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## Living your calling in the social sector: A theory about how to thrive and have a lasting impact in the world.

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Rabbat, Ilaina, "Living your calling in the social sector: A theory about how to thrive and have a lasting impact in the world." (2018). *Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstone Projects*. 139. [https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp\\_capstone/139](https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone/139)

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# Living your calling in the social sector: A theory about how to thrive and have a lasting impact in the world.

## Abstract

An important and overlooked group in the topic of calling is that comprising individuals who work in the social sector, defined as individuals devoted to advancing human dignity and social justice through advocacy, service, policy research, and/or impact investing at a local, national, and global level (Tirmizi & Vogelsang, 2016). Among this group, it is possible to distinguish between those that are experiencing mainly positive outcomes because of their calling—called calling thrivers—and those who are experiencing a combination of negative and positive outcomes, called calling survivors. The aim of the study is to understand the main differences between both profiles (calling survivors and thrivers) and which variables lead to positive and negative outcomes. Using the grounded-theory method, sixteen interviews were analyzed. The result was the emergence of a calling survivor–calling thriver continuum, formed by ten characteristics: positive relationships, self-awareness, sacrifice, work centrality, responsibility, privilege, empathy, motivation, impact achieved and prioritizing. The way the characteristics are interpreted by the individuals will determine if they are closer to surviving their calling, or thriving in it. The continuum revealed by the findings demonstrates that people working in the social sector do not necessarily fall into either group—thrivers or survivors—but are a combination of both. Based on the findings, a model was developed that would help individuals working in the social sector to improve their life satisfaction and job performance or, in other words, to thrive and have a lasting impact in the world.

## Keywords

calling, social sector, eudaimonia, life satisfaction, job performance, social impact, social entrepreneurship

## Disciplines

Applied Behavior Analysis | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Leadership Studies | Nonprofit Administration and Management | Other Psychology

Living your calling in the social sector:  
A theory about how to thrive and have a lasting impact in the world.

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University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Ryan Duffy, PhD

August 1, 2018

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### Acknowledgments

**Mamá y papá:** Gracias por siempre estar presentes y ayudarme a cumplir todos mis sueños. Gracias por motivarme a siempre seguir estudiando y crecer como persona.

**Mamá y hermana:** ¡Gracias por ser las mejores psicólogas y mujeres en mi vida! Ustedes son ejemplos de psicólogas positivas.

**Amor:** Obrigada por sempre me acompanhar e apoiar nos meus projetos. Obrigada também por sempre me motivar a ser uma melhor pessoa.

**To Amani Institute:** Thanks for allowing me to live my calling so deeply and for being my experiment and application field.

**To Amani Institute team:** Thanks for supporting me during the MAPP year! Without your support, I would have not made it. Thanks specially to Roshan and the Brazilian team. With lot of gratitude.

**To the people interviewed in this study:** Thanks for your time and commitment! Thanks for allowing me to learn and reflect so much about the realities of people living a calling in the social sector. You can inspire anyone!

**To Ryan Duffy:** Thanks for your generosity with your resources, time, advice. It has been a pleasure working with you! You really embrace the qualities of someone living his calling! Also, thanks for your immense contribution to the study of calling.

**To Judy Saltzberg and Andrew Soren:** Thanks so much for your time reading my drafts and giving comments, even during weekends! Your support has been vital for me in this journey.

**To Johanna Robinson:** Thanks for your amazing and professional help to improve my written English!

**To the MAPP dream team:** Marty, James, Leona and Laura: thanks for being calling thrivers! Thanks for taking care of all of us, thanks for always been present when needed, thanks for being so good at balancing excellence with humanity.

**To my MAPP colleagues:** Thank you all for suggesting readings, helping me brainstorm and your unconditional support during this past year!

**To all those people living a calling in the social sector:** Thanks for working tirelessly and passionately to make a better world for all!

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### **Introduction: About positive psychology and calling**

For centuries, individuals have asked themselves: What is a good life? How could our lives be made most worth living? To answer these questions, two prominent perspectives have emerged: the *hedonic* and the *eudaimonic* view (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The term *hedonic* comes from the Greek *hêdonê*, meaning pleasure (Vittersø, 2013), and it is linked to terms such as positive affect, life satisfaction, and reduced negative affect (Huta & Waterman, 2013). Huta and Ryan (2010) define the hedonic approach or hedonia as seeking pleasure and comfort. The eudaimonic approach is associated with meaning, excellence, and personal growth (Huta & Waterman, 2013). Related to this approach, Huta and Ryan (2010) define eudaimonia as seeking to use and develop the best in oneself. The concept of meaning is central to the eudaimonic perspective of the good life (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Aristotle called the highest state of happiness *eudaimonia*, which today could be translated as flourishing (Robinson, 1999). Flourishing is also a term coined by Seligman to refer to his well-being PERMA theory (2011), which states that flourishing is the presence in one's life of a high degree of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These five elements are all venues for flourishing. Maslow (1943) did not use the term "flourishing" but stated that a human's highest need is self-actualization, defined as living beyond oneself, working toward a greater good, a cause outside their skin, and toward a fate to which one is called (Maslow, 1943).

In this capstone, I will study a group of individuals who have a greater than usual connection to the eudaimonic approach to well-being. These people live their calling in the social sector, which is defined as individuals devoted to advancing human dignity and social justice through advocacy, service, policy research, and or impact investing at a local, national, and



global level (Tirmizi & Vogelsang, 2016). Individuals living a calling tend to “(a) approach their work in a way that ties it to a sense of meaning, (b) focus on prosocial contributions they can make through their work, and (c) identify an external and/or internal force that guides them to a particular career” (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018, p. 425). According to some scholars, there is a positive direct relation between individuals living a calling and life satisfaction and well-being (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Living a calling also has other positive outcomes such as job satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), job performance (Lobene & Meade, 2013; Park, Sohn, & Ha, 2016), and job commitment (Serow, 1994). However, some researchers are also starting to notice some negative outcomes linked to living a calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dik & Duffy, 2012).

For the last two decades, I have been living my calling through working in the social sector, transitioning different jobs, geographies, and topics. First, I worked in small nonprofits linked to education, youth rights, and human rights. I also worked in large international organizations and in community projects. Seven years ago, I co-founded Amani Institute, a social business that prepares professionals to solve social challenges. I worked in the areas of youth development, community development, non-formal education, social entrepreneurship and social business. During my career, I have encountered and worked with incredible people doing outstanding jobs to improve our world and humanity. Most of these people had a clear and defined calling to contribute to a better world. I noticed that some of them feel fulfilled and happy. However, others feel exhausted and burned-out. This observation made me ask the question: Why do some people benefit from living their calling while others suffer negative consequences? This discrepancy highlighted the need to better understand why living a calling in

the social sector might lead to positive or negative consequences and to identify potential conditions or mediators under which such positive or negative outcomes may occur. The objective of this capstone is to answer the question: Why do some individuals working in the social sector thrive and others only survive their calling, or even suffer as a result of it?

To answer this question, the capstone is organized as follows. First, I will carry out a literature review on the concept of calling and its positive and negative outcomes. Second, I will introduce calling in the social sector. In this respect, I will define what the social sector is, and I will present the studies that have already been carried out around calling in that particular sector, primarily focusing on the positive and negative outcomes. Finally, I will present the results of the study through grounded-theory methodology based on sixteen interviews conducted with individuals who have been living their calling in the social sector for more than ten years. The study will help us gain an understanding of the reasons why some individuals have a more positive impact than others. The conclusion of the capstone will benefit people who are working to make valuable contributions to decreasing poverty, fighting corruption, and improving children rights, helping them not only to keep doing their jobs in an impactful way but to also thrive in the long term.

