community you get within work. That’s been exceptionally valuable to me” (Line 380, 384). An emphasis on community recognizes that calling necessarily emanates *out*, beyond the individual who initially feels called. Participant talk demonstrates that the identity of the individual and sense of purpose is often centrally located through community found in, or related to, the workplace. I build an
understanding of community from Heath’s (2007) description of it as a group of individuals operating in a boundary of partnerships built from social, organizational, or civic interests. I also lean on Kuhn’s (2002) concept of community, which involves, “mutual engagement in a common practice,” arising from practical and frequent interactions that go beyond the functional structures (p. 107). Thus, boundaries are fluid, as the community is continually socially (re)constructed through the shared symbolic and material practices of group members.

These partnerships, in which common practices involve a permeable bounded sphere, serve to constitute and frame an interpretation of the call and manifestation of identity among those who perceive a work calling. For instance, in the current study, participants described community as a shared moral imperative existing among interdependent relationships with co-workers, clients, or family/friend support for work commitments. Participants’ material world also demonstrates work calling as involving interactions with community. Josh, the acupuncturist specializing in infertility treatment, demonstrates this well. Below, I highlight Josh’s interview, particularly my observation of two of the four walls in his office, which are almost entirely covered with baby pictures, family pictures, and thank-you cards from his clients. The visual and material impact of these two walls crafts a frame of interaction with community, a marker of solidarity, of commemoration.

**Josh and the Wall**

I meet Josh at his office, which is located in the heart of the city, in a large, old building with several other eclectic businesses, such as a jewelry repair shop. When I
walk in to his office, I am greeted by the smell of herbal tea and soft incense. I immediately notice the two walls described above. Josh and a woman in her 30’s who is visibly pregnant, come out of one of two inner rooms. She sniffs slightly, and Josh says in a kind tone, “tears are part of the natural progression.” I turn my eyes away from them to the desk in front of me and notice that there is no administrative assistant; it is his desk that rests in the left corner of the main room. After saying goodbye to the woman, Josh shakes my hand and offers me some water or tea. He assists a forty-something pregnant woman from the waiting area into an inner room and then joins me behind his desk, where two low-seated chairs are placed in the corner. Josh is a forty-something white, Jewish male who is full of energy and care. He is wearing khaki pants and a blue dress shirt. Throughout our interview, a few women come in and sit down in the waiting area. We stop the interview each time, while he takes them to an inner room and treats them with acupuncture. One woman, who arrived early for her appointment, pulls out a picture of her latest ultra-sound and shows Josh. She jokingly says, “What am I going to bring to Josh today? Because everything I bring, you fix.” Josh’s impact on his patients is not only represented in his interactions with them, it is greatly obvious in the material rhetoric of his walls. The work calling Josh lives out in his daily interaction with his patients bleeds over into the messages of success that he conveys through the pictures on his wall: successful conception and restored dreams.

During the times we had to stop our interview for him to welcome a patient, I stood up and looked over the pictures and thank you cards. Hundreds of baby pictures and families holding babies seemed to stare back at me. Thank you cards included
phrases like, “when all the other doctors told us there was no hope, we came to you. A month later, we were pregnant.” Towards the end of the interview, I asked Josh, “What does success look like for you?” and Josh responds immediately, “I mean these walls…” (Line 672). He gestures with his hands towards the walls, “I mean these pictures are…a constant reminder of the positive changes that I’ve helped people make in their lives, and, um, it’s just a very comforting wall for me” (553, 561-563). Josh’s walls clearly represent the compelling work he feels called to do and the interaction it necessarily involves with his community of patients and their families.13

Community

Other participants suggest that the underlying need for community in a work calling requires cultivation; it cannot be taken-for-granted. For example, Matthew, book publisher and entrepreneur, explains (Line 441-442,447):

It can be easy to lose sight of your calling or the purpose of your organization, and so you have to talk about it a lot…everyone needs to be in these conversations, I think about the calling.

Here it appears that interaction with others in discussions about work calling is what sustains the sense of calling—without interaction, the calling may be diluted. Participants also describe the needed support by their community, such as (Megan, Pastor and Police Department Chaplain, Line 1157-1160):

I don’t do this alone. So there are people in my life who I believe have been called to be my friends, to be my husband, to be my sisters-in-law, or just people close

---

13 It seems that it would be a comforting wall for anyone who enters this office. And yet, this material rhetoric also includes a promise of hope realized. All of these cards start with “we couldn’t get pregnant” and end with “you helped us get pregnant.” There are no cards that say “we still can’t get pregnant” or “I’m grieving over the third miscarriage and I don’t want to do this anymore.” There is a dark side of Josh’s material rhetoric. Here, the provocative and tangible nature of material rhetoric provides a sense of certainty when there is no certainty with fertility. Here, the identification is pulling clients in to a world of fertility success, when that may not be their world.
to me that when I go [to work], I totally trust that there’s a prayer covering over and around me.

Megan’s personal life is organized around her professional life. Her family and friends act as support for the work calling she pursues.

It is important to acknowledge that a pattern did emerge within a few participant interviews, related to the dark side of community influence and work calling. Ben, founder and CEO of a nonprofit child cancer research center, comments: “I think the church in particular has garbled a lot of language that is really not helpful when it comes to vocational discernment and call and God’s will and what isn’t God’s will” (Line 803-805). Here, we see that participants’ assumptions about work are informed by messages embedded within competing discourses of power.\textsuperscript{14} I elaborate on the potential costs or dark side of work calling in the next chapter. For now, it is important to note that identity formation is both constrained and enabled by interactions with community about work as a calling. More specifically, in the current study two primary messages about interactions with the community are a culture of calling, and “people.” I visit each of these ideas in turn.

In one of the first interviews I conducted, Gary, a pastoral director, expressed a belief that everyone in his workplace was similarly motivated. He explains: “Everybody senses that there is a culture of honor, a culture of purpose, integrity, and a culture of calling” (Line 573). While it may appear obvious that a ministry-oriented organization operates in a culture of calling, this assumption is limiting. There are several other

\textsuperscript{14} The question here becomes, what happens when a person’s community is unsupportive or even opposed to a person’s work calling? While this question was not in the scope of the current study, the value applied to work as a calling, as influenced by community (e.g. Clair, 1997), would be a productive next step.
messages that may exist in a ministry-oriented organization as a primary motivation, such as a culture of service, relationship, or social justice, (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006; Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001). What is significant here is that Gary used the phrase, *culture of calling*. Pulling from Eisenberg and Riley’s (2001) explication of organizational culture, communication is constitutive of calling. That is, a culture of calling exists within patterns of human action and meaning. Thus, a culture of calling describes the sense of community within a workplace, built from a shared moral imperative arising from a collective knowledge and identification with perceiving work as a calling. As Kuhn (2002) describes, communities of practices (such as a culture of calling) are not linear models of communication, rather they are “always intimately linked to practice, context, and discourse” (p. 108). A culture of calling involves “webs of shared meanings” constituted communicatively through interactions among community participants (Geertz, 1973).

Other interviews reinforced this notion. More specifically this awareness of a culture of calling appears to be a primary motivation for participants’ when this calling is expressed by other organizational members. For example, Lillian, Founder and Artistic Director of a Nonprofit After-School Program, shares “[What I love the most is] The amazing, amazing group of people who are on our boards, who are volunteers, teachers, mentors, and they all are coming from a similar place” (Line 851-852). The statement of “coming from a similar place” is in reference to her community that approaches work as a calling and the generative motivation that this affords her. According to Lillian, those involved with her nonprofit after school program all imbue the idea of work with
meaning, through implicit and explicit knowledge and enactment of feeling compelled to use their skills and passions for the betterment of society. In some cases, the desire to be part of a culture of calling can sway people to move to different companies. Carrie’s interview highlights this. She describes her recent work transition during an orientation meeting (Line 355, 365, 428-429):

So we got to hear from our current CEO and our CEO elect…and they all used this sense of calling…in describing their work…I feel like from talking to the other people in the organization that everybody is there because they have this sense of calling.

Lillian and Carrie’s comments demonstrate that work calling is connected to deriving a sense of community at work. These workplaces provide a larger social unit, producing a cohesiveness derived from shared beliefs and resources. Here, the shared belief is in work as a calling. The cohesiveness exists because of the moral imperative that work is the expression of a particular identity; that of being called. The collective incentive is not monetary or external demonstrations of power; it is the impact of what is deemed as “good” for society. It follows that there is a sacred expectation of work due to the nature of calling, which can be used to constrain or enable the worker.

In describing his company, John, entrepreneur and CEO of a for-profit finance organization, says he believes that a work calling motivates over half his employees. He explains, “We don’t screen for it, we don’t hire for it, but in our candidate process our [organizational] values are overtly clear. Our two core values of the company are

---

15 Here is where further exploration of the ethos within a culture of calling could be analyzed. Is this development merely a reflection of capitalistic power, a new take in deriving more profit by encouraging workers to assume a sense of deeper meaning? Within this culture of calling, is resistance welcomed or seen as a lack of faithfulness to a corporate call? Or, can an authentic attention to work calling as part of organizational culture truly inspire long-term innovation, motivation, and dedication?
absolute truth and absolute compassion” (Line 548-550). While John is an example of someone who feels a culture of calling can exist in a for-profit company, it does appear from the interviews in this study that a culture of calling is more accessible in (but not limited to) non-profit, ministry-oriented companies, or when participants work for themselves. Stephen, the wealth manager, points out, “If I was part of an organizational structure that was larger than myself, it would be quite a challenge, I suspect, unless I was part of a faith-based organization that embraced those values” (Line 344-346).

Stephen’s autonomy arising from his self-employment, allows for the privilege of community. He suggests that if he had to assimilate to a larger corporate structure where work as a calling may not be valued or prioritized, the opportunity to express his identity as a called worker would be constrained. The ability to produce a culture of calling appears to exist in work environments where participants are self-employed or with participants who are the head of a for-profit company. In addition to messages of a calling culture, participant interviews revealed a consistent pattern of talk about the value of people as it relates to their work calling. A culture of calling refers to the collective community, the community functioning as a whole; whereas messages about “people” as the community focus on relationships as the benefit rather than on the community identity as a motivator. Within a culture of calling, people are valued as a collective community attempting to infuse meaning into society through their work.

Participant discourse demonstrates how work calling as inherently interactional serves to orient their lives and organize their time, integrating individuals into a larger community. One significant outcome of participant communication in this study is that
all twenty-nine participants responded to the question, “what do you love the most about your work?” with some form of “people,” as an answer. For example, “If you don’t love people, forget it. That’s number one” (Ted, Pastor of a Multi-Ethnic Church, Line 637). Grant, Vice-President of Client Engagement at a digital advertisement agency, shares (Line 69, 75-76, 117):

The biggest aspect of the job that I like is the people aspect of it…what draws me more is being the guy for the company that ensures that our clients are taken care of, the guy that makes sure that our employees come first…what I like to do, I think ultimately, I found is invest in people.

Interactions with people at work greatly influence the quality of work as a calling. Participants describe connecting with people as fulfilling an inward desire rooted in a work calling. For instance: “this kind of desire or a hunger…to help people, be part of people’s lives, encourage, uplift” (Ted, Pastor of a Multi-Ethnic Church, Line 167-168). Connecting with people as the basis of experiencing community satiates the hunger to positively invest and impact other peoples’ lives.16

This response of a love for “people” surfaced in participant language regardless of occupation. Bethany, hairdresser and salon manager, states: “I love that I become somebody that they [the clients] trust and look forward to seeing in their life” (Line 295-296). A similar message of trust and guidance is evident in a comment from Rob, the financial advisor, “I love just working with people who I know need help and the satisfaction of being able to at least help them move a little farther down that path” (Line 495-496). Interacting with people (e.g., Frank, The Doctor), investing in their lives (e.g.

---

16 The challenge here may be that some people will always be in need, therefore the hunger to help can be filled for a time, but the cry for help will always be there. How is this cry rhetorically situated? Who hears the cry, who is behind the cry, and what cries are silenced?
Nancy, Professor and Gallup Consultant), or just the sheer love of people (e.g. Lisa, Hospital Performance Improvement Consultant) surfaced in every conversation throughout each interview process. The impact of these findings must not be overlooked. Work calling has been studied primarily by organizational psychologists, yet the message of work calling as inherently interactional is at the core of human communication.

Scholars must attend to the actual voices of participants, to hear their stories of work calling interaction, to witness their everyday discourse, and observe their lived experiences. When a person receives a call, communicative space is opened up between the caller and the called. In this space, the call is articulated between a caller and called, dynamically co-constructing what the call means, how it is actualized, and the relationships involved. The current interview exemplars reinforce the understanding that a work calling is interactional, involving interpretation and negotiation in determining what the call means to the person perceiving the call. Another prime example was demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, in Bill’s, NFL coach, statement (Line 1032, 1038-1040, 1054-1055):

It’s really the relationships that are far more valuable. I’m helping them become the best they can possibly be as a quarterback and then the side note is, also as a man, also as a husband, maybe even as a boyfriend… I think that’s the whole thing that revolves around the calling. It’s more about the relationships.

Work calling is about relationship. The quality of relationships within organizational life, the cohesion existing in a workplace culture has a direct impact on a person’s work calling. The theoretical and practical implications of such findings are discussed in the conclusion of this chapter. Presently, I turn to the final interaction theme, that is, work calling involves interaction with work/family dynamics.
Interactions with Work/Family

Within the theme of work calling as inherently interactive, participant talk demonstrates a sub theme of interactions with work/family dynamics. Previous research reveals that the two primary sources of socialization come from work and family (Cheney et al., 2008; Tracey & Trethewey, 2005; Krone, Schrodt, & Kirby, 2006). It follows that work/family communication informs an individual’s approach to work as a calling. Below, I highlight the material manifestation of work calling interactions with work/family dynamics in my interview with Frank, the primary care doctor. Frank’s work calling interaction, involving work/family dynamics, is characterized in the material rhetoric of his grandchildren’s drawings and picture of his daughter and two grandsons in every single room of his practice. These pictures demonstrate the value he places on his family, the legacy of his parenting, and the inclusion of his grandkids as a sign of his success. Frank defines his success in the positive contribution his work has on those around him. The success of his family is indicative of a healthy work calling enactment. His family success informs his work success.

Frank and the Pictures

Arriving at Frank’s practice, the woman behind the front desk asks for my name. Upon hearing my name, another woman behind the desk introduces herself as Frank’s wife and as the front desk administrative manager. She tells me he will be out in a just a second. From the sitting area, I see several children’s drawings and a few pictures of two young boys in Disney hats. Frank quickly comes out the door, shakes my hand and immediately ushers me in to a patient’s room. The patient, a petite older Asian woman, is
holding the left side of her ribs in obvious discomfort, looking at Frank with a trusting smile. He tells the woman that I am observing and interviewing him. As he treats her for her ailment, I noticed that there are also children’s drawings and a few pictures of the same two small, grinning boys in this room. Concluding his time with her, he asks how her family is doing and lightly placing his hand on her shoulder, tells her to get some rest.

At the very end of my interview with Frank, sitting in his office (with organized piles of paper on his desk, between books on the bookshelves, and on the floor), I notice more of these drawings and pictures. Frank leans forward and shares in his New York manner (1359-1360, 1370, 1375-1377):

> You know, everybody says they have cute grandkids, but come on. But you know what the best part is, this is how they are inside…That’s my secret. People go “oh my grandkid is smart.” Oh, these kids are very smart. And, “my grandkid is beautiful.” But my grandkids are beautiful on the inside. And why? Because of that girl right there [points to the photo]. Their mom.

With the information from the interview that he and his wife drive together to work each day, that he loves how their professional and personal lives are interconnected, and the stories that that Frank shares about how his work calling were greatly influenced by his father’s desire to see Frank not repeat the same work life he had as a poor grocer; these drawings and pictures reverberate with powerful material rhetoric. Frank is not trying to live a bifurcated life. He embraces the interaction between work and family communication. One informs the other and vice versa. His work calling interacts with his family life. He shoulders the wounds from his father’s sense of failure; he revels in the success of his children and children’s children.17

---

17 Material rhetoric of family photos was also strikingly evident in my interaction with Anthony, the clinical psychologist. Anthony had over six pictures of his family in his small office. However, for
The demonstration of work calling interaction in participants material world, points to an underlying element of organizational rhetoric. The guitar has become an extension of Charlie, the words on the wall represent Lauren’s connection to art, the pictures Josh’s on the walls mark a dedication of hope, and the presentation of Frank’s family the illustrates the belief that life success is a co-constructed process of work/family dynamics. When these individuals engage in their work calling, how they communicate about it constitutes the web of meaning that entangles their lives. The materiality of their lives helps (re)constitute these meanings for themselves and others.

