

‘Calling Work Orientation’ and Psychological Well Being among Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of education system, especially at higher levels are undergoing change. Both the teacher and students face new challenges. As urban India becomes more westernized and individualistic, our hitherto strong social support systems are breaking. The student alone tries to adjust to the college life and also tries to meet high performance expectations. Some succeed and some do not. A sizable number of students succumb to the pressure and commit suicide also. On the other hand, the phenomenal advancement in technology has made means to acquire knowledge easily available. The student is no longer dependent on teacher only for information. He is also looking for the missing parent, mentor or friend in a teacher. The teacher takes on multiple roles to nurture young minds and steer human potential in the right direction. In this scenario the work orientation of the teacher and his well being levels assume importance. People's orientations to their work determine their thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward work. Most people view their work either as a Job (focus on financial rewards and viewing work as necessity that brings neither pleasure nor fulfillment;), a Career (focus on advancement and the resultant increase in social status), or a Calling (focus on enjoyment of fulfilling, socially useful work). This paper explores various facets of the calling work orientation and its consequent impact on well being in the field of education. It argues for a need to closely look at the reasons why teachers come into this profession. It also looks into the reasons why enhancing the well being of the teacher should be priority of the management, given the important role they play in nation building.

Keywords: *Challenges Facing Teachers And Students, Work Orientations, Well Being*

“No person who is enthusiastic about his work has anything to fear from life. All the opportunities in the world are waiting to be grasped by people who are in love with what they’re doing ” Samuel Goldwyn

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It is important to appreciate that Indian society is undergoing a number of social and cultural changes. More than ever before the multicultural, multi social nature of society is evident in our classrooms especially at higher levels. As India slowly becomes a centre of choice for higher education, more and more students from across the world flock to India to study. Karnataka has a number of foreign students, with a large number studying in Bangalore and Mysore. A cursory glance at a degree classroom composition shows that among the Indian students the majority are not local students either. There seems to be a preference among Indian students to pursue higher education away from the home city. College teacher has to negotiate with students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, age profiles and nationalities, teach and continuously update in the teaching and evaluative process. This makes today's teaching a far more challenging.

Are our teachers prepared to handle such diverse groups of students? Teachers vary in terms of their effectiveness for various reasons. From the students' side, in the pre internet boom days college students were solely dependent on their teachers for notes and material for study. Knowledge was available either with the teacher or at a library. They had to go college. Now, the internet is overflowing with information in various formats pdf, video, eBooks', online tutorials , audio books etc on practically every subject under the sun at a click of a button. A student from today's 'screen' generation can easily study and take examinations online, without having to step within the campus premises. So how does the teacher stay relevant in the present scenario? As we still look for ways to improve teacher effectiveness in the teaching-learning process, we may need to look for the parallel processes which are happening in the classrooms, which still draw students from across the world to the colleges. If the student is not really looking for course material from the teacher, he is most definitely looking for a friend with whom he could discuss his concerns and clarify his doubts without fear or judgement. The question is whether our teachers are ready to take the extra care beyond just finishing the course requirements, to nurture impressionable minds and steer human potential in the right direction with utmost dedication. Each of these teachers brings a unique set of personality characteristics, experience and training that either make or break the job. Yet the unfailing key factor that keeps them trying would undoubtedly an undying dedication to the job. The driving force would have to be more than looking at the job as a way to earn a paycheck or secure status and prestige. In other words, the work orientation that the teacher is going to be is the game changer.

Another ugly truth is the growing depression among adolescent and young adults in India, often resulting in suicide. Suicide org. a website for suicide prevention, awareness and support has published that teenagers in southern India have the highest suicide rates. Patel *et al* (2012) in a study published in the British Medical Journal 'The Lancet' cited that the suicide rate in 15-19 age group living around Vellore in Tamil Nadu was 148 per 10,000/- women and 58 per 10,000 men (the numbers are 3 times higher among women). The higher rates may come from "the greater likelihood of disappointments when aspirations that define success and happiness are distorted or unmet by the reality faced by young people in a rapidly changing society," (Patel

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2012). A student is often left to his own devices to adjust to the challenges and expectations of a college life. Sometimes students spend more time with teachers than their own family members. The teacher plays a crucial role in helping the student adjust to the college life. Teachers' own well being levels are crucial factors in not only meeting this challenge but also in enabling future independent functioning among the students. We find that promoting well being of teachers is not a priority of college management as much as promoting worker/employee well being is for industries! What a paradox!

Ginot (1975) in his book 'Teacher and Child' rightly observes

“I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized. If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.”

The above backdrop implies that the work orientation and the well being of teachers are crucial factors that would help the teachers successfully meet the challenges of handling young minds against the background of a fast evolving society and educational set up.