### **Existing views on calling**

Research on calling has become increasingly important in recent years (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). People want to understand their work lives and how to make them more meaningful (Weiss, Skelley, Hall, & Haughey, 2003). An indication of the increasing interest in calling exists the various attempts researchers have made to define calling, resulting in many overlapping but distinct ways (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010).

Calling it is not a new concept; before the Protestant Reformation, the term was used to refer to the call to the ministry. However, during the sixteenth century, Martin Luther articulated the idea that a calling could not only be linked to religious motives, but that work could also be a calling from God (Hardy, 1990). Luther expanded the definition of calling to include almost every occupation that allows you to serve your neighbor, meaning that there are no particularly sacred works (Hardy, 1990). Calvin, pastor and reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, complemented Luther's definition of calling by establishing the relation between calling and gifts and talents given by God: "Whereas for Luther our vocation is discerned in the duties of our station in life, for the Calvinists it is derived from our gifts. We have a duty to use our talents and abilities for our neighbor's sake. Therefore, we are obliged to find a station in life where our gifts can indeed be employed for the sake of our neighbor's good" (Hardy, 1990, p. 828). This line of thought is called *classic* and can be summarized as specialized productive work that individuals are destined to do (and for which they are willing to make any sacrifice necessary) using God-given talents for the benefit of society (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Bunderson and Thompson (2009) then termed the *neoclassical* definition of calling whereby calling is secular and described as "that place in the occupational division of labor in society that one feels destined to fill by virtue of particular gifts, talents, and/or idiosyncratic life opportunities" (p. 38).

For other scholars, calling is not located in the division of labor, but is rather one of the three general orientations people could have toward their work (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986). The first orientation is to see work as a job or as a means to material benefits without looking to receive any other benefit. In this case, people will work to gain material benefits that they can enjoy during their non-work time. The second orientation is career, where again work is seen as a means to an end but this time to achieve advancement in their career in the potential

forms of prestige and power. Calling orientation, distinguished from the former two orientations, sees work as a “fulfilling contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one’s own advancement” (Bellah et al., 1986, p. 288). A person with a calling orientation “works not for financial gain or career advancement, but instead for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual” (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 22). Subsequently, Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) built on this classification to better understand work under the organizational psychology field. In their research, they presented evidence suggesting that most people see their work as either a job, a career, or a calling, and that these orientations are distributed evenly independently of occupational status. According to the same research, “within any occupation, one could conceivably find individuals with all three kinds of relations to their work. Although one might expect to find a higher number of Callings among those in certain occupations, for example, teachers and Peace Corps employees” (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 22).

Other scholars have defined calling “as a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain” (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1005). For Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011), calling is linked to one’s identity and to a specific domain, such as music or architecture, that benefits themselves, their families, and/or society. This approach differs from those described earlier in this section, since it is not directed toward work in general as an orientation (Bellah et al., 1986; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) but toward a particular domain (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). In addition, according to this approach, the benefits of the work do not have to be directed to society as a whole. This approach also differs from that of Dik and Duffy (2009), who 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”

(p. 427). Departing from Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas's (2011) definition in two ways, Dik and Duffy (2009), first, perceive individuals as being called by something bigger than themselves, such as God, a legacy, or a deep connection with humanity, and second, see calling as having a positive effect on society as a whole (Dik & Duffy, 2009). This definition is also supported by Hunter and colleagues (2010), whose study participants defined calling as a guiding force in one's life, connected to personal fit, well-being, and meaning; and associated with positive altruistic outcomes for society.

Considering all the different definitions mentioned so far, the literature on calling could be characterized by a "lack of a consensus definition of the term" (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 178). However, it is possible to identify two overriding current views on calling: the modern and the neoclassic (Duffy & Dik, 2013). The notion of *modern* calling relates to the notion of self-actualization, enjoyable and pleasure work, inner drive toward self-fulfillment, and duty to the self. The *neoclassic* calling is identified by an external calling, transcendent summons, linked to purpose and duty to society (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Combining these two views, Duffy and colleagues (2018) conclude that individuals living a calling through their work "tend to (a) approach their work in a way that ties it to a sense of meaning and purpose, (b) focus on prosocial contributions they can make through their work, and (c) identify an external and/or internal force guiding them to a particular career" (p. 425).

## **Outcomes of Living a Calling**

### **Positive outcomes of living a calling**

One of the reasons why research on calling has become increasingly important in recent years (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) is because of the empirical positive relation link between individuals living a calling and psychological constructs such as job satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), job performance (Lobene & Meade, 2013; Park et al., 2016), job commitment (Serow, 1994), and life satisfaction and well-being (Peterson et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). However, before describing the positive outcomes, it is important to make a distinction between perceiving a calling and living a calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Perceiving a calling arises when someone is called to a job that is meaningful and allows them to contribute to society as a whole; it does not mean that the person is living a calling. For this to be the case, the person should be actually working in an area related to that calling. The positive outcomes of a calling are more associated with living a calling than perceiving it, but both concepts are linked to positive outcomes (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2013; Gazica & Spector, 2015).

The main positive outcome correlated with calling is job satisfaction. Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) were among the first researchers to study this correlation in further depth. Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) have studied a classification system that can assist individuals in recognizing their orientation toward work and finding ways to achieve greater job satisfaction. The three orientations, already mentioned in this paper, are job, career and calling orientation. Individuals who have a calling orientation toward their work state having a higher level of satisfaction with their work; they did not think about retirement, and they took fewer sick days. A study carried out by Peterson and colleagues (2009) shows that individuals with calling as their main orientation were the most zestful and the most satisfied with work. More recent studies

looked at this relation and its mediators in more depth. For example, Chen, Schwoerer, and Augelli (2016) analyzed the data of 526 employees of a law enforcement agency in the Midwest United States; the results indicated that individuals with a higher sense of calling are more content with their careers, have higher levels of job satisfaction, and are less likely to move to another job. They found that the main moderators were the contextual factors of organizational justice and psychological safety. In addition, Duffy and colleagues (2012) attempted to understand the mediators between calling and job satisfaction, discovering that the two elements that could explain this link are career commitment and work meaning. The correlation between calling and job satisfaction has also been examined using samples of diverse identities such as members of the LGBTQ community (Allan, Tebbe, Duffy, & Autin, 2015) and people of different nationalities (Douglass, Duffy, & Autin, 2016; Kim, Praskova, & Lee, 2016). We can conclude that there is a moderate to strong link between calling and job satisfaction (Duffy and Dik, 2013).

Another important positive outcome correlated with calling is job performance. In a study conducted by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), hospital cleaners who considered their job a calling perceived themselves at their best as healers and hope providers, which increased their job commitment and performance toward patients' recovery. In addition, Lobene and Meade (2013) carried out a study on 170 full-time primary and secondary school educators in a suburban mid-Atlantic school system, and established a positive correlation between calling orientation and performance. Similarly, Park et al. (2016) provide an empirical link between callings and job performance using objective performance data such as the number of policies sold, and commission obtained among South Korean salespersons.

Commitment to one's job is also a positive outcome of calling. In a study conducted by Serow (1994), teachers who viewed their work as a calling were more committed to teaching and

were less concerned about the sacrifices they would be making because of their role as teachers, and were more willing to accept the extra duties than the teachers that saw their work as a job or career. Bunderson and Thompson (2009), through a qualitative study carried out with United States zookeepers, found a significant relation between calling and willingness to sacrifice pay, personal time, and comfort for their work; indicators of job commitment. According to Duffy and Dik (2013), several studies (i.e., Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Duffy et al., 2012; Hirschi, 2012) suggest that individuals who perceive their job as a calling tend to be more committed to their jobs and organizations. Some of the more recent studies examined the relation between calling and job commitment. For example, Hirschi (2012) surveyed 529 university alumni from three universities in Germany and found that a sense of meaningfulness and identity at work mediated the positive outcomes of living a calling such as work engagement and organizational commitment. Duffy, Dik, and Steger (2011) used a sample of 370 employees representing diverse occupations at a Western research university and found that the link between calling and organizational commitment was partially explained by career commitment.