**Work/Family Dynamics**

Other participant interviews reveal the socially constructed process of work calling as interconnected within work and family communication. For example, Erin, school psychologist, describes the impact that her mother’s approach to work and family had on her own work calling development (Line 489, 493-494, 503):

I grew up with a parent who worked for the school district… I saw the flexibility that that afforded as a parent because [my mom] worked full-time and it felt like I had a stay-at-home mom…One of the things that drew me even more to school psychology is that I knew that having a family was also part of my future.

As Erin speaks to, the influence of work/family messages within the concept of work calling forms a long-lasting impact upon our personal and professional development.

According to participants, witnessing their parents’ pursuit of particular occupations and the consequences of these choices greatly impacted their understanding and pursuit of work as a calling. Frank, a physician, shares (Line 551-552, 562-563):

Anthony, these pictures represented a sense of failure. The cost of his work calling was the sacrifice of family well-being. Anthony’s story will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.
My father’s life… didn’t… work out maybe the way he would have liked. He wound up working in a little grocery store in the ghetto in Chicago with his aging father… he never wanted that life for me and so he was always kind of talking up education.

The topic of his father’s influence upon his own work came up through Frank’s interview. He continually spoke of the sacrifices his own father made to ensure that he would not have to be limited in his work options. Frank’s dad revered education and more specifically, the profession of a doctor. The implication is that his dad laid the framework for Frank’s work calling.

In addition to the influence of parental communication about work, participants described an ongoing process of navigating the tensions that blur the boundaries between work and family in their own lives, through the interactivity of their work calling. Both men and women in the study spoke about the tensions of work callings and family. While the following exemplars do include concepts of sacrifice within calling (the focus of chapter six), the primary tension here is the necessary interaction between work and family. For instance, Anthony, a clinical psychologist and cognitive scientist, comments (Line 384-387, 391-392):

I knew that I wanted to do something that would be helpful in some way and I knew that I wanted to work with kids and families. And I knew I wanted to have a family and be a part of that… and I needed to figure out how to put all those things together within the context of a workplace.

Anthony articulates the colliding or competing messages that exist within work/family dynamics related to work calling. Bill, the NFL coach, also acknowledges that his work calling contains a high level of risk to his family. His work requires him to be away from home, to spend long hours and intense time during a large portion of the year, prioritizing
his team. To combat this risk, he and his wife designate a special dinner after each football season is over, to talk about how things are going. He shares that his intention for this dinner was, “…because I didn’t want her to just survive…I wanted her to thrive” (Line 124, 128). At this point in the interview, Bill pauses for an extended time. Then he goes on to say he has a word picture that represents the ongoing tension he feels between his work calling and his family. He asks me (Line 312, 320, 328-329, 333):

Have you ever seen that movie, The Little Mermaid? Alright, well, there’s this mean octopus lady named Ursula, when she casts those spells on those Mer people, did you see those little oyster shell’s all shriveled up? I try to make sure my family doesn’t look like that.

The implication is that work calling can cause the family sphere to implode, to wither and lose any form of identity. Work calling has potential for great good or destruction. Bill’s example underscores a healthy tension in the pursuit of managing the priorities of work as a calling and family. For Bill, if his work calling starts demanding the sacrifice of his family, it is no longer a virtuous calling.

Lisa, hospital performance improvement consultant, also describes tensions between interactions with work and family as they relate to her work calling (Line 907-908, 912-913, 917-918, 922-923):

For a little while after I had Tyler [her son]…I actually had a little bit of this anger thing in me…when I would sit in these monthly staff meeting[s], and I would sit there and be like I just want to be with my son. At that short period of time I wasn’t feeling a lot of meaning [at work], I was less and less motivated to work. And I think that if that would have continued, I probably would not have been able to continue working
Lisa’s communication reveals the tension between family and her work calling. She describes the interaction with her role as a new mom and as a hospital consultant. Here, she wrestles with the issue of where she is experiencing a deeper meaning.

From participant talk, it is clear that work calling is not a simplistic path. It is enmeshed in blurred boundaries, crossing over multiple spheres of life. What is also clear is that the meaningful pull of using passion and skill at work, the process of being compelled or the moment of reckoning, and the impact upon greater society, while quite strong, is not easy to deal with. It requires flexibility, creativity, and drive (e.g. Carrie, Nonprofit Financial Development Officer). Laurel, the painter and art teacher, proudly shares how she has been able to manage the interactions of work calling and family needs (Line 158-159, 163, 186-188):

I also care for my dad who is ninety-seven tomorrow, and he’s lived here for ten years with me. So I’ve been a full-time caregiver in my home and been able to grow a business and follow my passion…when I found that I needed to take care of my dad, I said I can stay at home and I can work. I can continue to do what I love to do and be here for him so he doesn’t have to go into some lonely place.

Clearly, interactions between participants’ work calling and family are messy, requiring communicative negotiation. Such complexity is apparent in the messages of tensions between work and family dynamics. When interaction is viewed as a socially constructed, constitutive process, tensions are part of the negotiation of reality. They serve as productive as well as potentially destructive means of (re)solidifying knowledge. According to participants, this messiness is worth navigating through, and it often involves a strong work-ethic, which according to participants in this study, is derived from parental influence.
With the exception of two participants, all other participants credit their work approach to their parents. This is evident in statements such as: “In many ways I followed in his [dad] footsteps to not go down the corporate track, to create your own future and the confidence that you can go out and do it” (Mark, Publisher and Entrepreneur, Line 336-337, 341). Nicole, the massage therapist echoes this (Line 202, 206-208):

My work ethic, from my roots would be my father. And he is somebody who I had admired his loyalty to his work. He always told me from an early age, it doesn’t matter how much money you make, enjoy what you’re doing.

Participants referred to their parents as their greatest teacher about the meaning of work (e.g. Charlie, Musician). Whether it was teaching by example (of what to do, or not to do), or by direct conversations, interaction with parents significantly influenced participants’ understanding of work as a calling.

Parents are not only credited for cultivating a work calling foundation for participants, they are also referenced as models for what kind of approach to work and work/family interactions to avoid. For instance, when asking Stephen, a wealth manager, who or what influences his work approach, he explains (Line 56, 60-62, 68-69):

It comes from a core value, and this is critical for me in my business...I grew up with a dad that was never home. And when he was at home he was locked in his den doing all the administration on his business. So I never had that interaction with dad. It created a value in my system to make sure that when I’m home, I’m home with my wife and my kids so I’m home at dinnertime…We’re together as a family and I don’t do any work on the weekend.

Here, a core value of work-ethic develops from reflexively and intentionally choosing to stop a particular cycle of parenting. Stephen chose not to continue the normative behavior of a distant dad and workaholic. The health of his work calling is predicated on the health
of his family life. Thus, work calling is not a compartmentalized function of work; it is a way of being.

Finally, a few participants commented on difficult family situations as being a direct influence on their work calling. Katie, a palliative care social worker, points to being “instilled” with a work calling because of learning how to take care of a chronically ill father (Line 379). She spoke of her dad with a fond tone, as if these experiences were his gift to her. Megan, pastor and chaplain for a city police department, also highlights a similar situation as one of the greatest influences upon her work calling (Line 585, 590-592, 602, 606-607):

My dad had MS my whole life while I was growing up. I had to navigate the world for him…I would help my dad if he had a doctor’s appointment or if he needed something …we had a really close relationship, but I translated life for someone with MS. That was way more education for what I do than my education. So, in that I feel like who the Lord calls, He equips, and my dad’s MS was part of the equipping for what it is that I do now.

What is interesting in Megan’s comments is a sense that the skills and passions for a work calling can be cultivated from challenging circumstances. The source of the skills and motivations for a person’s work calling can be drawn from and emerge out of very different life experiences.

In summary, participant communication revealed a theme of work calling as inherently interactive, through messages of interactions with a caller, community, and work/family dynamics. At the beginning of each sub-theme I also provided descriptive vignettes, which delved into expressions of work calling as inherently interactive in participants’ organizational lives. Through the vignettes and exemplars, a caller was described as a metaphysical, transcendent other (e.g., God), a still small voice, or a
physical other. Participants referenced community as involving a culture of calling within their workplaces and/or an overarching emphasis on the value of people, as it relates to what they love most within their particular work callings. Work/family dynamics were framed as spousal, child, and adult parental needs, colliding or competing with organizational life, as well as the significant impact of parental communication about work impact upon the participants’ own work approach. Presently, I explore the implications and applications of work calling as inherently interactive.

**Implications and Applications**

Through an analysis of thematic messages embedded in the communication participants used to describe work calling experiences, the current chapter provides qualitative evidence that helps to answer the question, “How do participants from diverse professions communicate about work calling experiences?” In the current chapter, I examined how participants provided one answer to this question, that is work calling experiences are communicated as being interactive. Interaction as a constitutive process contributes to the idea that meaning is ambiguous and multiple; filtered through encoding/decoding processes (that are conditioned by personal experiences and socio-cultural standpoints); occurring over time. Thus, work calling is distinctly communication-based. Moreover, providing an answer to this question has significant implications, both theoretically and practically.

Communication (re)constitutes work meanings. Communication about work calling (re)constitutes work meanings. Initially, understanding what work calling involves and what specific interactions percolate within work calling experiences serves
to contextualize, deepen, and expand the dominant survey-based, statistically oriented research. Such research connects work calling with positive outcomes such as greater overall motivation, life satisfaction, and general well-being (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). The current study helps specify what a work calling means for the participants themselves. Using themes to identify, describe, and evaluate communication about work calling offers a discursive short-hand to explain often hard-to-articulate assumptions, norms, and experiences. The exemplars in this study demonstrate the importance of highlighting the local language and worlds of participants in an understanding of messages about work calling and work/family interaction. It is far too easy to assume a clean, compartmentalized approach to work.

Perhaps more importantly, the exemplars in this chapter demonstrate the theoretical implication that communication about work as a calling as inherently interactive disrupts the reified understanding of work as concrete and challenges the bifurcation of organizational life and personal and/or spiritual life. That is, work calling involves the intangible and blurs the lines between public and private spheres. Integrating work calling in mainstream organizational communication scholarship troubles our notion of work, because we cannot ignore the reality that personal beliefs and perceptions of work have a bearing on one’s overall life.

Work calling as interaction with work/family dynamics de-compartmentalizes the public-private. Work and family are not containers; they interact with each other. Understanding work-life as dynamic management, means recognizing it as a process of
“weaving” or seamless integration of the two spheres (Broadfoot et al., 2008; Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). This study provides evidence that not only is the dynamic of work/family in constant and integrative tension, but for many participants their organizational/spiritual lives are interwoven at the very core of their identities as well. Future studies should attend to the particular impact of parental (or guardian) communication about work approach as it relates to participants’ perspective of work as a calling. For example, what deeper implications does family communication have upon a person’s pursuit and experience of work as a calling? How does a person’s spiritual or religious orientation serve to influence particular messages about work as a calling in the context of work/family dynamics?

From this study, we know that participants’ assumptions about work calling are informed by messages embedded within competing discourses of power. A second theoretical implication from participant communication about work calling as interactive is the panoptic control from those in power, in the shaping of what is and what is not work calling. The panoptican references a particular form of discipline used in prison systems, which structures prison cells in such a way that each cell is entirely visible by perceived armed guards in security tower (Foucault, 1984, 1977). Foucault likens the power of institutions and organizations to that of the panoptican, as both contexts refer to the inability to decipher whether or not the few in power were watching and governing the moves of the many. Here, sheer physical force is replaced by the discipline of observation. The discipline of being observed by unseen guards is then internalized by the prisoners so that they police their own behaviors in accordance with what the
institution sanctions. As previously mentioned, Ben, founder and CEO of a nonprofit child cancer research center, demonstrates this well in his interview, when he says, “I think the church in particular has garbled a lot of language that is really not helpful when it comes to vocational discernment and call and God’s will and what isn’t God’s will” (Line 803-805). Stephen, the wealth manager echoes this too, stating that he can pursue his work as a calling because he works for himself. However, “If I was part of an organizational structure that was larger than myself, it would be quite a challenge I suspect” (Line 344-345). The implications of panoptic uses of work calling messages point to the power to name what is and what is not a work calling. Scholars should give focused attention to enabling and constraining discourses used by institutions and voices of power in the (re)production of work calling messages. For example, future studies should engage in questions like, who has the power to name work as a calling?

Finally, greater attention is needed on the dominant pattern of talk revolving around the “people” as the greatest positive factor across diverse work professions, in the context of work as a calling. First, from an interpretive perspective, this finding lends to the recognition of work calling as a communication-based concept. Previously, occupational therapists and organizational psychologists have led the scholarly conversation on the subject of work as a calling. However, in the current study, participant communication revealed that at the heart of work calling is interactivity. Work calling is not only a psychological means of processing one’s work approach, it is a socially constructed, constitutive process of assigning meaning through interaction with
other people. That is, from the present research, it appears that a connection with other people is part of the core of work calling experiences.

Secondly, from a critical perspective, this finding could relate to the emphasis of service-oriented work. The present research included participants from diverse occupations; however, these professions involved people-oriented work rather than manual labor. Given these contexts, it may not be much of a surprise that all participants mentioned “working with people,” rather than working with their hands, as the best part of their jobs. The question becomes, in a postindustrial society, would work calling experiences be as prevalent in manual labor jobs? And, if so, would experiences of work calling be communicated in similar or different themes? For some, the value of work and a work calling may exist in the very inclusion of the body at work. The physical embodiment of agency is expressed in using one’s hands in order to physically make a difference in the lives of other (e.g. Crawford’s (2009) book on working in a motorcycle repair shop, operating as a “spirited man”). For others, work calling may be a luxury they cannot afford and therefore must labor in, rather than love, their work. The overlapping question here becomes, what value is there in being able to have a work calling that you can walk away from at the end of the day verses a work calling that has very blurred spatial or temporal boundaries? What does it really mean to be free to follow a work calling?

In the current study, there are also practical applications of work calling as inherently interactional in community, and particularly through messages about a culture of calling and cohesion. Cohesion is a necessary partner to efficiency. It is what brings
teams together with a magnetic force. The social side of work is almost always where commitment develops (Lafasto & Larson, 2001). Workers are motivated by having something to believe in, such as how their work fulfills a social need. Thus, the approach and enactment of a group’s goal is directly tied to the successful communication of a collaborative environment (Hicks & Larson, 2010), namely a team that cultivates trust through a shared commitment, such as work as a calling. From participant interviews, it appears that a culture of calling positively influences participants’ approach to work and the communities in which they are immersed.

As will be discussed in the follow chapter, work calling can have costs associated with it. We can see the potentiality for an ethical cost regarding a culture of calling if organizational leaders attempt to exploit workers who feel called in order to elicit more productivity from them. This usage or manipulation of a person’s belief in a work calling could result organizational domination and/or the need for emancipation. While this is disturbing, it is not surprising as many components of organizational life can be employed productively or destructively, depending on the orientation of those in power. Treated ethically, fostering a culture of calling has the potential to produce positive change for a person, community and the world at large. By focusing attention on what (re)constructs a culture of calling, in an understanding of work identity, climate quality, and perceptions of effectiveness, we can deepen our understanding of how people feel about their work.

We see a need for understanding feelings of work calling in a previous statement by a participant in the current study, from an interview with Matthew, the book publisher.
and entrepreneur, who explained: “It can be easy to lose sight of your calling or the purpose of your organization, and so you have to talk about it a lot…everyone needs to be in these conversations, I think about the calling” (Line 441-442, 447). As the founder of the annual Leadership Summit in South Barrington, Illinois, one of Bill Hybels’ (2008) axioms is, “vision leaks” (p. 52). What this means is that leaders often concentrate so much on filling up organizational members’ “bucket” of motivation that they forget to revisit, maintain, and refresh the vision, which can eventually cause it to leak out from the bottom. They forget that work identity is processural and not fixed. If the goal is living out a culture of calling—responding to a feeling of being compelled or a moment of reckoning, to use skills and passions, in order to positively contribute to society, then meaningfulness in work becomes a driving motivational factor in organizational goals.

Developing a culture of calling is not limited to ministry-oriented or nonprofit companies. While perhaps the cultivation of a work calling may be more accepted in these environments as it promotes a service-oriented mission, is it applicable among for-profit companies as well. For example, in December 2009, Blake Mycoskie, founder of TOMS was awarded the States Department’s Award for Corporate Excellence by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. TOMS (originally called, “Shoes for tomorrow”) is a socially conscious, for-profit company. In an interview, Mycoskie (2010) states, “I have found in the last three years that passion and compassion can build a business.” This is demonstrated through a foundational value of the company as a culture of giving. So, what exactly is their goal? One for one. Each time a consumer buys a pair of TOMS, another pair is given to a child. TOMS has helped make the average person
feel like co-creators of the movement, by encouraging “conscious consumers” to purchase and give more than 400,000 pairs of shoes to children around the world. Meanwhile, after working at TOMS for two years, employees get to travel to places like Argentina or Ethiopia to hand-deliver the shoes and see their goals come to fruition. This goal of “one for one” generated a movement on April 8th 2010, known as “One Day without Shoes.” On this day a quarter of a million people participated in over 1,600 events around the world, designed to raise awareness of the daily realities for those who do not have shoes. With what seems like simplicity, a movement among “conscious consumers” initiates an agency of socially minded purchases, making an impact for those who may seem unreachable. Those who work at TOMS share a mutual commitment in their work values and organizational goals. It could be said that this company demonstrates the enactment of work calling at an organizational level, and their commitment to this work calling has started what some have called a social movement.