Work orientations: Giving meaning to work

People tend to relate to work in different ways. Sociologists (Bellah et al., 1985) and psychologists (Baumeister, 1991; Schwartz, 1986, 1994; Wrzesniewski, Icauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) have argued for a tripartite model of people's orientations to their work. These general orientations help to determine our thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward work. The orientations offer a window into the ways in which people see their work, and more importantly, how they craft their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) in order to realize their orientations toward the work. As such, work orientation can be thought of as the interplay between the person and the work.

Bellah et al (1985; Schwartz, 1986, 1994) describe three dominant orientations toward work that reflect the experience of work in the United States. In the first work orientation, people view work as a **Job**, focusing on the material benefits of work to the relative exclusion of other kinds of meaning and fulfilment. Usually, the interests and ambitions of those with Jobs are expressed outside of the domain of work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) and involve hobbies and other interests. In contrast, those with **Career orientations** work for the rewards that accompany advancement through an organizational or occupational structure. Advancement brings higher self-esteem, increased power and higher social standing (Bellah et al, 1985: 66). Finally, those with **calling orientations** work not for financial rewards or for advancement, but

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for the fulfilment that doing the work brings. In Callings, the work is an end in itself, and is usually associated with the belief that the work contributes to the greater good and makes the world a better place.

Calling work orientation: Various conceptualizations

A concept that is often used to denote the presence of meaningful work is calling. The idea of work serving as a calling has a long history with religious overtones. The construct of calling stems from a religious context and describes the process by which God calls a person to do a work that fits his or her talents and life circumstances (Calvin, 1574; Luther, 1883). However, in modern parlance, a clear distinction has been made between neo-classical conceptualizations of calling that emphasize, duty, destiny and a transcendent summons (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dik & Duffy, 2009), and —modern conceptualizations that frame calling as an inner drive to do fulfilling and self-actualizing work (Baumeister, 1991; Hall & Chandler, 2005). More recent conceptualizations see calling "as the subjective experience of determination towards one's work, or the kind of work a person understands as his or her purpose in life" (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Other authors have emphasized the social component of calling, i.e., the work people are called to fulfil is of social value and does not aim at material benefits or an upward career (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 1997). Dik and Duffy (2009) defined calling as "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation". While in another conceptual essay, Elangovan, Pinder and McLean (2010) also identified three facets of calling: action orientation, sense of purpose, and pro-social intention.

Duffy & Dik (2012) point out that since 2007 the number of studies on calling has more than tripled. In the past there has been more emphasis on the objective indicators of work performance. Now a days, more attention is being given to subjective indicators such as job satisfaction and feeling of success, "new interest in the idea of vocation and calling—even though these terms may not be used - is emerging as people search for more humane and meaningful ways to understand their work lives" (Weiss & Sur., 2003, p. 6).

Traditionally seen as "a meaningful beckoning toward activities that are morally, socially and personally significant" (Wrzesniewski, Dekas, & Rosso, 2009, p. 115), researchers and theorists have made efforts to understand the key features and qualities of a calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Novak, 1996; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004), the circumstances under which a person may discover a calling (Levoy, 1997), the experiencing of a calling (Dobrow, 2004), the notion of a "callings orientation" (e.g., Bellah, Sullivan, Tipton, Madsen, & Swindler, 1996; Wrzesniewski, 2003), the importance of having a calling relative to a career (Dobrow, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005), and the relationship between a calling and career development (e.g., Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). However, this area has not received the attention it deserves from Indian

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researchers nor have there been efforts to understand the Indian conceptualization of calling. Thus, it is a fertile area which deserves attention of researchers.

Calling and the Teaching Profession: Shaping minds, shaping the nation

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

- Henry Brooks Adams

Who can deny the important role teachers play in moulding society? Teachers like any other employed people (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997), spend a large part of their day at work and more than 88% of this working time is spent in interactions with other people. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton (1985) believe that the effect of meaning in work is especially visible in occupations where individuals are constantly interacting with various social systems within an organisation, as in education.

The Indian Government in a press release on 27th January 2015, outlined its vision for the National Educational Policy 2015 stating that it "would like to bring out a national education policy to meet the changing dynamics of the population's requirement, with regard to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry". If indeed we were to become a knowledge centre, the architects for the system would be our teachers. And more so at the higher education level as the student then decides and prepares for his work life. With our ambitious plans for an emerging knowledge centre, we need teachers who believe they have come to the field because this is what they do best: teaching and nurturing impressible mind with a fierce dedication that can only be rivalled by devoted parents. So in others words we are searching for a calling work orientation among teachers.