Finally, there is also a correlation between life satisfaction and calling. Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) surveyed 196 workers in administrative assistant or professional positions concerning their views about their work. The respondents who saw their work as a calling reported considerably higher levels of well-being than those in the job or career orientation, as measured by work satisfaction and life satisfaction. Peterson and colleagues (2009), similarly, found that individuals with calling as their main orientation were the most zestful and the most satisfied with life in general. Levels of well-being could also be increased through positive relationships (Seligman, 2011; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Cardador and Caza (2012) consider that people living a calling strengthen interpersonal relationships inside



and outside their work environment; they tend to inspire and connect more with others and behave in a more positive way in their relationships. Another mediator studied recently is nationality. Douglass and colleagues (2016) ascertained that nationality moderated the links between calling and life meaning, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction in a study carried out among working adults in the United States and India.

### **Negative outcomes of living a calling**

There are ample studies about the link between living a calling and positive outcomes. However, there is less research upon the relation between living a calling and negative outcomes. Some researchers called these negative outcomes a double-edged sword (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015), the dark side of calling (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, England, & Dik, 2016). Duffy & Dik, 2013; Dobrow, 2014), or an unhealthy pursuit of callings (Cardador & Caza, 2012). What they all agreed upon is that living a calling could also have negative consequences.

The first of the negative outcomes described in the calling literature is organizational exploitation. In their study of zookeepers, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that calling is correlated with organization exploitation mediated by the willingness to sacrifice money, time spent with family, and physical comfort. The zookeepers' willingness to sacrifice—because of their intrinsic motivation with the profession—make them more vulnerable to being exploited by their managers since there is no need for external reward (i.e., good salaries, time off). The zookeeper would do the job with or without those external incentives. The willingness to sacrifice the family aspect was also supported by other studies (Duffy et al., 2018). Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2014) also described how people living a calling could be exploited by their organizations through dominance and control. According to Duffy and colleagues (2018), because of the exploitation

suffered inside an organization, some individuals living a calling may experience decreased job satisfaction and lower performance.

The second of the negative outcomes identified is workaholism. According to Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen (2008), workaholics work harder than is expected of them by the job description and by the people they work with. In working so hard, they neglect their life outside their jobs. Dik and Duffy (2012) consider that the willingness to sacrifice non-work-related aspects of life could also be an indicator or a consequence of an addiction to work. Workaholism is linked to working long hours and sacrifice of personal time in favor of work (Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007). Keller, Spurk, Baumeler, and Hirschi (2016) also found a positive correlation between calling and workaholism when there is a competitive climate. According to Duffy and colleagues (2018), workaholism can reduce job performance and job satisfaction in the long term. Mental and physical health, as well as relationships, could also be affected by workaholism since most available time is dedicated to the job (Dik & Duffy, 2012), evidenced by the Bunderson and Thompson (2009) study, in which the zookeepers were willing to sacrifice personal and family time in favor of work. Finally, workaholics' behavior of sacrifice arises from an inner compulsion or drive, and not as a result of external factors (Schaufeli et al., 2008) such as financial rewards or career advancement, which recalls the definition of calling orientation. This behavior could be compounded by the belief that having an unhealthy relationship with the job is acceptable, since it is contributing to society. (Dik & Duffy, 2012). Duffy, Foley, Raque-Bogdan, Reid, Dik and Castano (2012), in a qualitative study with psychologists, identified that people's attachment to their jobs may lead them to make different types of sacrifices, and that the main reason for such sacrifice was that they see their work as a calling.

Burnout has also been considered a negative outcome for people with a calling. Burnout can be defined as a three-dimensional construct that consists of exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy (Maslach, 1993). Burnout can also be defined as occupational stress that is associated with human service professionals as a result of challenging and emotionally charged relationships, especially between caregivers and the recipients (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Cardador and Caza (2012) examine the relation between living a calling and burnout, especially in the nursing and teaching professions. Nurses, doctors, and teachers are in a constant relationship with patients and students, and their problems, which could lead to burnout (Bakibinga, Vinje, & Mittelmark, 2012; Vinje & Mittelmark, 2007; Hartnett & Kline, 2005; Sherman, 2004; Yoon, Hunt, Ravella, Jun, & Curlin, 2016). Cardador and Caza (2012), explain the relation between calling and burnout by stating that living a calling leads to higher expectations in terms of performance because the job is central to the individual's identity. The individual feels obligated to put all their focus and energy into their work, which leads to burnout. According to Schaufeli and colleagues (2008), workaholism could be a root cause of burnout, with employees working in such an excessive way that they use up their mental resources.

Finally, Dobrow (2014) identifies a different negative consequence, "tunnel vision", a type of cognition whereby the individual focuses on their own beliefs and ignores potentially useful outside information (Dobrow, 2014). In longitudinal studies focusing on 450 amateur musicians across different stages of their career and 131 business students, individuals with a strong calling were more likely to ignore negative career advice (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012), in particular, when there is a strong calling early on and a discouraging career recommendation comes from a trusted mentor. The same results were seen over time. However, if the initial calling of the

individual is weak, the individual will be more willing to follow career advice (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012).

### **Calling within the Social Sector**

Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) determined that the people within the occupation they studied (administrative assistants) were evenly distributed across the three work orientations. However, this might not be the case for most occupations. Dobrow (2004) considers that some occupations might have a greater concentration of people living a calling compared to the general population. Those populations, such as health workers, artists, musicians, and social sector workers, deserve a separate study since they might have particularities that are not noticeable in the general population. This section will examine calling in the social sector and its consequences.

### **Defining the social sector**

The social sector can be defined as a group of entities and initiatives (e.g. community-based organizations; national and transnational nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits; social enterprises; foundations; and faith-based organizations) devoted to advancing human dignity and social justice through advocacy, service, policy research, and/or impact investing at a local, national, and global level (Tirmizi & Vogelsang, 2016). The social sector can also be defined as a nonprofit sector (Fowler, 2002). The sector has grown over the course of the last decade (Tirmizi & Vogelsang, 2016; Mintzberg, 2015), accounting for more than USD\$837 billion in products and services in the United States, or 5.6 percent of GDP (Callanan, Gardner, Mendonca, & Scott, n. d.), and that growth is similar in other countries (Benz, 2005). More and more talent is attracted to the sector because of the promise of social good (Global Social Entrepreneurship Network, 2016). Increasingly, individuals are looking for opportunities to make a difference, to contribute to a better world through their work (Kopp, 2003). Considering

this growth, and that the social sector is a concentrated sector of people who are living their calling, it is essential to analyze its particular features. In the next section, we will present the main studies carried out in the social sector on the topic of calling.

### **Studies about calling and its outcomes in the social sector**

Around the world, the most common way of fulfilling the higher calling to have a positive impact has led to people to work in the social sector (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). The social sector is a perfect opportunity for individuals that want to have a career instilled with meaning and to have an impact and advance the greater good (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). Social sector organizations not only provide economic remuneration but also the opportunity to be identified with a purpose associated with the pursuit of a higher calling (O'Connell, 1988; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). When individuals working in the social sector tell their story, they talk about a journey that allows them to pursue a higher calling, find meaningful work, redemption, and restoration (Griffin, 2000; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). One of the main characteristics of individuals working in the social sector is the desire to have more than a job and a career: to live their calling (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; O'Connell, 1988; Benz, 2005). Despite the close connection between living a calling and working in the social sector, there are limited studies focusing on individuals who are living their calling in the social sector and the related positive and negative outcomes. In this section, I will refer to the six main studies carried out on the subject of calling and its consequences in the social sector.