Lastly, if a culture of calling means sharing a collective value-system for the purpose of achieving organizational goals, the question should be asked, “what are the drawbacks for developing a culture of calling?” Additionally, practitioners should reflectively question their own ethical motivations behind the (re)construction of a culture of calling. The synergy and efficacy of a group can easily be manipulated by voices of power. When this is the case, individual motivation may not be sustainable. One of the initial tenets of work calling as inherently interactional is the inclusion of agency. If workers feel a lack of choice and freedom to act within their own value systems, the perception of work calling is polluted. The key here is that a culture of
calling is not step-by-step program which results in organizational success. We must pay attention to the distribution of power (Ansel & Gash, 2007). The collaborative process is one populated by human beings who have relational and instrumental goals. Work calling panopticans devalue the ethos of work as a calling and could create resentment or burnout. Levels of cohesion are connected to the distributions of power, in both the relational health and structural functioning of an organization.

While this notion of cohesion may seem relationally focused, it is also pragmatically oriented, as it directly affects an organization’s productivity. Lafasto and Larson (2001) describe spiritual energy or team spiritedness as, “sharing a collective will…a set of beliefs: We can do it. We’re going to do it. And we’re going to do it together” (p. 79). There is a particular type of group confidence found in spiritual energies. However, this confidence can be ruptured if individuals feel like they are being manipulated to orient themselves in this way. Not all workers may feel called to their work. Work callings are not necessarily positive, and certainly can involve significant costs. In the following chapter, I describe and analyze messages of calling costs. In particular, I examine the embedded messages of work calling requiring boundaries, resulting in burnout, and necessitating sacrifice.
“So I think that there are people who come from nothing, who absolutely know that they have a calling, they have nothing to fear, they can manage...And then there are people who can’t manage in any way, shape or form because they’re too afraid” (Lillian, Founder and Artistic Director of a Nonprofit, Line 430-431, 435-436).

Chapter VI: Significant Costs

Occupational stress is the most powerful form of decreased work satisfaction and the strongest cause of depression associated with work (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Jensen, 2006; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvick, & Alberts, 2006). While previous research has linked an individual’s perceptions of feeling called to work with overall wellness, decreased absenteeism, a contributor to stress reduction, and high levels of motivation (Lui & Robertson, 2011; Sheep, 2006; Marques et al., 2005; Cisernik & Adams, 2002); individuals with a work calling are also more likely to be overworked, which can result in a particularly disorienting type of burnout (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Golden, Piedmont, Ciarrocchi, & Rodgerson, 2004). In this chapter, participant discourse reveals that work calling costs, which manifested in burnout, can significantly fractures one’s core sense of identity. Work calling involves a unique struggle for work boundaries, the potential trauma of identity crisis resulting from burnout, and particular sacrifices associated with the pursuit of a work calling.

The present research is motivated by the research question, “How do participants from diverse professional domains communicate about work calling experiences?” In this final analysis and discussion chapter, I attend to the third theme that emerged from participant communication about work calling, which is calling costs. Language about
calling costs focused on the struggle for boundaries, the danger of burnout, and the distinct sacrifices (such as time, finances, social judgment) that work calling demands. From such discourse, work calling is revealed as a contested, political, and privileged term. Not only can work calling motivate, it can manipulate. Not only can work calling provide depth of meaning, its meaningfulness can become tyrannical. Not only can work calling enact a sense of freedom of self, it can also confine selves who are not free to follow it.

Chapters Four and Five provided a grounded definition of work calling and its interactive nature. The current chapter navigates through the messiness of work calling costs. This theme surfaced in language about: (a) the struggle to create, enforce, or experience work boundaries, (b) the trauma of identity crisis from burnout, and (c) sacrifices associated with pursuit of a work calling. Calling costs engage in the search for, or lack of boundaries, the experience of toxic callings that initiate burnout and identity crisis, as well as liberating and marginalizing sacrifices within intersubjective concepts of privilege.

The theme of calling costs is revealed through analysis and discussion of exemplars, providing support that this theme derives from participant communication which meets the standards of Owen’s thematic analysis (Owen, 1985, 1984). Calling costs identify competing voices of power; deepen our knowledge of the tension between blurred spheres of life; and underscore particular privileges that impede or enhance participants’ experience of work as a calling. This chapter is the springboard for future studies on the critical and rhetorical nature of work calling communication.
Boundaries

Cost signifies payment, a forfeiting of one thing for the attainment of another. It assumes that the focus of desire is not free; it involves a particular form of compensation. Embedded within this understanding is the assumption that the value of what is desired is worth the payment required. Participant communication revealed messages of calling costs as primary means of constructing the outcome or consequence of pursuing work as a calling. To review, the definitional markers of work calling, which include the allure of deeper meaning through the use of skill and passion for a greater good, and the inherent interaction of work calling which, pulls the worker in multiple communicative directions. Therefore, it is imperative to turn our attention to the underlying implications of what it means to live in a contemporary organizational context that blurs the boundaries of time, place, and space. Previous research tells us that our identities cannot sustain the bifurcated lines drawn between work and life (Miller, 2003; Bauman 2000). In contemporary society, it is a myth that work is unrelated to (or non-reflective of) the rest of life (Broadfoot et al., 2008). Work involves social and collaborative organizing, interweaving the public and private, providing a primary means of identity expression.

Participant discourse demonstrates that a work calling expresses the very core of a person’s value system. The challenge becomes when work is no longer an extension of the self, but the very definition of self, where work is always the priority. Within the situatedness of work calling and the theme of costs, a patterned set of ideas emerged through the sub-theme of boundaries as a preliminary place of struggle against burnout. For example, Nicole, a massage therapist, shares (Line 151, 173-175, 831, 840, 851):
Pain brings the worst out in people…I’ve learned to create those boundaries and being able to withstand that…something that took me about ten years to figure out. And through trial and error and how much I could really handle…Divorcing clientele in a professional way…in regards to boundaries, it’s okay to say no…I’ve been able to listen to my body. I’m much healthier, I don’t get sick like I used to.

We know that meaning-making is a local phenomenon. While Nicole’s exemplar may not provide a generalized understanding of work calling boundaries, it does reveal several key points about work calling boundaries for participants within this study.

First, participants convey that boundaries are needed because of other people. Work is not a container; it overlaps with other spheres of life and other lives (Garcia-Zamar, 2003). Here, the assumption is that boundaries are synonymous with balance. In this understanding, boundaries serve as a “protective function for individual workers subject to the ever expanding reach of organizations into personal life” (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003, p. 5). However, communication about work boundaries can become problematic when such messages refer to traditional concepts of boundaries as a wall or barrier between work and the rest of life. Such an understanding perpetuates the idea that work is a naturally bounded place. Several work-life scholars have rejected the term “boundary” and replaced it with the word “balance,” as a way of problematizing the blurred spheres of life (e.g. Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Second, participant discourse demonstrates that boundaries are a proactive and reactive process, both of which require reflective awareness of listening to the self and acting in accordance with the needs of the self (Kirby et al., 2003). In other words, boundaries are individualized and contextual. Third, lack of boundaries or balance
results, but is not limited to, a major decrease in health (Tracy et al., 2006). For instance, Alexis, a child and adolescent psychologist, points to boundaries for managing intense emotion derived from her occupation: “To really be in this you have to be able to separate a lot of what goes on and be able to handle hearing hard things and then like go to a birthday party for your friend” (Alexis, Line 842-843). Participants connected issues of boundaries and work calling to emotional and physical health.

Participants also express a pursuit or lack of balance. Josh, the acupuncturist and fertility expert, identifies the lack of balance in his work calling, attributing it to being self-employed: “But I think when you own your own business you never really have a day off or a full vacation like you would if you go to a place and you punch in.” (Line 816-817). However, Dan, the lawyer, who is not self-employed, also echoes the challenge of finding balance, saying: “The hardest part is trying to take time off, because you’re afraid that you’re gonna miss things or you’ll lose business…So I’m always afraid that I’ll lose business if I’m not sort of doing it every day” (Line 230-231). Here, we see that the demands of a work calling include the emotional, intangible (e.g. expressions of identity, health issues) and the functional, tangible (e.g., paying the bills). Such messages also indicate the continuous, ongoing dynamic of seeking balance.

**The Search for Balance**

Participants in this study frequently (re)produced discourse about the pursuit or lack of balance in their work callings. For instance, Carrie, a nonprofit financial development officer, shares the story of initially being a corporate woman, then a stay-at-home parent; but after her divorce she suddenly finds herself as a single mother. In the
process of reexamining her life, she begins to realize a deep longing to apply her skill-set and passion in a meaningful work context. She shares the struggle of negotiating fiscal solvency while pursuing her work calling. (Line 325-329):

There’s not gonna be any longevity in doing something that you don’t like. I mean you can make yourself do it and…there’s times in our lives where we need to just buck up and do some things even if we don’t like it, or it’s not our favorite thing….That’s just part of life, but for the most part where we have choices…I think it’s important to try to find that balance.

Carrie’s discourse reveals a belief that work calling is a choice, housed in the context of binding circumstances and degrees of control. At the same time, living out a work calling is part of experiencing and negotiating balance in life. For Carrie, a work calling can contribute to life balance.

Those pursuing work-life balance defined it as finding physical and social equity; focusing on whole-life health through the acknowledgement that family and/personal stability can easily become unstable if a work calling overtakes all of their identity rather than being an expression of their identity.\(^{18}\) For example, Josh, the acupuncturist and fertility expert, mentioned that even in his work calling, there are hard days. I ask him, what do you do when it gets hard? He replies (Line 715-718, 722):

Exercise, social, eating well, doing things that [I] enjoy. I try to lead a balance[d] [life]. I like to snowboard, I try to go to yoga once a week, I take fitness class once a week, hang out with friends. I mean I like to work hard, I also play very hard, too. And, I think that there’s a nice balance there.

\(^{18}\) Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, and Buzzanell’s (2003) seminal article on the problematics and empowerment of work-family research addresses the blurred boundaries and negotiated tensions in contemporary society, evident in both everyday life and institutional structures. They argue that a lack of work-life balance leads to depression, burnout, decreased motivation, absenteeism, turnover, and overall lack of productivity.
Josh’s pursuit of balance means matching the intensity of his work life with an intense play life. He communicates an intentional pursuit of emotional and physical health.

Laurel, a painter and art teacher, describes her proactive approach to balance as marking a boundary around having a “Laurel” day each week, and designating the weekend for family time (Line 309-311, 328, 332, 336):

I have forty-two students a week coming to four classes a week so I teach two days a week in class. I do a whole day of private lessons every week… And then Friday is my day out. And that’s when I take care of [Laurel] day… And the weekends are for my husband and me.

These examples provide a glimpse into boundaries in action. Discourse about boundaries as present yet permeable point to an awareness that work calling influences other aspects of life, however it does not need to dictate life.

Yet, in a society that interprets being busy as being important, where individuals evaluate worth based on accumulation of skills and goods (Bauman, 2000), pursuing balance is difficult, and particularly problematic when the term balance reinforces “normative assumptions about the equality of investment and separation of domains” (Golden et al., 2006). If a person interprets the pursuit of balance as establishing an equal distribution in one’s life, such an interpretation reinforces the idea that the domains of life are separate from each other. Thus, the pursuit of balance, or boundary management, is hard to articulate, maintain, or defend as balance is subjective and contextual.

Additionally, chasing the balancing of the scales can cause individuals to be pulled in multiple directions as voices of power call for more time and effort in relation to work, personal relationships, and family.
Some participants describe living in the challenge of searching for balance. This is evident in statements from participants like Rob, the financial advisor, who explains his new attempt at trying to find balance (575, 579-578, 584-586):

[...]

Rob talks about a lack of boundaries in work calling as a mode, a designated way of approaching work. This leads to the question, who designates this requirement of intense dedication to work? Is it the caller? Is it the called? Is it the institution of work?

At least one participant seemed to allude to his own responsibility in managing the dedication to work, fostered through calling—while alluding to broader cultural viewpoints that promote imbalance. During our interview, Matthew (the book publisher and entrepreneur) stops and sighs, then says: “That’s the hardest part, to unplug…” (Line 622). Matthew’s sense-making metaphor of workers as machines is indicative of the contemporary culture’s focus on consumption. We are not machines that can work tirelessly, unaffected by physical, emotional, mental, or even spiritual needs. Other participant discourse revealed issues of imbalance. For example, Grant, vice-president of client engagement at a global digital advertisement agency, shares: “It’s hard enough sometimes to balance what I have to do at work and then with home and then my own community and church stuff to invest to the level that I think I need to do” (Line 306-308). Participants’ talk links the sense of imbalance, and pursuing or lacking boundaries, with effects upon health and emotional well-being.
The Impact of Emotions and Health

Previous research in organizational psychology tells us that work calling is directly related to an increase in well-being, psychological support in times of job stress, loss of job, or occupational transition (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). We also know that occupational stress has been deemed the greatest cause of decreased job satisfaction (Jensen, 2006). In the Western contemporary economy and organizational culture, an “overworked culture” (Cheney et al., 2008) is encouraged and idealized, producing corrosion in workers’ emotional and physical well-being. Such a culture can have significant costs to worker productivity, efficiency, and identity. This is particularly problematic when individuals with a work calling experience stress as a result of feeling called to their work.

Participants describe struggling with or managing the stress of work as it relates to well-being. Investing oneself into a work calling can lead to emotional and physical costs as individuals navigate how to manage their call in relation to the rest of their lives. For example, Katie, a palliative care social worker, identifies the emotional impact of her work calling: “If you’re gonna be able to do this work, you have to be able to access your emotions or you won’t be able to do it” (Line 352-353). Josh, an acupuncturist and fertility expert, echoes this saying: “So I think my job, I deal with a lot of emotions a lot. I mean I always have a box of tissues in my office…” (Line 703-704). In regards to the possible physical effects of work calling, Dempsey and Sanders (2010) point to the dangers of individuals motivated by a work calling, which includes the tendency to overwork themselves to the point of irrecoverable exhaustion.
Participant discourse about work calling boundaries also points to the need to acknowledge emotions at work. Matthew, a book publisher and entrepreneur, indicates that a lack of boundaries can be costly to emotional well-being: “…because if you’re down, if you have sleep debt, you become more moody, it affects your personality and your creativity and it’s all these things, all these things relate” (Line 698-699). Thus, work calling boundaries includes the ability to access emotions, rather than compartmentalize them, to acknowledge the emotions of others and provide space for them, and to make direct connections with health needs such as sleep and tangible outcomes of work identity and production (McGuire, 2010; Garner 2007). If workers assume the culture of consumption through metaphors such as worker is a machine/constant producer, then recognition of emotional and physical well-being is only given during moments of breaking down (Morgan, 1997). Calling costs are exacerbated by reactive approaches to emotional and physical health.

Some participants described intentionally “refueling” for their emotional and physical needs. Frank, the doctor, exemplifies this well (1023, 1029, 1034-1036, 1045, 1053-1054, 1058-1059, 1063):

I refuel, I do things that are completely non-medical…my wife…when we get out of here, the two of us…we just screw around, we spend too much at the restaurant and we go for a walk downtown…We shop, we watch TV, we go to the movies… I took several years of Italian lessons [at the university]… yeah, it was a hobby. I even got an award for being outstanding, [Frank stands up and pulls out the award from his shelf to show me with great pride. He reads,] ‘the most dedicated student’… I would go to the classes in the evenings, it was like I would take off my doctor coat and I would…be somebody different, like Superman, you know?

Frank’s way of creating boundaries in relationship to his emotional and physical needs is to take off his superhero cape, to de-robe the doctor. Frank maintains the perspective that
his work is an expression of his identity, but it is not his whole identity. He expresses his identity through his relationship with his wife, in his life-style of learning and growing, such as taking Italian classes. Comments from participants like Frank highlight the tension of blurred boundaries and boundary management. To what degree is blurring the line between work and life healthy? The distinction returns to acknowledging work as an expression of self, an extension of identity verses work as the only means of knowing the self, of having an identity. In the description of calling costs and boundaries, participants also highlight the everydayness of work.

