THE VOCATION IDENTITY QUESTIONNAIRE: MEASURING THE SENSE OF CALLING

Diane E. Dreher, Katherine A. Holloway, and Erin Schoenfelder*

ABSTRACT

The Vocation Identity Questionnaire (VIQ), a 9-item scale, was developed to measure people’s sense of calling, the extent to which they find joy and meaning in their life’s work, including both paid and unpaid occupations. Criteria were based on Reformation descriptions of vocation supported by studies on intrinsic motivation, flow, perceived significance, and work satisfaction. The VIQ and the Work-Life Questionnaire (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) were administered to 86 faculty and staff at a private California university. Preliminary findings indicate high internal consistency and validity for the VIQ. Consistent with previous studies, we found significant correlations between calling and education, religious participation, and salience. Implications for future research are discussed.

Recent years have witnessed a renewed concern with vocation or calling: the process by which people find joy and meaning in their life’s work (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; and discussions in Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Cochran, 1990; Hardy, 1990; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Schwartz, 1994; Seligman, 2002). Although American popular culture equates happiness with money and material goods, studies have shown that once people have enough to satisfy their needs, increased affluence has little effect on overall happiness and that people with materialistic values are not nearly as happy as those involved in meaningful, challenging work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Diener, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Myers, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995; Seligman, Verkuil, & Kang, 2002; see discussions in Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). As research in positive psychology has indicated, healthy human development includes a sense of vocation: actively using our

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talents or “signature strengths” to make a positive contribution to the world (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2002).


A 1991 review article (Loscocco and Roschelle) called for more interdisciplinary research on work, and connections between work and spirituality have been made in a range of disciplines including counseling psychology (Cochran, 1990; Savickas, 1997), ethics (Raines & Day-Lower, 1986), management (Quinn, 1996, 2000), philosophy (Hardy, 1990), sociology (Davidson & Caddell, 1994), theology (Fowler, 1981, 1984, 1996; Fox, 1995; Huntley, 1997; Palmer, 2000), and vocational psychology (Bloch & Richmond, 1997, 1998). Three studies (Hardy, 1990; Raines & Day-Lower, 1986; Rayburn, 1997) have traced the concept of vocation from its Reformation roots to the challenge of finding meaningful work today; another (Davidson & Caddell, 1994) has examined the effect of religion on whether people consider their work a job, career, or calling; and two recent books on career counseling have discussed spirituality and work as a calling (Andersen & Vandehey, 2006; Sharf, 2006).

The sense of vocation was identified in the 1950s as an aspect of self-actualization (Maslow, 1954, 1971). Recent studies have identified meaningful work as one of the core domains of adult identity (Waterman, 1993) and a major source of personal fulfillment (see discussions in Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 2000; Savickas, 1997; Seligman, 2002). Research on intrinsic motivation has identified three important aspects of vocation: challenge, personal engagement, and love (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994). Studies of flow, “the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake,” show that people find work most meaningful when its challenges match their