First, Dempsey and Sanders (2010) analyzed the biographies of social entrepreneurs living their calling, and they found that these biographies show two different stories. On the one hand, these people are shown as role models in their pursuit of meaningful work centered on solving social problems. On the other hand, the studies identify an unbalanced work/life centered on

sacrifice. Dempsey and Sanders (2010) state that individuals working in the social sector, drawing upon the notion of calling, “celebrate a troubling account of work/life balance centered on self-sacrifice, underpaid and unpaid labor and the privileging of organizational commitment at the expense of health, family and other aspects of social reproduction” (p. 437). According to Dempsey and Sanders (2010), employees in the social sector invoke their calling to justify why their compensation is low. It is possible to conclude from Dempsey and Sanders’ (2010) study that sacrifice could be a contributing factor in decreased life satisfaction and dissatisfactory job performance.

Similarly, Bunderson and Thompson (2009), after surveying zookeepers from 157 different zoos (social sector organization) in the United States and Canada, conclude that zookeepers tend to sacrifice financial rewards, personal time, and comfort because of their calling. This leads to exploitation by the organization, as also pointed out by Dempsey and Sanders (2010). However, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) also note the positive element of being a zookeeper: zookeepers found transcendent meaning and significance in their work.

Another study done by Mize Smith, Arendt, Bezek Lahman, and Duff (2006), in which they interviewed fifteen participants from seven different nonprofit arts organizations, highlighted positive and negative outcomes of living a calling. Similar to the former studies, Mize Smith and colleagues (2006) also observed the theme of sacrifice. The vast majority of the participants expressed placing the needs of others before their own and talked about sacrificing personal time and financial compensation. However, some positive outcomes were also noted. The participants spoke about intrinsic rewards such as the possibility to make a change or to do something worthwhile, creative freedom, flexibility, feelings of pride, the appreciation of the

people with whom they worked and shared goals, and the opportunity to learn about themselves and the community in which they worked (Mize Smith et al., 2006).

In another study, Schabram and Maitlis (2016) interviewed fifty animal shelter workers and revealed some challenges linked to the animal shelter workers' calling and specific moments in their career. This study not only considers the outcomes but also some of the potential common factors contributing to the outcomes. At the beginning of the career of the animal shelter worker, the main challenges included difficult working conditions, insensitive clients, and lack of training and support. Later in their career, they would encounter poor management, negative dynamics with coworkers, and difficult external conditions such as legislation. For Schabram and Maitlis (2016), the way in which the workers responded to these challenges determined the outcomes. For example, workers following what the researchers called the identity-oriented calling path tended to respond to the challenges with intensely negative emotions, while trying to preserve their sense of their gifts (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016). These workers encountered a mismatch between their expectations and the hard realities of their work. The outcome was burnout and resulted in the workers leaving their work in favor of other animal-oriented jobs that suited their skills and requirements (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016). For the individuals in the contribution-oriented calling path, the final result was also burnout. They also left their jobs but in this case for other purposeful work that did not necessarily relate to animals (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016). Finally, the individuals on the practice-oriented path did not consider themselves to possess unique gifts or skills in relation to animals or their work (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016). They had more modest expectations than the other two groups, and their responses to the challenges were not charged with intense and negative emotions. They interpreted the challenges as a means of mastering their skills. They did not burn out; they kept

working in animal shelters essentially because they had a growing sense of confidence in themselves and the belief that they could make things better (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016).

Other studies have also analyzed why people decide to stay in their social sector jobs. According to a study conducted by Brown and Yoshioka (2003), people that work in the social sector, even with some constraints such as lack of career opportunities, long working hours, excessive workload, and low salaries, decide to continue working because of the opportunity to live their calling in the organization, expressing that helping others was the most important reason for this decision to stay. These employees believe their work is meaningful and worth pursuing because they are making a difference in people's lives.

In another study, Light (2003) encountered interesting results of a survey of 1,213 childcare, child welfare, youth services, juvenile justice, and employment and training workers. He found that the main reason behind people's decision to remain in the social sector was to live their calling: 98 percent of respondents said helping people was a very or somewhat important consideration in taking their job; 93 percent said the same about serving the community; and 99 percent used the words "caring" and "helpful" to describe their work. Only 8 percent said they come to work for the paycheck, benefits, and/or job security. However, in the same survey, the level of dissatisfaction with living their calling was also high: 81 percent of the individuals interviewed strongly or somewhat agreed that it is easy to burn out in their work; 70 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that they always have too much work to do; 75 percent defined the work they do as "frustrating"; 51 percent described it as "unappreciated"; 67 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that their salary was low; and 62 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that they worked long hours. Interestingly, in the same study, those who expressed little or no satisfaction



with their jobs overall also expressed interest in staying working in the field for ten or more years.

We can conclude that individuals living their calling in the social sector experience positive and negative outcomes similar to those mentioned in the general literature about calling. The primary positive outcomes are: the possibility of living a meaningful life (Light, 2003; Griffin, 2000; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Mize Smith et al., 2006; Brown & Yoshioka, 2003); increased intrinsic motivation (Mize et al., 2006); and increase in positive relationships (Mize Smith et al., 2006). A meaningful life, intrinsic motivation, and positive relationships lead to an increase in levels of life satisfaction and better job performance (Ryan and Deci, 2000a; Rath, 2015; Reis and Gable, 2003; Seligman, 2011) The main negative outcomes according to the studies are: sacrifice (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Mize Smith et al., 2006; Brown & Yoshioka, 2003); burnout (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016; Light, 2003); and exploitation by the organization (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Sacrifice, burnout, and exploitation by the organization could lead to decreased levels of life satisfaction and job performance (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Chung & Han, 2014; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

The data of all the studies also show that some individuals suffer positive and negative outcomes simultaneously (Light, 2003). Some individuals work in the social sector and decide to stay in this sector because of the opportunity to live their calling and live its positive outcomes, but at the same time they might be suffering some of the negative aspects of the calling. This group of individuals might enter into a vicious cycle, in which they experience a negative impact on job satisfaction and performance and even life satisfaction, but despite this they do not quit their calling (Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015). For this study, we will call the individuals that

experience increased levels of life satisfaction and job performance *calling thrivers* and those that live a combination of positive (increased levels of life satisfaction and job performance) and negative outcomes (decreased levels of life satisfaction and job performance) *calling survivors*. Calling thrivers and calling survivors are two poles of the same continuum of living a calling in the social sector. Calling thrivers are the individuals who are able to maintain a high level of job performance and life satisfaction across time, whereas calling survivors are those who are living their calling in the social sector but who have a lower level of job performance and/or life satisfaction throughout their career. In between these two poles is a continuum, meaning that people working in the social sector are not necessarily categorized as calling thrivers or calling survivors but are, more precisely, a combination of both. In the next section, we will try to understand what the main differences are between these two groups.

### **A New Theory of Calling in the Social Sector**

#### **Purpose of this Study**

Despite attempts to highlight various aspects of the connection between living a calling and individuals working in the social sector, extant research has rarely focused integrally on the correlating factors of the positive and negative outcomes of living a calling in the social sector. Considering this gap in the literature, through grounded-theory methodology, I will reveal a new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) about individuals living their calling in the social sector and the variations between individuals in their levels of life satisfaction and job performance. It is important to note that I will only study people who have been living their calling for more than ten years, and not those who only perceive their calling. I will answer the questions: Why do some individuals experience more positive outcomes (increased life

satisfaction and better job performance) than others? What does it take for some individuals to thrive (*calling thrivers*) and others to survive their calling or even suffer as a result of it (*calling survivors*)? A grounded-theory methodology was the most appropriate to use, since there is a lack of research about the outcomes of, and contributing factors to, living a calling in the social sector. Grounded theory, one of the most utilized methods within qualitative research, focuses on the development of conceptual ideas or theory based on participants' lives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Methods**

**Sample.** Thirty individuals working in the social sector expressed an interest in being interviewed for this study. From those, I selected 17 people to interview: nine females and eight males. The participants were selected because they have been living their calling for more than ten years, which allows me to understand their life experiences and variations instead of focusing on one specific moment in time. The participants originate from five continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America, representing the international characteristic of the social sector. Eight of them define themselves currently as social entrepreneurs and nine as employees in a social sector organization. However, eight of them had also had different roles in their lives (some had previously been social entrepreneurs, and now work in a social organization, and vice versa). The participants work in different areas such as social business, impact investment, education, environment, peace building, youth development, humanitarian aid, health, child development and social justice. Of the seventeen participants, one was disqualified because they had not worked for ten years in the social sector.