The Perspective of Everydayness

One particular work calling misconception that participants consistently brought up is the idea that a work calling is always exciting, continuously interesting, and never mundane. The perspective of everydayness informs work calling boundaries, reducing the feeling of cost that can result from a lack of balance or emotional and physical needs. To better explicate this connection, let us return to the metaphor of work calling as love (see Chapter Four for a full development of this idea). There is the recognition of love, the excitement and rush of feelings. However, there is also the choice to love, the commitment to remain with a loved one, even when it is difficult. Similarly, work calling is not just the thrilling rush of meaningful connectedness. If we take the constitutive view seriously, calling takes time, dedication, and perseverance. Some work days may still feel like a burden, may be deeply exhausting, yet the underlying reason for the work is renewing. The deception of expecting constant excitement and the allure of a calling
“high,” undermines the everyday realities that come with a work calling. For example, Erin (School Psychologist, Line 1181-1182, 1186, 1191-1192) notes:

I feel personally called to my work and there are still a lot of days where if someone said do you want to go home right now, I’d say, yeah…So, don’t confuse having a slow day with not being called to something.

Erin’s comment is also related to a statement earlier in her interview, that she feels called to be a mom as well as a school psychologist. Multiple callings are not the focus of this study; however, part of work calling boundaries means recognizing there are other spheres of calling that merit attention.

Participants describe the perspective of everydayness as involving a sense of security with their work calling. Boring or monotonous days do not intimidate participants who feel confident in their work calling. For instance, Matthew, the book publisher shares (Line 567-570, 574, 588, 593):

Not every day do you see these wins or successes, because you are doing so many tasks that lead up to significant things. So that’s why I think it’s all the more important to have a calling that you know…why you’re doing things because every day is not like you’re playing sports where you can cheer things…it’s the same thing that keeps you going through the lows… and disappointments, is having the calling and knowing that.

Matthew’s comment supports previous research that indicates a work calling helps sustain motivation and satisfaction despite work challenges.

Carving out work calling boundaries, for participants, means knowing on a deep level why you work. Hannah, a stay-at-home parent, comments that the hardest part of her job is the monotony, the fact that it is not as fast-paced as other occupations. However, in the same breath, she also says, “but how worthwhile and rewarding it is…Even though there are gonna be the hard times, you…never doubt your
decision…because you know that you are called to do it” (Line 381, 397-398, 402). Hannah’s discourse points to a part of boundary management which recognizing that a work calling does not merely encapsulate the “mountain-top” moment of exhilarating work, but also includes everyday work responsibilities. Thus, a perspective of everydayness informs work calling experiences by highlighting conceptual, temporal, spatial, and relational boundaries.

Work calling involves the love of the process of work and not just the outcome (Novak, 1996). However, participant discourse demonstrates that work calling as continual elation is a falsity that can harm the pursuit of boundaries. There are days where a work calling feels very much like a burden. The difference is, even in the burden there is still a deeper satisfaction in the knowing of why. If a work calling demands full dedication at the risk of all other values in life, then the work calling is no longer altruistic. If calling costs more than it gives, it burns rather than illuminates.

**Burnout**

Work calling has far-reaching implications on identity, and when burnout occurs, the very core of identity is fractured (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Previous literature describes burnout as a dislocation of work vision or hopelessness, an increase in social isolation, and an overwhelming sense of cynicism and disillusionment (Golden et al., 2004; Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2004; Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). According to participant communication, identity crisis as the result of burnout is a very significant and real cost of work calling. Participants understood burnout as a calling that had become toxic: “Make sure that what you want to do allows you to live the way you want to…that’s
where I think...a job you really love becomes something more toxic” (Erin, School Psychologist, Line 1202, 1211-1212). As the rich interview data reveals, work calling burnout is unique in that it complicates not only work identity but identity as a whole, for workers may not have a “separate, non-work self” to which to retreat. Work calling involves a foundational significance of self, motivation and purpose for living, as well as communicative connection to a caller and community. Thus, work calling burnout is total loss of inward vision.

Previous organizational communication research is limited in qualitative studies related to calling and burnout; however as Chapter Two mentioned, Golden et al. (2004) conceptualize occupational burnout related to clergy, as a “growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment” (p. 115). The current study extends our understanding of burnout as it relates to work calling by highlighting the implications of burnout as whole-person identity crisis. Work calling is an expression and extension of self, thus burnout is a considerable threat, not only for individuals’ work lives, but for their identities as a whole. A work calling includes some type of moral imperative for individuals, which may at times force them to make difficult decisions based on such values. These decisions may have very tangible costs. For example, feeling called to work may involve a sense of obligation to the work that dominates a person’s time at work and away from family (e.g. Bill, NFL Coach; Anthony, Clinical Psychologist), or the relinquishing of financial security (e.g. Lillian, Founder and Artistic Director of a Nonprofit; Ted, Pastor of Multi-Ethnic Church). Such costs may lead to burnout, and if the burnout is not dealt with, it becomes toxic, turning into a crisis of self. Before exploring the crisis of self as
the result of burnout, I highlight how participants connect work calling experiences to burnout in general.

Participants describe the process of burnout as overwhelming angst and complete lack of motivation. Grant, the vice-president of Client Engagement at a digital advertisement agency, articulates work calling burnout as “a crisis of confidence” (Line 645). Katie, the palliative care social worker, points to the potential abuse of emotional labor in a work calling as a burnout risk saying (Line 455-457):

But I think it [a work calling] can be draining. I mean when you go through cycles where all your patients die…I mean, I think it takes some resilience. I think it sometimes requires a little bit more energy.

Such results of burnout are substantial considering that the impetus of work calling is the enactment of doing something you are skilled at and feel passionate about, as it relates to something beyond merely self-gain. If a crisis of self occurs, then the individual not only feels incompetent and unsatisfied at work, but in life as a whole. Comments like Grant and Katie’s point to the tension between the values implied in a work calling and the potential for self-inflicted or corporatized misappropriation of energy given to their organizational lives.

**Identity Crisis**

The impact of work calling costs, and more specifically calling burnout, is further revealed in participant discourse about crisis of self. Participants talked about the potential for work calling crisis in comments like: “I do wonder if that is a fault of this [work calling]. It’s like what if I did lose my job…Would I be in some depressive funk…I mean I do get a lot of personal satisfaction from doing this” (Lisa, Hospital
Performance Improvement Consultant, Line1213, 1217-1218). Levels of depression and exhaustion in a work calling are not merely related to work, but penetrate an individual’s very perception of life purpose. A crisis of self is deeper than a crisis of profession. A crisis of work may involve questions like, “how will I provide for myself [my family]?” or, “How can I strategically place myself in the next possible occupation to ensure upward mobility and stability?” Whereas, a crisis of self, involves questions like, “Who am I now?” and “How do I recover from the paralyzing grief and ultimate loss of an occupation that was an extension of me?” Such questions may logically extend from a view of public-private life as completely blurred. Nancy, professor and Gallup consultant, describes a recent crisis of self in her work calling: “If you’d have talked to me this time last year, I wouldn’t have been able to say that [I’m living out a work calling]…I was really in transition, and I was feeling very lost and really grieving the loss of my job” (Line 482-483, 488). Nancy’s discourse highlights feeling lost; pointing to the role work calling can have as a sort of compass for one’s life purpose.

Among the twenty-nine interviews, several participants described having gone through a crisis of self, and a few others appeared to be on the dangerous border of succumbing to complete burnout. Work burnout can affect other areas of life, but it may not define life. In a work calling, where purpose and meaning, communication with community, a caller, and the self are intertwined, complete burnout means something more. It means feeling a total loss of life-direction. Two interviews in particular stand out in regards to grappling with a crisis of self; the interview with Grant, vice-president of Client Engagement at a digital advertisement agency, and the interview with Anthony, a
clinical psychologist and cognitive scientist. Grant’s interview demonstrates the recognition of experiencing work calling burnout in the moment. Anthony’s interview highlights an evolution of acceptance of work calling burnout. The former provides proactive communication, while the latter represents resigned communication.

I met Grant at a local coffee shop in a nice, waterfront town. Grant is in his late thirties/early forties, wearing a tailored suit and designer glasses. He had to reschedule our meeting due to a last minute business trip out of state. Such trips happen quite a bit in Grant’s job as the vice president of a globally renowned digital advertising agency (his main work involves managing client relationships). He apologizes for having to reschedule, saying: “A challenge in my job is that I don’t ever know what I’m walking into each day” (Line 35-36). Grant communicates with a rare combination of humility and confidence. He is engaged in our discussion, alert and honest. He describes the passion he feels for building relationships with clients, making sure they come first, being a business person known for empathy and integrity. He clearly loves his work. However, as the interview progresses, he grows more thoughtful, pausing more between responses. Finally, he looks out the window, clasping and unclasping his empty coffee cup, then he says slowly that within his work calling he is actually experiencing an identity crisis.

Grant describes an opportunity he was given to leave his large company to run a smaller, locally owned one. He shares: “So I started to run this small agency. It was my favorite thing I’ve ever done…Loved it, loved it, and I loved it” (Line 369, 373). He goes on to explain why he left a job he felt called to, what motivated a higher work calling. For
Grant, it was the power to influence the culture of a company (Line 385-389, 408, 412-414):

A big motivating factor for why I left to be able to go to this company of sixty people and really influence the culture…You know…set policy, but mainly create a culture…like I used our training and development budget to take twelve employees to the Dominican Republic for a service project. And it changed their lives. To see the impact that made on our culture because our clients got involved, people raised money, we took down supplies. I mean it took off way more than I ever thought.

Grant goes on to explain how the founder of the company sold the organization to a larger corporation without telling anyone, including Grant. Suddenly, Grant was without a job and the culture he had been a part of creating was pulled apart. The global digital advertising company offered Grant his old job with a new promotion and Grant took it:

So I have a better job at [the global digital advertisement company] than I did when I left…but it’s way less fulfilling for me than it used to be…And so while on paper its most people’s dream job, and it really is, and I have work life balance, I love what I do, but there’s something missing for me.

Grant’s crisis of self surfaces from the result of experiencing a higher, deeper level of work calling, by taking on a different role a new job which allowed him to express his identity even more, and then being forced to return to his previous job.

He goes on to explain: “I do feel like God is using me…and my relationships there…It’s not for nothing…But I’m not fulfilled by it. It’s a paycheck….it feels like…angst…doubt…crisis of confidence…” (Line 614, 637, 641, 645, 658). Grant’s facial expressions reflect pain and hurt. He shakes his head, and then gives me a small smile, saying “so right now I am praying about what that looks like and praying that I will be ready… I can do things in the meantime to help uncover where it might be” (Line 540, 672). Grant’s interview demonstrates his current state of grappling with a crisis of
self that has left him unfulfilled at an occupation that once felt a dream job. His mood and communication flowed from pain to purpose in the seeking out of what is next, what his work calling might be in the years to come. His talk also reveals the highly permeable boundaries between “work self” and “personal self” that a calling may elicit in those who experience it; and the potential costs that come along with such permeability.

Anthony, the clinical psychologist and cognitive scientist, expressed a very different type of calling crisis of self. I had to get security clearance to meet with Anthony, who literally works at the top of an ivory-looking tower, near a well-known university. The building is full of academic and political scientists doing “big things.” After the security guard checks my identification and my signature on the sign-in sheet, he directs me to an elevator. When the elevator opens to one of the top floors of the building, I am struck by the incredible panoramic view, the clouds seem closer to the office than the city below. I sit down and wait for Anthony, who comes out a few minutes later. He looks tired. He leads me to his office, which is not as large as I assumed it would be, but still has an entire wall that is a window facing the mountains. Anthony is in his late forties, but looks older. He is wearing slacks and a dress shirt. His introverted communication is balanced by an apparent need to process his work life. During the interview, I notice that his office has at least six pictures of what appears to be his family.

While Anthony is a scientist, more specifically a clinical psychologist, early on in his interview, he mentions his childhood dream of being a doctor. He says that he chose not to be a doctor because he also wanted a family and believed that being a doctor had too much cost. He described what he felt may have been a work calling to be a doctor as
“seductive because you think you’re doing good work for other people…[experiencing a] higher calling of being a doctor or whatever, so anyway I thought well, why flirt with temptation, I’ll just not go that route” (Line 277, 291-293). Anthony’s discourse demonstrates a desire to instill boundaries within his work calling, so that well-being of his family would not be lost at the expense of his work. He describes re-examining what it was about medicine he loved—talking about children and helping families. So, he turned to clinical psychology.

I thought I was there to talk about his work calling as a psychologist; however Anthony kept returning to his dream of a physician, as if no one had ever asked him about it, as if it had been buried deep inside a wound that had never really healed. He shares (Line 596, 601-602, 606-607, 611, 615):

Maybe ten years after I got my Ph.D. I continually would think, should I have gone into medicine? And I kept thinking, well, I can go back, you know, if I don’t like this. I can go back. And, finally now I’m forty-eight and now I don’t want to go back…So I gave that one up…if a calling was more defined…I would have to say it was probably being a physician. But I chose not to do that…and it took me a long time to accept that I chose not to do that.

Anthony looks over at one of his family pictures, the still faces smile back at him. He goes on to talk about his current job that until recently was in a different state. However, as it grew, they asked him to move to where he is now. For the sake of his family, and his children who were heavily involved in their communities and schools, he chose to keep his family in their home, in the other state and fly back on the weekends. The sad irony here is that he chose not to pursue being a physician so he could be close to his family, and his current job has now caused the very issue he was concerned would happen.
Again, he returns to talk of being a physician (Line 1135-1136, 1140-114-1143, 1147-1148):

The choice, the reasons that I didn’t go into medicine were, I don’t think they were good reasons…the good principle of wanting to have a family life, that was a good thing to do. But, I think it could have turned out just as good or maybe even more favorable if I would have done the other way…And I certainly wouldn’t be in this position now where I’m working up here…and my family is living down there, and I’m living in a depressing basement to save money.

Anthony never expressed in words the exhaustion his tone and body language gave away. He never talked about changing his current occupation or trying to incorporate different way of doing things to alleviate his despair at the separation of his family. It appears that burnout has become his work companion, the whispering voice of “should haves” that birth apathy rather than action. He concludes our interview time with a warning—that thinking about work as a calling requires making difficult decisions that “may have pretty major consequences, which this did” (Line, 1424). I thank Anthony for his time and as I head back down the elevator, I realize I have been holding in a deep breath. Breathing out, I feel as if I am breathing out the soft resignation and sadness that lingered in his office.

Work calling burnout is palatable. It may begin by affecting the internal, but it is not contained there and will eventually permeate the whole person evident in identity crisis. Grant and Anthony’s interviews demonstrate the power of identity crisis. Stephen, the wealth manager, speaks of the tension of honoring who you are in work and the point of reconciliation that everyone faces at some time about whether or not they have done this. He contends, “There’s only so much the heart will allow someone to dishonor who they are as a person before there’s that internal struggle and conflict that becomes
pronounced” (Line, 839-840). This articulation of dishonoring “who you are” speaks to the heart of identity crisis—no longer knowing oneself. The interview excerpts above demonstrate the tensions of calling costs, going beyond definitional work in Chapter Four and work calling enactment in Chapter Five. Here, participants speak of the need to heed their calls whole-heartedly; but in doing so, they end up burned out. This burnout appears to be derived from the blurred public-private boundaries, or the idea that they are investing their whole selves in their work. Such full investments can lead to very serious negative consequences.

Thus, within the theme of calling costs, boundaries and burnout are interconnected. Work calling boundaries involve prioritizing balance, being aware of the emotional and physical impact of work, and having a perspective of everydayness. According to participants, these boundaries can proactively help reduce work calling burnout. Lauren, a church communication coordinator, explains: “It’s a great reward, but…you can’t be partway in, you kind of have to be all in. Because it’s not just a cool place to work, it’s a place you have to work really hard” (Line 550-552). Alexis, a child and adolescent psychologist, describes this tension as well: “I do love what I do and sometimes I want to run super far away from it because it feels like a really big responsibility” (Line 587-588). Lauren and Alexis’ discourse reveals a tension that exists within the compulsion of the calling and the sense of responsibility for community impact, which necessitates a whole-person involvement.
The demand of work calling can also lead to burnout if a person confuses the fantasy of an occupation with the reality of what the occupation or type of work includes.

Ted, pastor of a multi-ethnic church, shares (Line 335-337, 343):

There was a pastor and his wife from Texas who, on paper they thought what we had was the best thing ever. So they moved from Texas to join us…They stayed with us for two months, gave it their best shot, couldn’t stand it and left.

Ted’s discourse demonstrates that burnout can also occur when people choose a job that may not actually be their calling. Megan, pastor and chaplain for a city police department, contends that an actual work calling is the antidote to occupational burnout, saying (Line 1333-1334, 1338-1339, 1346):

I think that calling, if you’re clear about what calling is, I think it’s the best prevention to burnout…I don’t think that it causes burnout. I think that people get tired when they try to do it in their own strength. So if I’m serving in my own strength, I’m gonna burnout….become bitter and cynical.