Innumerable previous research has repeatedly shown the beneficial effects of calling work orientation on both individual performance and well being levels. However the relationship between calling orientation and well being is not so straightforward. A couple of variables would perhaps mediate this relationship. The individual's effort at continually self-motivating is one such variable. Teaching the same subject year after year, to mostly unwilling learners can't be an exciting job for some, while, an effective teacher does manage to create meaning not only for himself but also for the students he teaches. What steps do effective teachers take that set them apart from the rest who see their job as only a means to earn a living is interesting to understand and analyse. In an Indian context where we tend to look for extended relationships in professional situations as well, does the dedicated teacher's perception of students go beyond the teacher-pupil relationship is an issue that needs to be explored. Effective teachers see work as having meaning beyond personal need fulfilment. *Teaching is their calling.*

Well Being: A consequence of meaningful work experience

With the advent of the positive psychology movement, 'well being' has emerged as an important area of enquiry. There are two related terms that are often used: Subjective well being and Psychological well being, emerging from two overlapping but parallel approaches. The first of these approaches is generally called hedonism (Kahneman et al.,1999) which defines well being as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. The second perspective, both as ancient and modern as the hedonic perspective, suggests that well being does not consist in maximizing positive experiences and minimizing negative ones (Ryan & Deci, 2001) but refers to living fully or to allow for the richest human potential possible (Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008). This second perspective is widely known as eudaimonia.

Impact of calling on well being

The effects of a Calling orientation for the individual, work group, and organization have been studied and contrasted with those with Career orientations in a number of different work situations.

Individual Effects

For the individual, a Calling orientation toward work has behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional effects that differ from those experienced by people with Jobs or Careers. For example, people with Callings tend to put more time at work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), whether or not this time is compensated. As well, those with Callings report higher job and life satisfaction than those with Jobs or Careers (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). They also derive more satisfaction from the domain of work than the domain of leisure and hobbies. A calling can be both binding and ennobling (Bunderson and Thompson 2009). In addition to higher performance, job crafting also has been associated with increased levels of resilience in the face of adversity at work (Ghitulescu, 2007) and increased emotional well-being (French, as cited in Finding Positive meaning in work Wrzesniewski, A. 2003).

According to Self-determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) focus on material rewards (as in experiencing one's own work just as a source of material benefits) decreases the possibility of satisfying basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Research has shown that preference for extrinsic rewards results in lower job and life satisfaction (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2007). 'Collaborative job crafting' led to higher performance among early childhood educators (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk 2009). Some authors even feel that a sense of calling denotes an ultimate form of subjective professional success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This perspective is relevant for the emerging interest in positive psychology as well where meaning and purpose in life are considered as main contributors to happiness and life satisfaction (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; and Steger & Frazier, 2005). When people experience their work as a calling it brings them the sense of meaning both at work as well as in life generally (Steger, Pickering, Shin & Dik, 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Calling orientation by virtue of having more job satisfactions, indirectly leads to better performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono,

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and Patton 2001) and impacted psychological meaningfulness and work engagement significantly, provided there was a work role fit (Rothmann & Hamukangandu 2013).

A sense of calling was correlated with lower levels of stress and depression (Treadgold, 1999) and is claimed to foster the acquisition of meta-competencies (e.g., adaptability) which ultimately improve individual and organizational performance (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Also, a sense of personal mission, purpose-in-living and an element of service towards others characterizes people who are pursuing their calling (Dobrow, 2004), which has implications for professions especially such as teaching.

Calling and well being among teachers

Studies linking teachers' work orientations to well being are rare. A study by Wrzesniewski *et al* (1997) revealed that teachers with calling orientation had higher job and life satisfaction compared to those who experience their work as career or just a means of financial security.

Hagmaier & Abele, (2012) opine that individuals working in health and education sector tend towards calling orientation more often than those in other professions. However, research clearly shows that calling orientation does not contribute to burnout. On the contrary, individuals with calling orientation cope better with stress and have lower level of emotional exhaustion (Treadgold, 1999). In addition to that, people who believe that their work is helpful for others think less about themselves and more about other people. They are less emotionally exhausted and have better work performance (Grant, 2010). In study on teachers, the results revealed that calling orientation was significant positive, and job orientation significant negative predictor of well-being, while opposite was found for ill-being (Jurcec & Majda 2015). Screw *et al* (1992) examined the effects of background variables and professional role orientation on teaching commitment among education undergraduates. Calling orientation was a major factor in choosing teaching as a profession.

IMPLICATIONS:

The above studies combine to suggest that people with Calling orientations toward their work engage with the domain of work in qualitatively different ways than those who have Jobs or Careers.

There is growing recognition that a teacher's job can create stress and strain and this concern is mirrored by the growing interest in the area of teacher burnout. Teaching, which was once thought of as an 'easy' profession is now waking up to the realization that it is no less challenging than other professions. While recruiting teachers we need to focus not only on the teaching skills and qualifications but also on their psychological makeup. There is a need for extensive research in the area of teacher well being and work orientation that could provide pointers to evaluate these qualities in teachers during the selection process.

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It's time all stakeholders including the governments came up with well being promoting measures for teachers, as happy and satisfied teachers will produce happy, well adjusted students. Further, since a majority of our teachers are women, it has implications for articulating employee friendly policies that aim at better work-life balance.

All efforts must converge towards creation of inclusive and healthy society. In this endeavour, identification, selection, promotion of healthy teachers with calling orientation coupled with psychological well being is not just the requirement it should be the goal of any well meaning society. Thus, Researchers in psychology have an important agenda before them.

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