**Procedure.** First, I submitted a protocol proposal for the study and informed consent form to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After approval of the study by the

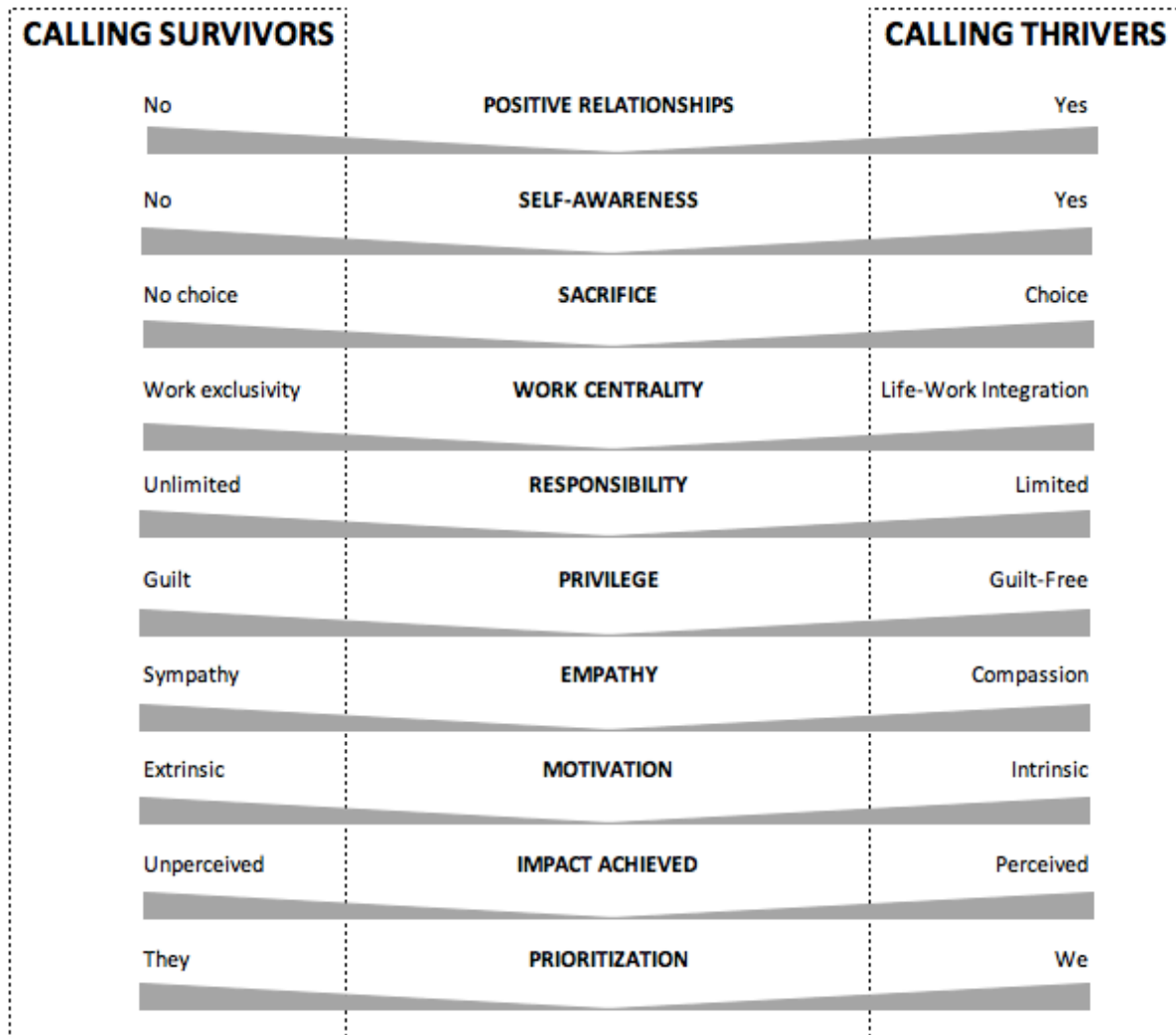
IRB, I contacted the participants to arrange interviews and asked them for their written informed consent (see Appendix A and B for interview script and consent form). Participation in the research was voluntary, and participants could terminate their participation at any time. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted 50–75 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by professional transcribers and checked by myself to secure accuracy, resulting in 298 single-spaced pages of data. A code number was assigned to each participant and interview transcripts were identified by code number only.

**Data analysis.** The data analysis involved three main tasks: (1) examining whether participants met our sampling criterion of living a calling for more than ten years; (2) coding the transcriptions to analyze similarities and differences in the data; (3) developing the theoretical model that explains the positive and negative outcomes in different individuals living a calling.

The first step was to ascertain whether our participants met the sampling criterion. One of the participants did not meet the sampling criterion of living a calling for ten years so was excluded from the study. The transcripts were then coded. Consistent with the grounded-theory methodology, the data analysis took place at the same time as the data collection and coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, six interviews were coded using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998); fifty axial codes and fifteen selective codes were identified. Second, another six participants were interviewed, and the transcripts of those interviews were compared and contrasted with the codes and themes encountered in the first six interviews. Some of the themes changed or were grouped, forming unified themes. Finally, four more interviews were conducted until saturation was arrived. As the final step, a theoretical model that answered our research question was developed.

## **Findings**

Figure 1 illustrates the ten themes that emerged from the data consistent with grounded-theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first and second themes are positive relationships and self-awareness. The vast majority of the participants agreed that human connection and self-awareness led to greater life satisfaction and better job performance. No participant thought otherwise. However, the other eight themes that emerged (sacrifice, work centrality, feeling of responsibility, privilege, empathy, motivation, impact achieved, and priority), while also common across the participants, were not described as factors that necessarily lead to positive or negative outcomes by the majority of the participants. Some participants thought those themes led to positive outcomes while others associated them with negative outcomes. However, the element that was identified as being able to determine a positive or negative outcome is the perspective of the individual towards each theme or how they relate to the theme. Interpretation of themes and transcript excerpts from qualitative interviews follow.



**Fig. 1. Model to survive or thrive a calling in the social sector**

**Positive Relationships:** The reference to the importance of human connection was consistent throughout all the interviews. When referring to positive relationships, the participants mentioned the relationship with their colleagues, with the ultimate beneficiary of their actions, and with their friends and family members, including mainly romantic partners/a spouse. In terms of the relationship with their colleagues, some of the participants expressed: “One of the things I like the most about working in the social sector is the amazing people you have the

chance to meet ... so inspiring!” Others mentioned the importance of that positive relationship when times are hard: “I have a great support network of friends, I never feel alone. Even in the hardest times, I do not feel alone.” A senior person in the social sector remarked:

Last year it was hard ... I reached out to like-minded peer support ... people who were both tough on [me] but [also] encouragers, people who love me ... The encouragement that comes from being accepted by people who love you and knowing your lifelines, even virtually is precious.