Megan distinguishes between burnout resulting from a healthy view of work calling, which is a balanced focus of self and others, verses an unhealthy view of work calling which is an extreme focus on either self or others.

Throughout Megan’s interview, she consistently points to work calling as being connected to her relationship with the agency she felt called by (God) and her support system in community. Her exemplar highlights the particular dance of work calling conceptualization, enacted through inherent interaction with the caller, resulting in a decrease of work calling costs. It also suggests that when a person with a perceived work calling feels disconnected from the transcendent or internal motivation, work becomes disorienting to one’s whole sense of self. While the current study did not directly pursue a research question about work calling and burnout, these discourses demonstrate one
aspect of how work calling is experienced by participants. Future studies would benefit greatly from more direct attention to this topic. I turn now to participant communication about work calling costs in discourse about sacrifice.

**Sacrifice**

Sacrifice is a distinctive type of cost. Messages of sacrifice refer to a process of relinquishing some thing or someone of great value, in order to pursue a desired work life, and that person or thing of great value may never be returned. In sacrifice, there is no promise of a fair exchange. Sacrifice is like being inflicted with a scar or an impairment that you may have to live with for the rest of your life, even though what you have now received or obtained as a result of the sacrifice is good. Unlike the sub-theme of boundaries, which suggests the need for discipline and reflectiveness about prioritizing one’s values, sacrifice involves openness to pain. This sub-theme of burnout points to a type of numbness, a freezing and dissolving of motivation, satisfaction, and purpose. However, the fire that burned out can be re-lit or refueled. And while there is a crisis of self in burnout, self can be redefined or revived. In sacrifice, a wound may never fully heal, and there is a constant reminder of what one has chosen to give up, for what one hopes to obtain.

Yet, we must also recognize the “dark side” to self-sacrifice entailed in work calling. In a study on work calling in popular culture, Dempsey and Sanders (2010) point out that the willingness to self-sacrifice among individuals with a work calling increases the danger of underpaid and unpaid labor in the guise of a greater good. The implication is that, among individuals who feel called to their work, who communicate a high level of
motivation and satisfaction, there tends to be a decreased attention to the *quality* of their work lives. Put a different way, there is a sense in which communicating work calling can lead others to take advantage of the called. As organizational scholars, we must inquire about “the costs of the resulting overwork, exhaustion, and self-sacrifice” (p. 452).

Participants in this study describe sacrifice in two primary ways, extrinsic and intrinsic. First, extrinsic sacrifice includes issues of finances and time. Second, intrinsic sacrifices reference the contested sphere of privilege. Here, participants wrestle with, argue for, and contend against notions of privilege as they relate to economic or socio-cultural constraints, fear, and social judgment. I cluster messages about privilege with the sub-theme of sacrifice because of the tension in participant discourse about whether privileges involve *choice* to sacrifice or *lack of opportunity* to choose to sacrifice.

**Finances and Time**

Participants describe financial sacrifices within work calling experiences as a never-ending part of the calling. Moreover, participants frame financial cost as a requirement, a choice, or as a trusting in the call(er). For example, Ted, the pastor of a multi-ethnic church, assumes that work calling financial sacrifices are just part of the job. He shares (Line 312-313, 316, 318):

> The people that I work with, the people who work for me, if they didn’t feel this, they would be done…I hardly pay them anything…I hardly get paid anything…So, if they don’t have calling, forget about it, they’re not there.

Participants who feel that the sacrifice of financial stability or growth as indicative of their work calling, rarely seem to ask the question, is the sacrifice worth the call? What seems to compel these individuals is the sweetness and the power of using their skill set
and passion; communing with a caller; and seeing the impact of the calling lived out for
the betterment of those around them. For Ted, financial sacrifice is a necessary, albeit
difficult, requirement of his work calling.

Other participants describe work financial sacrifices as a choice. Charlie, the
musician, points out someone he knows who chose not to follow his work calling because
of the price of financial uncertainty: “One friend who was a very, very talented musician,
who made the intellectual decision that this world is too insecure, …became, an
electronic engineer…He works for Microsoft” (Line 501-503). Charlie goes on to share
that this friend was never really happy in his Microsoft job and has recently faced
retirement with great joy at the prospect of returning to his music. Here another question
arises, does a work calling have to be the primary means of work, or can a person satisfy
the call in secondary work (part-time or hobby)? If this answer is yes, how does work
calling as secondary inform the primary job and vice versa?

Bethany, the hair dresser and salon manager also describes her financial sacrifice
as a choice; however she frames it admirable, as the cost of love (Line 238-240, 244-
245):

I have friends that admire how hard I work…and they also know that I love what I
do and sometimes they’ll even say they envy that I’m actually doing something
that I love. I’ve chosen to do something where I may not make as much money as
my friends or probably as much money as I’m worth…But I think the proof is
because I love my job so much it’s one of the sacrifices I’m willing to make.

Bethany is willing to make the financial sacrifice for her work calling; however what is
also evident is her reference to a qualified willingness. What sacrifices is she not willing
to make? What boundaries does she have in regards to how much she is willing to
sacrifice for her work calling? Another underlying question—one which I take up in the
discussion of privilege, below—arises: What conditions exist to allow her, and others
who willingly make financial sacrifices to pursue their callings, to make such a sacrifice?

Most of the participants who focused on the cost of financial sacrifice were not in
corporate occupations. However, Stephen, the wealth manager, attributes his financial
certainty to his caller (Line 449-450, 545-455, 559):

What helps is because my belief is that God is my provider… and He’s the one
that’s helping me build my business, my clients are not my source of income, God
is… And that frees me up, as I trust Him for provision.

Stephen’s statement provides context from an earlier exemplar in his interview about his
desire to fully engage with his family as well as work. He chooses to create strong
boundaries around the time he gives to work, so his family time does not suffer. In that,
he sees himself as unlike most of the other financial advisors in his field.

Along with financial sacrifices, participants articulated a sacrifice of time. They
describe this also as a willingness to relinquish time (e.g., choosing to work longer or/and
harder), a demand for patience, and a thief. For instance, in messages about a willingness
to relinquish all boundaries of time to a work calling Lauren, church communication
coordinator, explains (Line 302, 310, 323-326):

I think they [people pursuing a work calling] need to be willing to sacrifice.
[Responding to my follow-up, “what kind of sacrifices?”] Well, for me I think
there’s a financial sacrifice… you know, sacrifice your time. I think a lot of people
when they care… they’ll put more time and effort into it and they’ll sacrifice their
free time and their time with their families, which I do.

Lauren describes sacrificing her time with family in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. She
does not appear to be upset or concerned about this. For Lauren, the sacrifice of her time
demonstrates that she really cares about her work. The implication here is that individuals who are unwilling to sacrifice their time to the extent of overworking may not care as much about their work. Lauren’s value of work organizes her perception that overworking (vs. working part-time) is part of calling dedication.

On the other hand, Grant, vice-president of client engagement at a global digital advertisement agency, talks about the sacrifice of time like someone would describe training for a race. His recipe for a sacrifice of time is: “Pursue it with everything they have…pursue it with vigor and that process may take longer than their eagerness may allow them, but go after it” (Line 832, 834-835). For Grant, the sacrifice of time is not necessarily the impediment of work upon the rest of life, it is a way of understanding work calling as a process. The sacrifice of time in a work calling may be seasonal or organized around a work event/project. A runner is not always running a race, and in fact needs times of rest in order to be successful in a race. Grant’s sacrifice of time is the demand for patience.

Perhaps one of the more telling interviews concerning sacrifice was with Bill, the NFL coach, who articulated the sacrifice of time as a gamble. Bill clearly communicates a dedication to his work calling and his family. At the end of our interview, he pauses for an extended period of time and then shares (Line, 436, 749-751, 757, 761):

The hard part…[is] the commitment of time…I think I’m nervous about, was all the time that I spent [working] worth it…was it worth it for me not to see my kids’ high school and college sports…As a dad who’s a football coach…you give up a lot…there’s a lot that has been given up.

Bill’s interview demonstrates that the sacrifice of time may mean that the actual sacrifice is not known at the present moment. Here, the sacrifice of time acts like a soil erosion,
stealing something or someone beloved in a silent, slow manner that is not revealed until much later.

**Intersubjective Concepts of Privilege**

In the final sub-theme of work calling costs, participant communication demonstrated a patterned discourse about privilege. However, participants’ assumptions about privilege vary greatly. Several participants view work calling as a type of work only individuals with a fiscally stable background can pursue. Some participants understood work calling privileges as a socio-economic limitation, dependent on how they were raised (e.g., with a supportive family) or the character of a person (e.g., someone not governed by fear). Still other participants argue that experiencing a work calling is not limited to a particular type of person. They suggest that anyone can and should pursue it, but the cost here is the ability to rise above social judgment.

The financial sacrifices that may be required in the pursuit of a work calling involve the privilege of being able to choose, to not merely be governed by fiscal survival. For instance, Rob, a financial advisor, shares in a matter-of-fact tone (Line 600, 609, 616):

I mean you’re either in a job that you feel called to do or you’re not… And I think if it’s not, I mean something needs to change…I’ve been in jobs I’ve felt not called to be in and I think I’ve just been able to move on.

The tension in pursuing a work calling is that the ability to “just move on” is not necessarily open to everyone. Additionally, the costs of such a calling may significantly harm other areas of value in a person’s life.
Several participants use words like “luxury” to describe work calling (Matthew, Book Publisher and Entrepreneur, Line 848-863-864, 946):

You don’t run into people very often who have that sparkle in their eyes, who are just so excited… they don’t see work as fun and enjoyable and a big, important part of their lives…some people, I don’t think, have the luxury of finding their true calling.

Work calling as a luxury implies comfort and pleasure. These participants articulated awareness that the ability to pursue a calling is not necessarily typical. For example (Nancy, Professor and Gallup Consultant, Line 777-780):

But now in the practical world, there’s plenty of people that just need a job…it’s a privilege to be able to live in the realm of calling. It’s an honest privilege because for so many it’s absurd to talk calling when they have no food on the table, and it’s like they just desperately need a job.

Nancy refers to a “realm of calling,” making work calling sound like a particular area or territory. This reference underscores the potential restrictions (e.g. gender, race, and socio-cultural) some individuals may have in the attempt to enter such territory. For instance (Stephen, Wealth Manager, Line 808, 812, 818-820, 824):

I don’t think it’s [work calling is] mainstream…I have not had the feeling growing up that it’s commonplace for everybody and anybody to pursue their giftedness and to seek expression of that. [Responding to my follow-up, “Why do you think that?:”] Um, family upbringing, financial success, people are driven to find careers that can provide financial rewards. Pursuing your giftedness doesn’t mean you’re gonna be financially rewarded for it. And so many people sacrifice honoring who they are in order to have the financial success.

Stephen points to the potential for work calling to be affiliated with middle-to-upper class discourses and identities. Yet, his comment also suggests that individuals who choose financial rewards over “honoring who they are” may be weak or selfish.
The need for financial stability is a messy and layered reality for most people. Bethany, hairdresser and salon manager, connects the privilege of financial sacrifice as a choice anyone can make, if s/he is willing to accept the cost:

I think it’s [a work calling is] open to anyone because… I didn’t have the money to go to beauty school. I knew that if I wanted to do it, I had to find a way myself to do it. I believe it’s a choice…. And I think everybody has the ability to do that, but some people get stuck in something where maybe they are making a lot of money and it’s hard for them to leave and even though they know it’s not what they love to do, they just stay… so I believe that everybody has the option to change what they’re doing if they’re not happy, but some people choose not to and some people choose to do it.

To be clear, Bethany describes herself as coming from a very “blue-collar” family, where just having a job was viewed as a success. She says: “I’ve been working since I was thirteen… When all my friends were out on vacations I always had to work, because if I needed to earn money I needed to work. Nothing was ever given to me” (Line 159-160, 162). Bethany recognizes her work calling as a privilege that costs her great financial rewards, but one that she is willing to make, willing to fight for on her own because of the calling.

Several participants, however, argue that work calling is not a privilege (related to their ability to risk financial sacrifice); it is an essential part of experiencing a meaningful life. Megan, pastor and chaplain for a city police department, shares: “I think anyone can [pursue work calling], I think everyone should. If we’re gonna spend a third of our life doing something, it should have meaning” (Line 1489-1490). The key here is the word “should,” everyone ideally should be able to pursue their work as a calling. However, the realities of life often impair that, if not financially, then relationally.
These comments individuals or privatize work calling, as though it is a personal responsibility to follow, regardless of what it might mean for one’s ability to earn money (or in the case of Anthony, the clinical psychologist, lead a balanced life). Additionally, it is significant to note that this personalized nature of work calling surfaces in communication about calling costs, rather than in definitional markers of a work calling (e.g. in the “happy” discussion of using a person’s passion, etc.). This is in direct tension with the attention to calling as interactive, speaking more to the prevailing Westernized “common sense” of the individual agent.

Relatedly, participants described their ability to manage the costs of work calling with a personal choice to overcome fear. That is, pursuing a work calling requires not only the ability to financially sacrifice, but to persevere. Lillian highlights this well, sharing (Line 392, 397, 417-420):

The majority of people in the world make choices out of fear…not out of a sense of ownership of their journey… I know people who’ve grown up extremely poor and they have no fear of being able to earn a living, or being able to find what they need in life, you know, they can stretch themselves.

The message here is that work calling is about recognizing ownership of the journey, recognizing the locus of control each individual has on her/his pursuit of work.

The sacrifice of pushing through fear involves a willingness to embrace uncertainty: “When you have a sense of calling and you experience that, you’re more comfortable with uncertainty of the future” (Matthew, Book Publisher and Entrepreneur, Line 754-755). Laurel (painter and art teacher) echoes this reference to fear (Line 535-548):
When you listen and you heed the call, it’s an adventure in faith…most people don’t heed the call. They shrug it off, they deny it, they argue [Responding to my follow-up, “Why do you think they don’t heed the call?:”] Fear. Fear is not your friend”

Here, the metaphor of a journey returns. A journey is not certain; it is not completely in our control. It necessitates agency, requires flexibility and courage. Nancy, a professor and Gallup consultant, explains (Line 605, 614-615, 619-620, 622):

So to be able to know yourself apart from other people’s opinions of you, I also think there has to be a level of fearlessness…if you’re afraid to be yourself, if you’re afraid to step out and take a chance with a new job, then you could miss a real affirmation of who you are…so I think there’s some fearlessness to that.

Overcoming fear, for these participants, seems to involve a certain type of character. Everyone may experience fear, but (as participants describe) only some rise above this fear, only a few are able to take the risk.

Some risks are tangible (financial impact), others are internal (struggling with fear), and some are relational (negotiating the perceptions of others). Consider Anthony, the clinical psychologist, whose family appears to be suffering from his work calling costs. Anthony’s sacrifices include an interactive sacrifice for his family, the loss of time with him as a father and husband. Participants continually expressed having to risk incurring social judgment for their work calling. Social judgment is described as a stigma, criticism, being undervalued, and experiencing a lack of support. For example, Stacey, a dog trainer and animal rescue staff shares (Line 359, 365, 369-371):

I don’t have a lot of support for the work that I do…My own family thinks it’s a waste of resources and a waste of potential… I find my calling in dogs. I don’t find it in people, and the comment that I’ve heard more than once is, there are women being beaten every day, why aren’t you helping them. Because that is not where my heart lies.
Stacey’s awareness of social judgment in this comment is directly related to the idea that a calling is interactive, with multiple meanings and interpretive. Participant discourse reveals a tension between how work is valued by the person and how it is valued by the larger community. Within this discourse, some participants describe the pain they felt, while others articulate resilience in the continual overcoming of such judgments.

Bethany, the hair dresser and salon manager, provides a rich exemplar of the cost of sacrificing social judgment for the sake of a work calling. She explains (Line 65-66, 85, 89-91):

But I never thought of it as something that I would pursue because it was a profession that wasn’t perceived as valued… I had to put aside what I thought other people were going to think of me…because it didn’t hold prestige like a teacher or an accountant or a lawyer or a doctor so I struggled with what are people gonna think of me. But at the same time I knew I had to be true to myself…

Bethany experienced social judgment from her family who did not understand why she chose beauty school after earning a graduate degree in business. She also describes social judgment from a larger social context. After working her way through a prestigious beauty school in New York, she explains that managing misconceptions of her work was challenging (Line 632-633, 637-639, 670-672):

It’s a very undervalued industry. A lot of people think, people do hair because they couldn’t do anything else…that lack intelligence or any sort of drive. But in the right environment, it’s actually one of the hardest jobs…I was at a class for eight hours yesterday, we have staff meetings. We’re just like any other business, but I don’t think a lot of people perceive us as being so structured and run like a business.
Bethany’s exemplar of work calling costs, in the sacrifice of social judgment, communicates a layered and contextual nature of sacrifice. The assigned value of work is influenced not only by the individual but by the society in which the individual works.