Another person brought up the idea that working in the social sector could be quite lonely, so having that positive relationship is even more important: “I meet regularly with my peers to share my frustrations ... this community is important for emotional and spiritual dimensions too.” Another participant, working in climate change, shared: “I gain a lot of energy and motivation from people that share my same passions and are working as hard as I am.” When talking about family support, the main comments were about romantic partners/spouses; the participants reported having an “incredibly supportive husband”, “a very loving relationship with my husband”, “a wife and love partner ... which is amazing”. Finally, when talking about the relationship with the ultimate beneficiary of their actions, they shared: “I am fulfilled when I talk with the parents of the children that participate in our program ... when they say thanks, when they give you feedback, when they smile at me ... I feel all that I am doing is worth it.” We can conclude that positive relationships are a vital element of the participant’s well-being.

**Self-awareness:** Self-awareness can be defined as “continuous monitoring of experience with a focus on current experience” rather than that in the past or future (Cardaciotto, Herbert, Forman, Moitra, & Farrow, 2008, p. 205). There was common agreement among the participants about the importance of the role that self-awareness plays in preventing burnout and in achieving

a fulfilling and purposeful life. Five participants talked about awareness and the relationship with their bodies: “I understand when I’m in danger [of burnout]; for me it becomes apparent because I notice the impact on my body and my health.” Six participants mentioned that being self-aware helps them to remember the real reason for their work, and helps them connect with their calling. One of the participants working with vulnerable children in India described the importance of awareness: “It is fundamental [to maintain your well-being] to being aware ... a sense of self-awareness and also surrounding myself with people and teams, who are able to call me out if I am not being aware.”

**Sacrifice:** The theme of sacrifice arose in all sixteen interviews. This is consistent with other studies in the social sector that identify a relation between living a calling and sacrifice (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). One social entrepreneur who works globally stated that he is “sacrificing a lot,” that he is sacrificing money, time for hobbies, with family, and time with friends. Another person interviewed, who works with children in vulnerable situations, mentioned that the first thing she sacrifices is her family, then her social life, and finally her downtime. Most of the respondents mentioned sacrificing money, time with their families and friends, and time for themselves. Another example of sacrifice given by a very successful social sector worker is outline as follows:

I'm willing to sacrifice probably everything but my family. I guess my family would be my heart. You could take all of my clothes, you could take all my money. For whatever reason that doesn't feel like a sacrifice to me. You could even take away my freedom for something that was the thing that mattered the most. Say the craziest situation, like you end up in jail or you end up captured for the deepest core of what you believe in. Would I do that? In the moment, if I thought that would have the greatest impact, maybe so. But



would I put myself in that situation? I don't know. If I were in a situation and the choice came up where I had to sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice, for the ideals that I believe in, I could see myself doing that.

Even though all the participants talked about sacrifice, some talk about sacrifice as a variable that they cannot control, while others considered that they chose to make sacrifices.

***Sacrifice without choice:*** The individuals that associate sacrifice with not having a choice lose a sense of agency and autonomy and, in turn, experience feelings of exhaustion or burnout. The participants made comments such as: “you have to unveil,” “you cannot say to the international cooperation wait for me,” “you have to work at night,” “the first years of my social startup, I had to give so much that it was not healthy, I lived my second burn out.”

***Sacrifice as a choice:*** The respondents that associated sacrifice with choice made comments such as: “Today I am not dedicating enough time to take care of myself but that has been a conscious and momentary decision” or “I do think there are parts of my potential that I’m not able to try and express [because of the amount of work], but I’m okay with that. It’s a very personal choice.” The people that associate sacrifice with making a choice enjoy their work. A social worker who has been working for more than twenty years with disadvantaged populations in the United States said, “I’m willing to work hard. I don’t really call it a sacrifice. It’s actually joyful, for me.” A similar comment was made by a person from Brazil working with social entrepreneurship: “There is no sacrifice; I have fun doing what I do”. Finally, another individual mentioned:

I consciously chose a role that is full life, 24/7; on a daily basis my day-to-day is hours and hours of screen, sending emails, coordinating and a lot of logistics ... from the bottom of my heart, I chose this because I know it is the biggest contribution I can make to

solving the problem of climate change. If that means washing floors, I'll wash floors, whatever needs to be done ... People might not understand, but I am so happy with what I am doing.

In this case, participants chose to make a sacrifice; they were autonomous in their decision.

**Work centrality:** The theme of work centrality was also present in all the interviews. It is clear that work plays a central role for the individuals interviewed. The participants stated that they work a great deal because of their calling and because they love what they do: "I'm just constantly thinking about work. If I'm not doing it, I'm thinking about it. I'm engaged in some way, shape or form. It's all-encompassing, in terms of what I do and how I do it." Others mentioned that work is a "life project." However, some individuals preferred to focus only on work while others talked about the importance of integrating work with other aspects of their life.

**Work exclusivity:** A known social entrepreneur mentioned:

I love to work; I love my work. I want to do it. If I'm in a bar with people and it's boring, I honestly tell myself, "My God, it would be so much more fun to be working right now." At times, yes, I think maybe especially on weekends when I could maybe take more time off, I want to work instead. I can't help myself from working because another people might go rock climbing or something, but I think actually work would be more fun for me than rock climbing, so I work instead.

Similarly, other respondents stated that work occupies their entire life and they do not have time for their families or romantic partners: "One day you realize that your son does not recognize you and then I said to myself: what am I doing?" People who currently identify, or identified in the past, with a work exclusivity situation connect work exclusivity with negative outcomes:

“We start demanding from our work things that should come from a relationship, from oneself, from a leisure moment like a trip, from children, from friends who do not necessarily share our calling; there you will inhabit other fields of your being.” Another prominent person working in the social finance sector in Brazil mentioned:

I decided to leave the organization because I was exhausted, my work occupied all my life. I think the biggest challenge of this is to not let the job take up your whole life.

Today, I learned that. Your calling is more than your job. People who don't believe in it, no matter how fully they are identified with what they do, they tend to turn work into something more for their own sake, for their ego, than a service to humanity.

The respondents that were in this sub-category identified that work exclusivity could lead to worse job performance:

It came to the point that it [my job] was limiting my impact because it was putting me in a box. I felt like I had so many other facets of myself that I was excited to explore in order to contribute in new ways. I almost didn't like the attention that the work brought when it started to become more mainstream.

***Life-work integration:*** Some respondents acknowledged that work is central in their life, but they understand the importance of integrating other aspects in order to increase their well-being and improve their job performance. They see work and personal life not as competing priorities but as complementary ones. One of the participants said:

I used to look at things as a trade-off, my love partner or my job, my personal life or my professional life, but today I realize that I should be able and do both because everything that happens outside my working hours also enriches my job because I can be more efficient, more productive, and happier.

Others complement this approach from a creative perspective:

I have a creative practice; I write poetry. It's through poetry that I vent my emotions, get my dark thoughts out and then I am fine. I draw and paint sometimes and realize that all of us in the work that we're doing, all have to have some kind of creative practice for a good well-being.

Another participant said:

I never stop enriching my life with other things, like with art, with music. They are also important because diversity makes creativity. If one only thinks about the problem we are trying to solve, our cause does not connect with other things, then we have no new flow of ideas or connections .... creativity is particularly important because of the complexity of the problems we are dealing with.

Another of the people interviewed, who works in the humanitarian field, represents the opinion of the participants that highlighted the importance of integrating family and work:

I've had to do things differently to create a career that I knew would work for my family. I knew I wanted to have a family and I knew that I could continue to just go on from operation to operation that would lead to burnout ... I used to travel and just jump on a plane and go and do whatever was needed, that type of thing. I don't do that anymore. I'm very careful about when I go and why I go. Now, I think that is to the detriment of my work, but because family has such a priority for me right now, that's okay, my work continues to be successful and the ways I measure success as well. I had to create something where I could have more balance and I did it.

Another participant from Brazil mentioned that working so much could harm his relationship so he plans frequent trips with his partner in order to prioritize that relationship. A female social worker revealed another way of integrating work and family:

I have one child and so, for her upbringing, I decided that I had to make two, three priorities and it really was her and my work, but when it was her, it was 100% her. Now, I have to admit that if I'm driving her to lessons, practice, or appointments in the car and I have to wait for her, I've got my laptop, my book, something I can be doing while I'm waiting. No moment was unattended because I've always got something that I can be doing.

Finally, participants also found it important to integrate a spiritual practice and sports into their lives: "I do not try to do an hour of yoga daily, but I do some posture in between emails and meetings." Another participant added: "when I do not practice yoga, I am more irritated, less happy," while an award-winning social sector leader said:

To be well-rounded and in shape or prepared for resilience and the challenges ahead, one must try to stay in shape, and that's multifaceted and multi-layered ... You do find that most people who are going the distance have learned to meditate or breathe or have some variation of spiritual discipline ... you need your breathing exercise, you need your physical exercise, you need your intellectual exercise.

One participant gave the example of their attempt to integrate physical activity into work: "I am creating a program in the organization about physical activity, so I have the excuse to do exercises while working." Sleeping was also mentioned by some as an important aspect for productivity: "When I am sleepy, I take a nap because I know I will be much more productive afterward."

**Feeling of responsibility:** A sense of responsibility was also shared by the majority of the participants in the study, evidenced by the following quotes: “You make a pact with your calling, it is a commitment,” “I feel I have a duty, a duty to use my skills to solve social problems,” “I take this calling seriously. One of the ways it plays out is that I have a very high standards of excellence because the work feels so important that we have to give it with the respect it deserves,” “I have a commitment; if the universe or life gave me these skills and abilities, they should be put into service, for the people,” “I feel a sense of duty.” However, as per the other themes, two groups emerged. One sees the sense of responsibility as unlimited, that they are responsible for everything. The other group sees it as limited: they have a defined responsibility.

**Feeling of unlimited responsibility:** Some of the participants said they experienced a feeling of omnipotence, that they were so great that they would be able to solve the whole problem. As if “you are god” or the “savior of the world,” but at the same time: “You are not omniscient, you do not know all things, you don’t understand all things, you cannot change all things. You are not God.” Some pointed out that this is characteristic of social entrepreneurs, more so than other people working in the social sector. One of the most successful entrepreneurs in the area of education said:

I would send out emails at 4:00 in the morning and I would expect a response at 6:00 AM because I thought that, “You know what, this work is important. There are kids out there who are struggling, and we need to be there for them.” I think that’s structurally wrong, that messaging that social entrepreneurs kept, you become a hero overnight. Then you’re expected to carry the burden of a hero.

Because the participants feel their commitment is unlimited, they feel they cannot say no. One of the respondents stated: “In some of this there is no end. You can’t turn it off because people need you to be doing something. You can’t just say, ‘Don’t need me now’ kind of thing.” The people who ascribe to this sub-theme might suffer certain negative outcomes such as stress and burnout because they are not able to meet their own expectations. One of the participants described this feeling thus: “If I say no, I feel I am failing someone,” and a man who has been working in one of the biggest social businesses in Brazil for ten years said: “I already do so little compared to other people, other entrepreneurs. Imagine, how absurd if I say that I want to stay on the beach drinking caipirinha instead of working!” Here we see a sense of guilt linked to the feeling of unlimited responsibility, also seen in other responses: “I feel guilty if I am not working. I should be working,” “If I am not working, if I say no, I feel selfish, irresponsible, bad colleague, bad leader, I feel that I am failing.”

***Feeling of limited responsibility:*** On the other hand, some of the people interviewed said the opposite, that they were very clear about their limited responsibility, about what they are trying to achieve. A senior manager in a large international nonprofit organization quoted one of the phrases her mother said to her, one that has stuck with her: “You are not responsible for anyone’s life.” She gave an example: “Many times I look at these people [homeless], and here in my neighborhood there are a couple of them, and I look, and I see them completely lost, completely lost from life. Only their bodies are alive, and then I remember this phrase.” Another group of participants understand that they are not the only ones responsible for solving a social problem: “I do think I’m making a difference, but I think I’m part of a larger army.” The people who, when interviewed, saw their feeling of responsibility as something positive, normally describe their impact as “something clearly defined” or as “only worry[ing] about the things that

are under my control.” One American woman stated: “sometimes you feel frustrated that you're not making enough impact, or you feel like you're devoting your entire life work. What does that actually mean? It's important for me to break things down and define what is it that I want to achieve and then have some understanding of the scope.” Another leader in the humanitarian field said, “For me, productivity is a big part of it [the feeling you are making progress], feeling like I'm making progress in one way, shape or form. Like having a goal laying out.”

**Sense of privilege:** Fifteen out of sixteen participants linked the sense of responsibility to a sense of privilege. Some of the respondents talked about wealth, others about education, and others about their life experiences. One of those interviewed expressed it thus: “I think that I'm very privileged, I'm very fortunate. There are lots of people who aren't, and there's a world that seems to be, more broadly, a world that seems to be suffering ... I feel I have the responsibility, to do my best to help other people.” Another of the respondents working with the International Committee of the Red Cross in South Sudan also commented about his background: “I am coming from a rich country ... I felt like I was so privileged to grow up in this country, have all these possibilities and somehow I have to give something back.” An executive director from a large social organization in Latin America remarked: “My family gave me all kinds of opportunities: I went to a good school, I studied in a public university ... I always felt very privileged. It is a duty to return back.” Even people who did not grow up in a middle-income family mentioned the word “privilege” in relation to responsibility:

I had the opportunity to navigate different contexts, I grew up in a place where my friends were assassinated, and I also interviewed presidents and traveled in business class ... That gave me a systemic perspective of the world ... That is actually the privilege I feel the duty to return back to society.



However, the sense of privilege alone was not enough to lead to a positive or negative outcome. For a group of the participants, that sense of privilege is linked to guilt, while for others it is linked to motives other than guilt.

***Guilty privilege:*** Six out of sixteen mentioned that they feel guilty about what they have. This group of people have a sense of responsibility rooted in guilt because of what they have. One of the participants described this connection as follows:

If I grew up with two silver spoons in my mouth and I had a blessed life in a beautiful town, with a great education and a good family, and went to the best schools, that means every single day I wake up in deficit. Every single day I'm behind. It's not just every Sunday where I feel like I haven't done enough, or Monday and I feel guilty because I'm unproductive.

Another serial social entrepreneur indicated that the flip side of his sense of privilege is guilt. This feeling of guilt could elicit negative consequences such as lower levels of life satisfaction. For example, a woman who has been working for more than twenty years in social issues stated:

When I return from the supermarket, I take out all the price tags because I know what I paid for meat she [the cleaner] would never pay ... I feel embarrassed ... I do not buy clothes, I do not wear jewelry, but I do not know if I do that because I do not like it or if it is because I feel guilty ... I do not have the courage to spend on futile things, I do not have the courage when I'm very happy to be showing joy because I always think someone is not so happy.

***Guilt-free privilege:*** The majority of the participants stated that their sense of privilege was not linked to guilt but to gratitude, luck, or reward. These people tend to have a more optimistic outlook on life. One such participant remarked:

I just think to myself, "Halleluiah, thank you for the privilege!" I don't feel any weight from it. I take it as a gift, very gladly, with a deep sense of gratitude. ... I care so much about other people and people's lives in general that I feel like it's just a duty for me to be present in a way that's bringing joy to this earth that's bringing healing to the planet. That's bringing, like, jubilation to the world because I just feel like there's no other way to be because we're just so fortunate to be alive.

Another person referred to the "lottery of luck": "I'm not that person who is on the street begging or who is dying in a war or getting raped or whatever ... I just feel that I am lucky, and I should use that." Similarly, another participant articulated:

I think we're all born into the worlds that we're born into. We don't choose it and that's not fair. It's just plain and simple. I don't think you can feel guilty about either what you were born into or what you've created for yourself. A part of that ... I am giving as much as I can in a lot of different ways.