**Implications and Applications**

By interviewing participants from diverse professions, I began to map the conceptual terrain of work calling by investigating the local knowledge of individuals who experience it. Participants’ communication conceive of work calling (Chapter Four) and demonstrate the inherent interactional of work calling (Chapter Five). The current chapter explores the significant costs associated with work calling experiences, which revealed costs in the negotiation of boundaries, navigation of the crisis of self in burnout, and the contested nature of privilege. Work calling is not neutral. It can be applied by the self, others, or institutions in such a way that misuses the call or pollutes it to toxicity. I conclude by synthesizing the theoretical and practical implications of the work calling costs.

First, work boundaries are complicated. Not only have our professional and personal lives become interconnected and blurred, but the expectation and interpretation of work boundaries varies depending on context and culture. As we begin to identify and even value the concept of blurred boundaries, the current study suggests that blurring boundaries still requires a sense of balance or permeable boundary management. We know that individuals who give primacy to an intrinsic work motivation are more likely to lack work boundaries (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). More specifically, individuals with a work calling perspective are “more likely to make personal sacrifices and devote extra
time to their jobs” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, p. 593). The current study demonstrates that boundary management is part of the discourse about work calling, in messages related to balance, emotional and physical health, and a perspective of everydayness. In other words, participant discourse troubles the idea of blurred boundaries, pointing to potential consequences of erasing the division between work and life completely. Here, the cost of work calling appears to be related to letting work overtake an individual’s life, rather than being a means of identity expression.

This leads to further questions, such as how is the pursuit of balance addressed, promoted, or silenced in organizational contexts? What does work calling boundary management look like in different cultures? Future studies would benefit from conducting focused research on how participants who experience a work calling conceptualize boundaries. Similar to chapter four’s attention to definitional markers of work calling, what are the definitional makers of work calling boundaries? What formal and informal boundaries exist in the lives of those with a work calling? Leaning on Broadfoot et al.’s (2008) research on meaningful work and boundaries, we should also consider how work calling boundaries “intersect in interesting ways with the structures and experiences of gender, race, and class” (p. 155). Here, scholars may also benefit from understanding the implications of such a work approach and the (mis)use of privacy and power in boundary management tensions. Thus, future studies should trouble work calling boundaries and reflect on ways these boundaries are guided by historical, cultural, and social practices.
Practical applications of work calling boundaries could involve creating more space to discuss and problematize what boundaries look like and how they are enacted in organizational contexts. Part of the illumination of a discussion on work calling boundaries is the awareness that work and life are interconnected and blurred (Broadfoot et al., 2008). Boundaries that work for some individuals may not work for others. Boundaries are not a blueprint to healthy work lives; they are a way of approaching work and life. Boundaries are also connected to emotional and physical health of the worker (McGuire, 2010; Garner, 2007; Oats, Hall, & Anderson, 2005).

Practitioners interested in boundary management issues should include intentional discussion of work boundaries during work reviews, and create an open, reflective accountability in communication about the pursuit of balance. Here, we should be mindful of acquiescing governance of boundaries and balance to those in power. Boundaries should complement agency, not be used a means of manipulation or control. Moreover, pedagogically, we have a responsibility to help students begin understanding how to incorporate boundaries. Recognizing college students as workers, rather than training for work in a post-college context, means including a discussion about work boundaries in the classroom.

Second, the current study contributes to understandings of burnout as it relates to work calling, by giving primacy to the local language of participants. Burnout is an overwhelming and exhausting process that can lead to frustration, cynicism, and emotional exhaustion. People who experience work burnout have a decreased sense of job satisfaction that often results in leaving their jobs. Golden et al.’s (2004) survey-
based study on burnout among clergy suggests that burnout directly impacts “personal and interpersonal functioning” (p. 155). As burnout is such a deeply penetrating and personal issue about feelings of powerlessness, it seems odd that the majority of research about this topic is from a post-positive perspective, lacking a primacy on actual participant communication.

The implication of burnout for individuals with a work calling appears to deepen the level of cost. Rather than focusing on financial gain or an elevation of social status, work calling is an expression of self. When work becomes a place of exhaustion, frustration, and cynicism, it results in an actual crisis of self. Just as Tracy et al. (2006) explore the metaphors of workplace bullying, future scholars would benefit from a focused attention to metaphoric language about work calling burnout, in order to better understand the disillusionment, voices of dominance, and places of agency that this cost of calling involves. Participants in the current study describe burnout as a crisis of self or a toxic calling, which implies an effect on the whole person (not just a “worker”); and a pollution or exposure to particular substances, circumstances, or people. Thus, identity crisis itself is a means of describing work calling burnout. As organizational scholars, we would benefit from understanding the communicative signs and symptoms of burnout, as well as the degrees of control that work contexts allow.

Practitioners would also benefit from understanding the signs and symptoms of work calling burnout. If individuals with a work calling approach show higher levels of work satisfaction, motivation, and well-being, it makes sense that an organization should be mindful of not losing such valuable organizational members. Individuals who are self-
employed may need to figure out the internal cadence to their work calling momentum. These individuals could be at risk for burnout in a different way, if accountability is not as present.

Thirdly, messages of work calling costs in discourses of sacrifice underscore the potential for marginalization and manipulation. Smith, Arendt, Lahman, Settle, and Duff (2006) found that sacrifice was a dominant discourse. However, their study focused on spirituality in the nonprofit art sector and created a distinction of the sacrifice of money for the enjoyment of work. The current research suggests that financial sacrifice is relevant for both nonprofit and for-profit workers, as it relates to feeling called. Monetary implications in this study also suggest that individuals can make money above the standard of living and operate from a work calling. Fiscal sacrifice may be part of some peoples’ work calling, but it is not a universal requirement. Work calling sacrifice is much more complex and individualized than this.

Future studies would benefit by placing issues of gender, class, and race at the forefront. How might these issues inform particular work calling sacrifices or messages about boundaries? For instance, while this was not a primary focus in the current research, gender surfaced a few times in participant interviews and is worth noting for future studies. Women in particular talked about a double sacrifice of finances and the stereotype of being “a mom” more than “a worker.” For instance, Lisa, a hospital performance improvement consultant, describes this tension (Line 1123, 1131-1133, 1143, 1145-1146, 1154):

I think you have to really understand and know in your gut what you’re willing to take... I think in a weird way, I don’t know, this may sound different than I mean
it to sound. But I think to a certain extent, you have to be competitive like a man is… because I don’t want people to see me as a mom…when I deal with our CEO… he would ask about my kids, which on one hand I loved that he’s asking about my kids… but it’s just like, okay, forget about my kids, dude, I’m here to do this job.

Erin also highlights a gender tension in a dual calling of being a mom and a school psychologist, and the way this is perceived by her husband (Line 608-609, 698-699, 703-704):

Sometimes I feel like there’s this undercurrent message from my husband that, like you could more… Or do you really still think you’ll want to do this in fifteen years?… One time I mentioned, I would love to just stay at the high school I was working at forever, and he goes, do you really think you’d feel good about that at the end? And I kind of thought I would… So then I don’t know if I’m perceiving judgment or if that actually is me… judging myself and thinking that that’s what his tone is implying.

Such excerpts highlight the connection between work-life boundary management and gender issues. Future studies should investigation communication about dual income households, parenting, and the pursuit of work calling. This is a worthwhile topic for future work-life and work-family communication scholars.

Within messages of sacrifice, the discourse of social judgment also merits further attention. Clair, McConnell, Hackbarth, and Mathes (2008) describe “job judgment,” related to meaningful work as (p. 11):

Valuing or devaluing a friend, a lover, or a significant other according to job status (due to any one of several criteria) categorizes the individual according to the tasks performed (the organization worked for, the money paid, etc.) rather than the person performing the tasks.

As scholars, we should continue to problematize messages of social judgment in communication about work calling; while acknowledging the highly contested vectors of class, racial, and gendered privilege that may affect one’s ability to heed a call, as well as
others’ perceptions of a call. Future studies should attend to class privileges within work calling messages and the influence of such privileges in the ability of one to heed (or even be aware of) a work calling.

In the closing chapter I return to four themes located within interdisciplinary scholarship about work calling as: (a) both a spiritual and secular perspective; (b) historically, culturally, and socially situated; (c) a potentially liberating and marginalizing construct; and (d) interconnected between extrinsic (outcomes) and intrinsic (needs/well-being). I address how the findings in this study interact with these themes. Lastly, I conclude with a summary on the contributions and constraints of the present study, as well as possible directions for future research.
Chapter VII: Conclusion

Exploring new terrains is often a lesson in hindsight. It is much easier to look back at the paths taken or the roads carved out and see the imprint of choices, and potential for change. It is here where the richness of pausing to assess the steps made, the landscapes yet to be discovered, and the journey as a whole is of great value. As I begin the conclusion of the current study, in an effort to map the conceptual terrain of work calling experiences, I look back on the given territory. I feel the weight of responsibility to the voices of the participants who shared the gift of their stories with me, and at the same time I seek to ensure that my time with them does not blind me to the voices without agency. Therefore, in an effort to underscore the complexity of work calling, while also providing a summary of the generative findings in the present research, I conclude this chapter by first, returning to the four interdisciplinary themes (outlined in Chapter Two), highlighting how the current qualitative research uniquely supports the concept of work calling as a communication-based concept; second, exploring the contributions and constraints of the study; and finally, offering suggestions for future research.

Unique Contributions to Interdisciplinary Themes of Work Calling

Towards the end of Chapter One, I highlighted how work calling research has either been explicitly or implicitly discussed in the domains of psychology, sociology, theology and business. Whether in the few overt studies of work calling; or in more
subtle studies about meaningful work and/or spiritual communication in and about work, that allude to messages of work calling; I argued that these disciplines offered overarching themes of work calling to which communication scholars could uniquely contribute. That is, work calling is: (a) both a spiritual and secular perspective, (b) historically, culturally, and socially situated, (c) potentially liberating and marginalizing, and (d) interconnected between the extrinsic (outcomes) and the intrinsic (needs/well-being). In the following section, I provide a summary of how the current study attends to aspects of each of these themes. First, participant communication extends our understanding of spiritual and secular perspectives by suggesting that work callings are much more process-oriented than solely just an easily recognizable moment. Second, participant communication contextualizes our understanding of work calling by providing perspectives of diverse occupations in a post-industrial economy. Third, participant communication highlights the liberating and marginalizing aspects of work calling in messages about work calling as interactive and interconnected, as well as the potentiality costly. Finally, participant communication further problematizes the interdisciplinary theme of internal-external by framing work calling as processural, commensurate with identity (e.g., trueness to self), and negotiated with others.

**Work calling includes both spiritual and secular perspectives**

In the last ten to fifteen years, interdisciplinary literature has attended to the *both-and* idea that a work calling can be perceived as spiritual and secular. However, this acknowledgment remained rather generic. The current research provides more specificity foremost by suggesting that a work calling is process based. This disrupts the idea that a
sacred calling is typically one recognizable moment—one call, versus a continuous calling. For example, in Chapter Four, participant communication reveals that a spiritual and secular work calling is realized through a compelling process or a reckoning moment. Second, the current research also highlights that a calling occurs through those things that represent our selves (e.g., Charlie’s guitar), which extends our understanding of work calling dimensions.

As participants in the current study demonstrate, work calling involves constitutive interaction. That is, work calling perspectives are interconnected with how the individual relates to a caller. Work calling is manifested in a relationship with a higher power, inner self, or material other. It involves an ever changing, ongoing interpretation of messages. By merely suggesting that there is a spiritual or secular perspective guiding work calling, previous research constrains our understanding of the communicative dynamic at the heart of this calling. Work calling inherently implies some type of activity between a caller or calling, and a called; and between the called worker and the many significant others in her/his life. The caller or calling calls a worker into a relationship, not once, but in an ongoing, unfixed, dynamic process. In doing so, work calling is an expression of self, how we value work, and what we prioritize within such value systems. This study suggests that future research on work calling should view it as constitutive (or interactive) primarily, before ascribing generic characteristics of calling as sacred or secular.

Additionally, I extend the spiritual or secular perspective by positioning it as a dynamic journey rather than simply one moment in time. Work calling, as my
participants characterized it, can be a clarifying moment of epiphany; but it can also be a processural journey, even one punctuated by moment(s) of reckoning. Here we see that spiritual and secular frameworks not only inform our work callings but they also influence the way we interpret work calling messages. The significance is in the idea of work calling as a journey, which seems to expand on the “moment” that we typically associate with sacred callings. A communicative approach to work calling as a journey contributes to secular and spiritual perspectives by identifying the possibility of a dynamic, constitutive process of such callings, which necessarily occurs over time. Work calling thus conceived extends the both/and expansion of the call as being sacred and secular to include moments of reckoning as well as processural journey, punctuated by multiple constitutive moments.

Furthermore, in Chapter Five, participant communication demonstrates that a relationship with a caller not only manifests through a transcendent, higher power or an internal sense of self, but also through a material other. Thus, a spiritual or secular perspective is not an isolated value; it is interconnected with the messages formulated and assigned. That is, calling is influenced by our understanding of who or what is representative of our spiritual or secular values. By analyzing messages about a caller and a called, we can delve deeper into the interactivity of work calling. It is interesting to note that work calling experiences, and more specifically a caller, can be representative of our selves. The question then becomes, in what ways do we interpret not only calling messages but also a caller, and what influences such interpretations?
As we seek to understand how people make sense of their work calling experiences, we should take seriously how work callings are communicatively constructed from the point of view of participants. The current research sought to engage in a dialogue about work calling, to pursue an understanding of definitional markers through the phenomenon of experience. In doing so, we see that simply categorizing work calling as spiritual or secular is limiting, and does not lead to understanding experiential meanings of work calling. We must account for the ontological and epistemological connectivity within individual perspectives and personal experiences.

When individuals view their work through a calling, it shapes their orientation to work in ways that constitute particular expectations about their work and their lives. For instance, participants in this study with a work calling expect to be able to apply their skills and passions in their occupations. How this expectation is met through their work affects how they interpret the quality of work, their role and contributions, and their level of satisfaction. Expectations about an individual’s desire to positively contribute to his or her conception of a societal good, is also significantly constitutive. This expectation affects the value the individual with a work calling places on the work he or she does. This value in addition then can be ascribed to his or her own identity as it is informed by the work he or she does and the contribution he or she perceives. Further investigation of who we receive spiritual or secular messages from and how we interpret them deepens our understanding of the values placed on such messages as well as the power of these messages.
Work calling as historically, culturally, and socially situated

Previous research demonstrates that the meaning of work calling varies across history, cultures, and societies (Clair, McConnell, Bell, Hackbarth, & Mathes, 2008). For example, a Westernized historical account of work calling (e.g. Weber’s “Protestant Ethic”) focuses religious obligations and an individualized product “of rational economic behavior” (Goldstein & Eichorn, 1961, p. 557). Contemporary perspectives of calling focus more on “a sphere of responsibility” (Guinness, 2003), and the use of talents and passions for the betterment of society (Steger et al, 2010, Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005, Miller, 2003). At the same time, work is now a defining force for identity and a place to find community. Worth and value are now defined by the accumulation (and use) of abilities, primarily expressed in work (Bauman, 2000). Yet, our understanding of how work is valued still requires further research. In an effort to deepen such understandings, I sought to begin mapping the conceptual terrain of work calling through the experiences of participants from a diverse range of professions. The guiding research question did not specifically address historical and cultural frameworks. Therefore, because of the nature of the current study, attention to historical and cultural contexts of calling was in the background. However, participant communication did provide a particular understanding of the socially situated, constitutive nature of work calling. Within this framework, messages of work calling revealed a direct impact on the socially situated nature of work/family dynamics and community, particularly in discourse about a culture of calling.
The relationally-situated nature of work calling messages among participants is particularly relevant in discourse about the tensions between work and family dynamics. Whether the tensions involves such issues as managing a work calling and being a parent (e.g., Erin, the clinical psychologist; Stephen, the wealth manager), translating work success as family success (e.g., Frank, the doctor), constructing the value of a work calling from family communication messages (e.g. Megan, the pastor and chaplain for a city police department), it is clear that messages about work calling influence and are influenced by family dynamics. The current research highlights the need for communication scholars to explore the formative and conditional roles of work calling in the socializing process of what counts as valuable work. Future studies should embrace work calling messages outside of organizational structures, acknowledging the blurred boundaries of work messages that come from family, community, and informal work spaces. Retrospective accounts of family messages about work could provide a glimpse into the socializing nature of work calling communication and how these messages are passed down generationally.

Certainly, work calling is contextually bound within a historical, cultural, and social understanding. Through an analysis of particular experiential accounts of work calling perspectives, the current study provides further basis for future communication scholars to investigate the historical and cultural implication in the (re)constitution of work calling messages. Future research focusing on meso (organizational) and macro (societal) level communication about work calling would be very generative in furthering an understanding of the connection between work calling and organizational rhetoric. For
example, analyzing worker discourse about feeling constrained and enabled by a culture of calling, as well as how they are persuaded to identify with the particular framings of work calling articulated to them by others, could offer insight into the socio-cultural impact of this concept.

Finally, it is significant to mention that most of the workers I interviewed were in service/people-oriented, post-industrial professions rather than manual labor. As we are entering into a post-industrial economy, this aspect of the findings is an important contextual factor, to help explain the idea of being called. It underscores Bauman’s (2000) point concerning the constant attention to finding who we are or being true to ourselves, which seems to accompany a post-industrial consumerist society. Future studies should attend more to the implications of how work callings are experienced and expressed in a post-industrial economy.

Work calling as a liberating and marginalizing construct

As mentioned in Chapter Two, people who perceive of their work as a calling express higher levels of motivation, satisfaction, and self-concept, while at the same time they are more likely to make personal sacrifices for work, lack work-life boundaries, and are prone to burnout (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Steger et al., 2010; Golden et al., 2004; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Work calling can provide liberation through the ability to express one’s identity in purposeful, meaningful work, which utilizes one’s skills and talents in a way that positively contributes to society. However, work calling can also involve a prime opportunity for marginalization. Marginalization can occur through organizational commodification, which is when an organization
attempts to manufacture work calling in order to further organizational goals or financial
gain (McGuire, 2010). Those who operate from a work calling also risk marginalizing
others when their calling is used as an excuse for work to dominate all other life
priorities, thereby harming relationships with family, friends, or co-workers.

One of the most generative ways that communication scholars can contribute to
the concept of work calling is in analyzing the liberating and marginalizing messages
embedded within it. In the current study, work calling messages point to feelings of
liberation through the freedom of identity expression. Here, work may help shape what
Crawford (2009) terms as, “the spirited man.” The spirited man [or woman] embodies
agentic responsibility in the pursuit of work that is intrinsically fulfilling, involving skill
and passion. Work calling is the virtue of experiencing a core sense of dignity in work.
Work calling allows for some individuals to experience a manifestation of
meaningfulness in work, and therefore in life. Messages about work calling as a high
motivation and great means of satisfaction were evident across participant interviews.
Work calling as liberating also extends to feelings of belonging and relational satisfaction
through the discursive emphasis of community and people. Here an ideology of separate,
distinct worlds fade as work calling blurs the spatial and temporal spheres of life.

However, the elasticity of blurred boundaries can only stretch so far. When work
calling dominates in such a way that other spheres of life are merely a shadow, then work
calling can prove toxic to the self and others. One form of marginalization demonstrated
in participant discourse is the oppressiveness of burnout and identity crisis. When work
calling becomes such a defining drive of an individual’s existence, it can supersede other
important life concerns. Bill (the NFL coach) points to this concern when he worries about whether or not his commitment to his work calling will truly be worth the sacrifices he made in other spheres of life, such as family. As mentioned in Chapter Two, further research is needed in regards to issues of burnout and work approaches involving subjective success (e.g., meaningful work, spirituality in the workplace, etc.). The current research creates scholarly space to further explore the implications of work calling and burnout, as well as work calling and identity crisis. Future studies should examine messages of work calling burnout and identity crisis as they relate to the larger organizational environment and family/personal relationships. What active role do organizations have in this issue of burnout and identity crisis and how is this role co-opted for corporate gain?

Additionally, work calling points to the tensions of privilege and identity. In the current research, participants’ discourse suggested that calling implicates one’s identity; yet, it is questionable how many participants were reflexive about the relationship between privilege, identity, and calling. Some suggested that calling is a way of expressing identity, and if it is not pursued, it can significantly hinder self-perceptions of identity. The question for future scholars, and those who may feel a sense of work calling, is what forms of privilege help, hinder, and harm the pursuit of a calling?

**Work calling as intrinsically and extrinsically connected**

Work calling as a constitutive process has very extrinsic and material effects. As I discussed in Chapter Two, individuals who feel called to their work are typically known for a type of servant leadership by demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility
and contributing to an ethical organizational culture, which have direct connections with profitability (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005; Sauser, 2005). We know that work is not amoral (Cheney et al., 2010), and with that consideration we must further explore how the values we place on work influence, and are influenced by, our enactment of work. The current study adds to such discussion.

Work calling as a communication-based concept demonstrates the interconnected relationship between the symbolic and material realities of work. Work calling suggests a contextual shift in organizational communication issues as it provides a new way of addressing work identity. It reinforces the shift of work practices, values, and outcomes in contemporary, Westernized societies that turn more attention to the link between subjective and objective work success. Participant communication, in discourse and in actual work environments, demonstrated the extrinsic and intrinsic impact of work calling.

Participants’ framing of work calling is commensurate with identity or trueness to self. Additionally, the idea of calling as processural, and negotiated with others points to the intrapersonal and interpersonal components of work calling. Work calling as the expression of identity, through the use of individualized skill sets and passion, connects the values a person places on work, with an approach and enactment of “knowing who I am” at work. Recall, Stephen, the wealth manager saying, framing his work calling as: “honoring who I am as a person” (Line 214); or Ted, the pastor of the multiethnic church, sharing, “at its [work calling] very core is understanding who I am” (Line 204).

Participants also linked the deep feelings of motivation and satisfaction of their work
calling with the resilience they feel to keep working during difficult moments (e.g., Katie, the palliative care social worker). As Carrie, the nonprofit financial development officer, argued work calling provides an ability to enact the “innate sense of purpose we all crave” (Line 720). Yet, as Grant, the vice president of a global digital advertising agency, also shares, a work calling “requires action, [and] sacrifice” (Line 865). How individuals feel about their work calling, and the socially constructed, constitutive nature of work calling, manifests itself in the way it is enacted. Work calling provides a vehicle for deeper understanding in the ways that meaningful work and spiritual communication is expressed in talk about work and work artifacts. Thus, how we feel about our work selves and the values that we place and bring into our work contexts influences our embodied, experiential practices.

The current study supports, extends, and emphasizes the intrinsic and extrinsic interconnectedness of work calling, by providing a reorientation in understanding how internal, subjective success influences, and are influenced by, external, material success. Further research on the way work calling is manifested in external messages and how these messages serve to (re)enforce an individual’s sense of work calling is necessary. Additionally, how do organizations receive, respond, promote, and negate such messages?

**Contributions, Constraints, and Future Directions**

To review, the guiding question for the current study was, how do participants from diverse professional domains communicate about work calling experiences? Using thematic analysis to map the conceptual terrain of work calling experiences articulated by
twenty-nine participants, three dominant themes emerged: (a) definitional markers of work calling, (b) inherent interaction in work calling, and (c) significant costs associated with work calling. In Chapter Four, I examined the definitional markers of work calling, revealed in four sub-themes. They were work calling involves: (a) overarching meaningfulness, (b) a transcendent/internal compelling or reckoning, (c) a necessary integration of skill-set and passion, and (d) a positive contribution to society. Here, I also highlighted work calling definitions articulated in three dominant thematic metaphors embedded within participant talk. They were work calling is: (a) a journey or epiphany, (b) organic and material, and (c) love.

Chapter Five, I demonstrated how participant communication pointed to work calling as inherently interactive; that is, work calling is socially constructed. It is constituted through communication and constitutive of communication. The inherent interaction of work calling was identified in three dominant themes: (a) interactions with a caller, (b) interactions with community, and (c) interactions with work/family. Here, I also expanded on the concept of interaction by providing three interview vignettes which reflected work calling interactions in the physical, material environment of participants, as well as in their actual talk.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I investigated the theme of significant costs located in participant communication about work calling experiences. Participants articulated significant costs of work calling in sub-themes about: (a) boundaries, (b) burnout, and (c) sacrifice. By identifying significant costs associated with the pursuit of a work calling, it
became clear that part of the taken-for-granted nature of work calling is the complexities involved such as risk, social judgment, and spheres of privilege.

Given the findings of the current study, I suggest that communication scholars are uniquely situated to further explore the everyday (micro), organizational (meso), and societal (macro) agendas and practices within work calling messages. By beginning to map the conceptual terrain of work calling from actual participant communication and experiences, using a qualitative, interpretive view, the current study provides unique contributions to the field of communication. These findings offer the possibility (in research and practice) for further questioning of how the traits of work calling as inherently interactive relate to the definitional markers of work calling, as well as the implications of gender, race, religious, and class distinctions. Next, I explore the unique contributions and constraints of this study.

**Contributions and Constraints**

First, the value of work as a calling as an organizational communication concept is a relevant topic, aptly demonstrated in the current study through participants’ grounded definitions and sensemaking metaphors. While previous interdisciplinary researched theorized and quantified the concept of work calling, these studies remained limited in the explication of actual discursive messages manifested directly from participant communication. This study provides a contextualized understanding of work calling, by emphasizing the lived experiences of individuals who feel called to work, uncovering the dynamic, socially constructed, constitutive, nature of work calling. By doing so, the
present research about work calling provides a new heuristic from which to understand organizational life.

Constructing a grounded definition of work calling, and the thematic metaphors used as shorthand to describe work calling experiences, helps explicate the significance of how people interpret and experience work calling. From the current research, it is clear that the complexity of work calling merits further study in regards to its constitutive effects, the influence of (and from) community, as well as the very real costs associated with this work approach. Recognizing the connection that work calling has with meaningful work, spiritual communication in and about work, and even the future implications of organizational rhetoric within work calling messages, provides insight into the communicative ethos of work calling.

Recall the content of work calling’s grounded definition from participant communication. Participants described work calling as an overarching sense of meaningfulness in one’s work; brought to awareness through a process of being compelled or a moment of reckoning instigated by a higher power or the inner self (which can also be manifest in a material other); enacted through the integration of the individual’s passion and skill-set; in ways that positively contribute to society through one’s work. The significance of this definitional marker for meaningful work and spiritual communication is multiple and merits further research. Work calling goes beyond the concept of a momentary and easily identifiable instance. Certainly such implications include a greater focus on the constitutive and processural nature of work calling. For meaningful work such an emphasis highlights the connection with others in
order to fully experience meaningful work, and for spiritual communication it highlights an ongoing relationship with a caller and a calling. Additionally, while work calling can include patterned and common experiences, it is also simultaneously unique and individualized. For many people, work calling may not be experienced as a one-time epiphany, but rather as a recognition that requires cultivation and agency.

Similarly, sensemaking metaphors of work calling experiences reveal underlying means of identification and persuasion for the called worker. In addition to journey metaphors, work calling as a *seed*, emphasizes a processural, constitutive nature. For instance, a seed is vulnerable to the surrounding environment. Seasonal changes influence the growth and development of a seed. The processural nature of calling implies the need for perseverance and an embracing of uncertainty. Similarly, the metaphor of fire points to instances of igniting (moments of reckoning, or an epiphany) but also alludes to the need for care-taking, fanning the flame, and the risk of being snuffed out. Such metaphorical language merits further study and could be productive in understanding work calling as organizational rhetoric based on the embedded messages of persuasion and identification espoused in such discourse. Thus, building definitional markers from participant communication architecturally demonstrates the complex, intersubjective, and individualized nature of this concept.

Second, work calling deepens our understanding of identity and what impacts and/or influences identity construction in and about work. Here, I specifically connect identity with the processual nature of work calling and identity with work calling costs. To begin with, identity and the processual nature of work calling overlap. That is, work
calling as processural implies a continual source of identity (re)generation. Epiphanies and reckoning moments are then markers on the journey rather than a one-time, contained experience. In other words, as a static, fixed call, the power of the call on a life and for identity constitution likely diminishes as time passes, but as an ongoing calling it has a power to continually construct a particular identity. The unfixed and continuousness experienced in some individuals’ work calling was evident in comments from participants such Grant, the Vice President of Client Relations at a Digital Advertising Agency, when he said that his work calling: “was just kind of a, a series of pathways that one led to the other” (Line 136). Megan, the pastor and police department chaplain, also highlighted this when she explained: “I didn’t get a telegram in the mail or hear a voice, I just kept walking through doors… that He [God as a caller] kept flinging wide open” (Line 608). Such exemplars reinforce the concept that an individual is constantly referencing the call, instead of the calling having a fixed meaning.

Here, communication scholars should also consider the implications of work calling as inherently interactive as it relates to identity construction. Work calling as constitutive also points to a processural rather than purely immediate nature. The interactivity of work calling is demonstrated through messages of a continuousness in relationship between the called and the calling, the called and a caller, and the called and the community. Here, participant communication makes visible the dynamics within the enactment of the work calling. It also extends our understanding of how an individual relates to a caller as a higher power (God), an internal self, or a material other.
Additionally, work calling costs identify competing voices of power and the influence of such power upon identity construction. Such discourse expands our knowledge of the tension between blurred spheres of life, emphasizing specific privileges that obstruct or augment participants’ experience of work as a calling. Understood from participant communication, when the identity of an individual with a work calling is threatened in some way (e.g. due to lack of boundaries or the weight of required sacrifices) the identity crisis is one of totality (e.g. Grant, Vice President of Client Engagement in a Global Digital Advertisement Agency). Here, burnout derived from work calling impacts all aspects of one’s identity. It can sever the core of a person, effecting all spheres of life rather than merely one aspect of life. As with all studies, the current research project was finite and therefore limited. I turn now to acknowledge the theoretical and practical constraints.

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of the present research in understanding definitional markers, inherent interactivity, and significant costs embedded in messages about work calling, other frameworks could also prompt different readings and interpretations of the data. First, viewed from a more critical lens, participant discourse points to privileged standpoints within work calling. From these standpoints a number of productive questions emerge that should be explored: For example, to what extent are the messages of work calling in participant communication a reflection of the society, or discourse community, in which they are embedded? How are these discourses used to shade power? Whose voices are marginalized in work calling? Future critical scholars engaged in this topic could examine the underlying ideology that guides the
values placed on particular forms of work, and how those values influence the
cositutive nature of work calling messages. Additionally, how ubiquitous might “work
calling” discourses be in arenas in which religion is highly integrated into companies
(e.g. Focus on the Family)? When work calling is supported by an organization, when
does this support become suppression? How do individuals who feel called to work
manage in this perspective and approach in an environment where they are marginalized?
Is work calling really a luxury? If so, to whom is it afforded and to whom is it denied?

Second, viewed from a gendered, work-family lens, work calling research points
to the necessity of studying the range of work opportunities for men and women in
contemporary society. To what degree is a work calling more accessible and achievable
in a white-collar, masculine world? For example, in the current study participants with
high-level corporate occupations were all male, whereas the female participants worked
in nonprofit, counseling, and other mothering/care-taking types of professions. Is work
calling more acceptable for women taking on feminine work? What costs are women
allowed to take for their work calling? Similarly, how would a man be received if he
pursued a work calling in a mothering/care-taking profession such as a stay-at-home
parent?

Finally, from a temporal-generational perspective, work calling could be
construed as a privilege of age or related to a privilege of self-awareness. Can emerging
adults afford to pursue work as a calling, or is it more open for those who have reached
an occupational actualization? Is work calling more on the minds of adults who have the
luxury of time to reflect on the search for meaningfulness in work, rather than looking for
a “real” job? These additional viewpoints could offer rich counterpoints to some participants’ portrayal of a work calling.19

Although I achieved saturation in the thematic analysis, it is conceivable that different and/or additional findings could be located if I interviewed more participants. Similarly, longitudinal and repeated interviews may have also provided another layer of data. Furthermore, as mentioned above, participants all worked in people-oriented/service occupations rather than manual labor. Their interviews may not reflect the perspectives or values of individuals from other spheres of work, or non-Westernized cultures. However, the goal of this study was to provide a rich snapshot of work calling as a communicative concept. In doing so, I explored, analyzed, and evaluated a diverse occupational group of participants who view their work as a calling. Emphasizing the lived experiences of individuals with a work calling, primarily through interviews, with some informal observations and artifact analysis, supports the idea of work calling being communicative. As it was not my desire to strive for generalization and due to the nature of snowball sampling, some spheres of work were left in the dark. Researchers engaging in organizational communication and work calling should investigate the discourse of individuals in manual labor occupations. Additionally, a large number of participants in this study were self-employed. Future scholars should investigate the influence of organizational power and/or agency as it relates to the pursuit of work calling.

19 However, as work calling is a socially constructed, constitutive and emergent concept in organizational communication literature, I chose an interpretive framework. An interpretive lens enabled me to examine how participants made sense of their experiences of work calling and the ways in which their interpretation of these experiences constructed their identities as workers who are called.
Future Directions

Part of mapping a terrain is learning what future directions might exist. I suggest at least three areas of exploration that future scholars should attend to: the area of multiple work callings and blurred boundaries, a more focused attention on organizational rhetoric, as well as material rhetoric, in work calling messages.

After I concluded the twenty-nine interviews and began analyzing the data, I realized that one question I should have asked was, “are there any other places in your life in which you feel called?” From a qualitative perspective, recognizing the ongoing and dynamic process of work calling conceptualizations, it would be beneficial for future communication scholars to focus on how multiple work callings are talked about and interpreted. For example, in a quantitative study on unanswered callings, Berg et al. (2010) identified messages about additional callings of educators, suggesting that multiple callings provided different motivational outlets while also adding to the tension of managing multiple callings and the even greater likelihood of being overworked. Similarly, Oats et al. (2005) particularly engage in inter-role conflict of Christian mothers who also work in academia. From thirty-two interviews, Oats et al. suggest that women who incorporated their spirituality in work legitimized their “choice” to parent and work outside of the home based on feeling called. Oats et al. conclude by stating (p. 221):

The sanctification of work, through experiencing one’s vocation as a calling, helped this sample of women cope with the tension experienced between their multiple roles by leading them to approach their pursuits with commitment and confidence in a context of ultimate purpose.

Here, it seems that the concept of work calling legitimizes the pursuit of work and life choices that may otherwise not be sanctioned by the self and/or others.
From an organizational communication qualitative perspective, how do participants actually communicatively account for work calling tensions? Perhaps more significantly, what organizational and societal messages reinforce the idea of multiple callings as possible, good, or even ideal? Are multiple work callings more acceptable for particular persons? What do such messages contribute to our understanding of the current overworked culture and the concept of blurred boundaries?

Future studies might also consider a more direct focus on organizational rhetoric as a means of assessing the influence of work calling messages at the meso and macro level. Organizing is constituted by individuals within an organization, and as such, each individual’s organizing scheme brings in different messages about work, which can include work calling rhetoric. The exploration of how individuals communicate about work as a calling involves messages that they use to make sense of organizational life and messages they accept from the organization. For example, Smith and Eisenberg (1987) applied a root-metaphor methodology in an analysis of Disneyland’s use of the “family values” management worldview. They found that this form of control created complex confrontational problems, resulting in a high level of employee dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover. While Smith and Eisenberg may not have overtly framed their study with a rhetorical lens, their study uncovers the impact of dominant persuasion and the use of hegemony to discursively legitimize what is deemed as good, right, and true. Such research provides a glimpse of the potential for work calling studies, particularly as they may focus on community and a culture of calling. For example, in a culture of work calling, can organizational members express dissent and how is this received?
Additionally, an exploration of how participants communicate about work as a calling involves the awareness that they carry with them certain meso level messages from the organization about what work is. By investigating occurrences surrounding messages of work calling, the manner in which it “worked,” and what the effect was for the audience or society, future scholars can dig deeper into the organizational rhetoric of work calling (Auer, 1981). As such, understanding the power of rhetoric in and about work, means attending to the ways in which it is used to dominate (and liberate). This could lead to questions such as: do messages of work calling pacify, quiet, or satiate certain work needs? Are they used to reframe labor that would normally be devalued and who is the architect of such framing?

Future studies focusing on the material rhetoric of work calling could also include examining aesthetics/art, building structures and even the physical body as a constitutive force, influencing our understanding of the called self and how it is interpreted by others and the world. We know that messages of work calling are not neutral. Such language choices persuasively connect individuals to identify with the organization they are a part of (Cheney, 1983; Burke, 1973), which can serve as a means of enforcing ideological beliefs (McGee, 1990), making sense of the world through storytelling (Pierce, 2003; Fisher, 1984), and providing metaphorical maps in the social construction of reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Based on the guiding research question, the current study did not set out to include such a finding, however through informal observations most poignantly demonstrated in the vignette descriptions of inherent interaction; I uncovered assumed frames of meanings located in the physical space of the participants’ work lives.
Future studies should engage in a more direct gaze at the cultural uptake of work as a calling in an organizational and societal level.

Analysis of material rhetoric recognizes the process of identification embedded in the very fabric of such artifacts. Work calling interactions are part of a value system within an approach to work; what people value is often revealed in the material rhetoric they have chosen to place around them (Ratner, 2009). According to Selzer (1999) there are two dimensions involved in the relationship between rhetoric and materiality, namely that rhetoric produces material consequences and materiality is inherently rhetorical. As Selzer contends, “material realities often (if not always) contain a rhetorical dimension that deserves attention: for language is not the only medium or material that speaks” (p. 8). Thus, examining the messages represented in corporeal, tangible objects would allow scholars the opportunity to question the unquestioned forms of persuasion contributing to message construction of work calling.

Organizational values and/or worker values are often revealed in material rhetoric (Ratner, 2009). For instance, Bell & Forbes’ (1994) analysis of office decorations as revealing messages of organizational members’ resistance and pleasure, engaging in a more direct study of work calling as material rhetoric could also contribute to an understanding of alternative and even subverted constructions of work calling in response to organizational control. Future studies investigating work calling should focus on participants’ work environments and their material world, which will contribute to an understanding of work calling rhetoric. Additionally, if people motivated by a work calling do feel silenced, how might they express this in their material rhetoric? By
assessing work spaces and/or messages from the collective organization, future studies can explore the complexities and paradoxes found in organizational life, which influence the individual to identify, or reinforce their identification related to the concept of work calling, thereby uncovering the disseminations and enactments of work calling messages.

A work calling addresses the internal thirst to feel purpose and connects it with an external means of enactment. Work inspired by relationship with a caller that allows for particular skills and passions to engender an individual's sense of significance through contributions to a societal good is powerful: “there’s something in me that kind of sings…I just feel so fulfilled and satisfied” (Ted, Pastor of a Multiethnic Church, Line, 239, 252). A work calling provides significance and joy. It is (Stacey, Dog Trainer & Rescue Animal Staff, Line 774-776):

The type of work that feeds your soul. I don’t know how else to say it. You wake up in the morning and you’re looking forward to doing it and you go to bed at night and you’re proud that you did it.

Sometimes a work calling is exhausting and costly. Sometimes the cost not only negatively impacts the called self, but the person’s community and/or family (e.g. Anthony, the clinical psychologist). The pursuit of a work calling may not be understood by others, it may be misjudged; it may be misinterpreted or misappropriated. A work calling may demand holding to certain convictions and value systems that limit a person’s choices. However, through the overriding sense of joy that can derive from a sense of work calling, many pursue it while advising others to do the same: “just decide…if I’m really called to do this job sometimes the circumstances are really lousy and you just have to decide, this is what I’m called to do, let’s go!” (Bill, NFL Coach,
Line 565, 588-589). When a calling is recognized and when a person responds a call, there is a type of “fire in your belly” (Lisa, Hospital Performance Improvement Consultant, Line 503).

“So where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within” (Eric Little, Chariots of Fire, 1981). In the movie, Chariots of Fire (1981), the voice of Eric Little is heard saying these words as he begins the 1924 Summer Olympics. As the runners get in their positions, the starting gun is fired, and the men’s powerful legs take them swiftly around the track. Eric Little runs with his head titled up as if to drink from some heavenly water. His voice is heard again, recalling a moment earlier in the movie when he responds to his sister, who does not understand his choice to put being a missionary on hold in order to fulfill his calling as an Olympic runner. He says in a soft Scottish accent, “I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.” It is clear from watching the faces in the crowd that this pleasure is translated to the onlookers in a type of visceral inspiration. People cheer and hug each other as Eric crosses the finish line.

Muscles will strain. Bruises and stumbling may occur, but when a person who feels called to work pursues it, there can be a deep, deep pleasure. In one of the first races in the 1924 Olympics, Eric Little is pushed off of the tracks by a fellow Olympian. He tumbles on the ground while the crowd members visibly hold their breath. Eric gets up and begins to run after the others. One onlooker says, “It’s too late.” The man next to him replies, “Don’t believe it, his [Eric’s] head’s not back yet.” The camera pans back to Eric, who, as he runs, lifts his face upward in his trademark expression of utter pleasure in a
communing with his caller. He breaks through the finish line, winning the race. Yet, for Eric, the victory seemed to be experienced before crossing the finish line. The success was in the embodied joy of doing what he felt meant to do. As the conceptual map of work calling continues to unfold, to be charted out, it is clear from the current study that messages of work calling are contextual, individualized, and powerful. The current research disrupts the generic understanding of work calling, pointing to the socially constructed, constitutive and often process-based components of work as a calling. To further explore and analyze such messages we must seek out the voices of the called, listen to their stories, and let them be our guides.
References


Lair, D.J., Shenoy, S., McClellan, J., & McGuire, T. (2008). The politics of meaning/ful work: Navigating the tensions of narcissism and condescension while finding


251

Appendix A

Email to Gatekeepers

Dear <Insert name of gatekeeper>,

For my Ph.D. dissertation, I am researching the concept of work as a calling. A major part of this research study involves interviewing people who view their work in this way. I am hoping you may know individuals with this work approach, or who have described their profession as a calling. While people may not use the word “calling” to explain their work, they may talk about it as something they were meant to do or as their passion. These words could indicate this type of perspective. If you find that one or more people come to mind, would you please send the message included below to them, inquiring if they would consider talking with me? (You will also find the same message attached to this email in case that provides an easier way to send the information.) Thank you for helping me connect with those who view work in this way. If you have any questions, please feel free to call (425-478-3091) or email me.

My name is Arianna Molloy and as a part of my Ph.D. dissertation, I am studying the concept of work as a calling and I am hoping I can talk with you about this research. While people may not use the word “calling” to explain their work, they may talk about it as something they are meant to do or as their passion. These words could indicate this type of perspective. If you view your work as a calling, would you consider participating in this study? This would consist of meeting with me for approximately an hour for an interview. Additionally, I am also hoping that a few of the individuals I interview would allow me to observe an hour or two of a typical work day. (However, a work observation is by no means a requirement to do the interview.) Anything you share with me will be kept confidential, all persons and organizations will be given pseudonyms. In other words, no real names will be attached to the research study. I would be happy to share more about this with you. Please email or call me (425-478-3091) if you are interested in being a part of this study. Thank you.
Appendix B

Email to Participants

Dear <Insert Name>,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. I am very excited to learn about your perspective on the concept of calling in your work.

I would like to meet with you for approximately an hour for an interview. You are totally in control of the interview time. I will come with questions, but if a question is confusing or you aren’t comfortable answering, we can move ahead to the next question. Before we begin the interview, I will provide you with a consent form to complete, to ensure that your name and all personal information will be protected and not disclosed. At the end of the interview, I will ask you to fill out a brief demographic survey (it will only take you 1-2 minutes). And, I think we’ll have a great time! I’m excited to learn about why you do what you.

I am currently scheduling interviews. I have interview times available most days (8:00 AM, 10:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 2:00 PM, 4:00 PM, 6:00 PM and 8:00 PM). I am happy to conduct the interview at your place of work or in a coffee shop, whatever is most convenient for you. **Please reply back to me with your available dates and times, from my availability above and we’ll confirm the interview.**

I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you in person for the interview. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research.

[Follow-up Email to Participants]

Dear <Insert Name>,

Thank you so much for your time! I really enjoyed our meeting and discussion of calling. I appreciate your transparency and perspective and learning more about the patterns that exist within this approach. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any additional thoughts following our conversation or if you have any questions. If you have any other friends or colleagues that may be interested in the study, please feel free to forward the below email to them.

*My name is Arianna Molloy and as a part of my Ph.D. dissertation, I am studying the concept of work as a calling and I am hoping I can talk with you about this research. While people may not use the word “calling” to explain their work, they may talk about it as something they are meant to do or as their passion. These words could indicate this type of perspective. If you view your work as a calling, would you consider participating in this study? This would consist of meeting with me for approximately an hour for an interview. Additionally, I am also hoping that a few of the individuals I interview would allow me to observe an hour or two of a typical work day. (However, a work observation is by no means a requirement to do the interview.) Anything you share with me will be kept confidential, all persons and organizations will be given pseudonyms. In other words, no real names will be attached to the research study. I would be happy to share*
more about this with you. Please email or call me (425-478-3091) if you are interested in being a part of this study. Thank you.
Appendix C

Interview Map

I. INTRODUCTION

A. [Establish Rapport] Thanks for meeting with me today. <Insert Gatekeeper> thought it would be a good idea that we connect. I’m looking forward to hearing about your relationship to your work.

B. [Purpose] So, in our time today, I would like to ask you some questions about your work approach and some experiences you have had, in order to learn more about you.

C. [Motivation] From our interaction, I hope to gain an understanding about how you communicate about your work approach, to unpack a little bit more the concept of approaching work as a calling.

D. [Timeline] Our time together should take approximately an hour, but feel free to expand on your responses as much as you’d like.

(Transition: Let’s begin talking about what your work involves...)

II. BODY

A. So, tell me about the type of work you do?
   1. Can you walk me through a typical work day?
      a. Who do you interact with?
   2. How long have you been doing this work?
   3. Tell me how you came to do the work you are doing now? What led up to this?

B. When did you first start thinking about your work as a calling?
   1. In your opinion, what are some primary values that person with a work calling approach has?
      a. What makes this approach unique?
   2. What do you think contributed to viewing your work as a calling? In other words, who or what contributed to sense of work calling?
      a. Can you think of a particular example?
3. How does your organization speak to the perspective work as a calling?
   a. Do you feel like your work approach is supported by other people in your life (work and/or home)?
   b. Can you think of an example?

4. Do you feel like other people that you work with (work for, or who work for you) feel the same way about their work? Why/why not?

(Transition: So, we’ve talked a bit about what your work involves and the influencing factors of approaching work as a calling. I’d like to hear more specifically what this work approach means in your life...)

C. What do you love most about your work?
   1. Tell me about a situation that best represents this?

D. What is the hardest part of your job?
   1. Can you think of a particular instance that best represents this?
   2. On the days that it feels really hard, what do you do?
   3. What do you think is the biggest challenge or “learning curve” for people who view their work as a calling?

(Transition: Thinking now about your approach to work and what this means for the future...)

E. Where do you see yourself in five years as it relates to your work?
   1. What qualities or skill sets do you think are necessary to experience work as a calling?
   2. What advice would you give to someone who has just discovered the idea of their work as a calling?

(Transition: Finally, let’s return to this basic concept of work calling...)

F. How would you define work calling?
   1. What key concepts do you think must exist for a work approach to involve a sense of calling?

257
III. CONCLUSION

A. Aside from what I’ve already asked you, is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your work, or your approach to work as a calling?

B. It has been a pleasure talking with you. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study about work as a calling. This research is conducted by Arianna Molloy, a Doctoral Candidate in Communication Studies at the University of Denver, CO. Arianna can be reached by phone (425) 478-3091 or arianna.molloy@du.edu. This project is supervised by dissertation advisor, Dr. Christina Foust, Communication Studies Department, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303) 871-4330, cfoust@du.edu.

The purpose of this research is to explore how participants talk about work as a calling. Participation in this study involves interviews and possibly work observation. The interviews should take about an hour of your time. (If you agree to a work observation as well, it should take about one hour.) The interview will involve responding to 8-16 questions about work as a calling. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. The researcher respects your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty.

Your participation in the study will be confidential. Results of this research may be presented at professional conferences and included in journal articles. However, your responses will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. Your name and demographic information will be kept separate from your responses. Only the researchers will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use pseudonyms when connected to an interview exemplar or artifact description. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Your participation is sincerely appreciated. You may keep this page for your records. Please sign at the bottom of this page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please contact Arianna with any questions you have. I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study about work calling. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

___ I agree to be audiotaped.
___ I do not agree to be audiotaped.
___ I am open to a work observation.
___ I do not want to participate in a work observation.

Participant Signature _____________________ Date _________________
Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

You are not required to answer the following questions. This information will remain strictly confidential. Your name and demographic information will be kept separate from your responses. Only the researchers will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use pseudonyms when connected to an interview exemplars, work observation, and/or artifact description. Your participation is sincerely appreciated. If you do not understand any part of this form, please contact Arianna with any questions you have by phone (425) 478-3091 or arianna.molloy@du.edu. If you have any concerns or complaints please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-4531, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Name:_________________________________

2. Job Description:____________________________________

3. What is Your Age? (Check one of the following)
   ____18-29 years old
   ____30-49 years old
   ____50-64 years old
   ____65 years and over

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one of the following)
   ____Some High School
   ____High School Graduate
   ____Some College
   ____Trade/Technical/Vocational Training
   ____College Graduate
   ____Some Postgraduate Work
   ____Post Graduate Degree

5. Do you have a religious or spiritual orientation?
   (Check one of the following): Yes_____/No_____

   Please explain:____________________________________

6. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?________________________

7. What is your total annual income before taxes (Check one of the following):
   ____Less than $20,000
   ____$20,000-$40,000
   ____$50,000-$70,000
   ____$80,000 or More