The people that link their position of privilege to reward highlighted certain common sentiments: "I don't feel guilty about what I have. I'm okay, but I don't feel guilty. I feel like I've worked so hard to get what I've got."

**Empathy:** Fourteen out of sixteen considered themselves empathetic or deeply connected to other human beings. However, people deal differently with that sense of empathy. For some, that empathy brings a lot of suffering, while others are able to manage it in a more rational way. These different reactions could be linked to how individuals define empathy. According to Bloom (2017), there are many definitions of empathy and as a result, he prefers to talk about sympathy, being "the ability to put yourself in other people's shoes and feeling what you think

they are feeling”; and about compassion as the “ability to value other people and care about their welfare but without necessarily feeling their pain” (Bloom, 2017, p. 24).

**Sympathy:** Half of the participants described their empathy in terms of sympathy. One of the participants stated: “I connect with people's eyes. Yes, and when they're suffering, I actually physically feel their pain. I don't necessarily think it's a good thing.” Another man, working with communities, described his experience: “When I see homeless [people] sleeping on the street, I try to block myself or I enter in an endless spiral of suffering.” According to Bloom (2017), the consequences of feeling sympathy is that it could lead us to make wrong moral decisions because of its biases. An executive director of a social organization working on social issues shared that when she was feeling the pain of the convicts she was visiting to such a great extent, she began to experience certain negative outcomes:

I started to lose my personal values ... I started to think that everyone who was arrested should not be arrested because deep down that person just stole because she or he had a story ... I came to a point where impunity was a value... I needed to be more rational.

Another consequence described by Bloom (2017) is that sympathy can lead to burnout and exhaustion. One of those interviewed, working in humanitarian aid, mentioned: “Seeing what I see on a daily basis, whether it's in person or working even remotely, it's exhausting. It's exhausting to see that much suffering, see that much pain ... it's very discouraging and very hard to see on a consistent basis.”

**Compassion:** The other half of the group of participants mentioned that they put limits on their own empathetic feelings and introduced some rationality in order to understand the situation. One of the participants stated:

Sometimes, you have to step back and understand, why are they suffering? Is it my role to help? Can I help by supporting them directly or anything else? What is a broader context? Can I help them right now, in this moment? You find yourself being more analytical about it because you can feel the pain. You want to alleviate your own pain and sometimes it's not even about helping other people. You know intellectually there's no way that you can help all the suffering. You can get lost in it. It would be best to have a defined view of how to help suffering in the moment, with a combination helping other people and organizations that work at a systemic level, rather than feeling lost and alone by suffering.

Also, one of the respondents expressed: "It wouldn't be possible to do this work [humanitarian aid] if I did take on their suffering as well. In this area of work, if you do that you're going to lose that objectivity, you're going to lose that ability to really serve everybody that you need to." Other participants who belonged in this sub-theme transformed what they could see into action instead of suffering: "That suffering that I see in another becomes my flag, it becomes my reason to keep working and fighting [for a better world]." Another participant mentioned: "When I see someone suffering, I don't suffer: I roll up my sleeves and I get busy."

**Motivation:** According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), "to be motivated means to be moved to do something" (p. 54). In this case, the people working in the social sector are moved to improve the situation of our world. People in this study talked about being motivated to "make a positive impact in the world," "contribute to society," "do something good to other people," "take care of the planet." The great majority of respondents used the words "purpose" or "meaning" when explaining why they do what they do. However, some participants said that in some circumstances they see themselves extrinsically motivated while in others they see

themselves as intrinsically motivated. Ryan and Deci (2000b) define intrinsically motivated as “doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable” and extrinsically motivated as “doing something because it leads to a separable outcome” (p. 55). For example, a person that has been working for more than a decade with communities throughout Brazil shared a moment with his team when they were aligning their motivations:

We were billing above what we had planned as an optimistic scenario, but I was feeling a negative atmosphere in the team that I had never felt before ... so I asked everyone, “Are we happy?” a very simple question. And what we came to the conclusion is that not. For the first time, we were super good financially, but that was not what moved us to work every day.

Across the different interviews, it is possible to trace examples of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

***Extrinsic motivation:*** The primary type of extrinsic motivation encountered during the interviews was introjected regulation. Ryan and Deci (2000b) define this type of motivation as regulation by contingent self-esteem; it is a motivation to avoid guilt or anxiety or to maintain a sense of worth or ego. Seven out of sixteen respondents talked about being motivated at different moments of their careers because of ego: “Sometimes I forget about my real motivation, my purpose that moved me initially ... and in many moments I saw myself competing with others, checking who was better, who was doing better, I wanted to be the best one.” A social intrapreneur also pointed out that “being recognized as the founder of a social venture seemed to miss the point. I wanted the point to be about the impact in the world and it started being more about the organization. It started being about the job rather than the impact.” The feeling of ego was sometimes linked to the need for recognition; this was the case with four of the people

involved in this study: “I want to be recognized,” “I like how other people react to it [the work he does] ... if I’m perfectly honest ... It’s nice that people think well of me because of the type of work that I do ... there is a theme around recognition.” One of the respondents confessed to “always asking for compliments from people about how good I am.” Some of the respondents also pointed out that they are sometimes motivated as a result of needing to escape from a dark place themselves, that their social work was an excuse to heal themselves rather than arising from the joy of having an impact on some else’s life or the planet: “I have always felt like the outsider, the unloved one ... that makes me want to do work that connects people more and brings more people across.” Another participant stated: “I realized only but rather belatedly in the last couple years, that I was [motivated] out of my deficits, my insecurities.” Another participant, in this case, female, said: “Deep down we are always trying to feed some of our hidden psychology, right? It is a shadow of ours that we are trying to heal.” Another type of motivation that was common among half of the participants was amotivation. Amotivation is defined as the “state of lacking an intention to act” (Ryan and Deci, 2000b, p. 61). Seven people mentioned phrases, and situations, such as acting “on autopilot” or being “sucked by the organizational machine.” For example, “Eighty percent of my time is about fundraising and I felt, several times, [pulled] away from the mission [from the reason I am working].” Another of the participants, who works in climate change, explained:

Sometimes it happens to me that when I am doing so many things at the same time, I find it difficult to connect with my inner motivation. I cannot remember why I’m doing it [her work]. When you enter that freeway at full speed, you have to make a conscious effort to say, “What motivated me at first?” ... things do not move me so much or easily when I am in that state.

***Intrinsic motivation:*** Most of the participants recognized that they want to be intrinsically motivated. When they are intrinsically motivated they are at their peak of their potential and they feel fulfilled and happy. The director of a local nonprofit organization in a slum expressed: “I always wake up happy to go to work ... I have an internal force ... a motivation for justice.” Another participant remarked: “[When I am living my calling], I feel a lot of happiness, I feel fulfilled ... I am where I want to be.” Fifteen out of the sixteen acknowledged that their motivation is not linked to money or status but with living their calling, having a purpose and a meaningful life:

It’s the feeling of a life of purpose we profess that you’re doing something that is not just about a time sheet, or the amount of money that you make, or the status that you have.

It’s like you’re doing something that you feel, and I’ve seen it. You can have a positive effect on people’s lives. When you’re doing that, and you see what that can do, and what that connection means to people and even if it’s a small thing that you’re doing. When you try and do something else in a different way, in a different career, different areas of work, it just doesn’t have the same meaning. It doesn’t have the fulfillment, it doesn’t really have the core connection that you do when you do this type of work.

**Impact achieved:** For people working in the social sector, living their calling means having a positive impact on society. The impact takes several forms depending on the sector in which the individual works and on their type of job. The impact could be on combating corruption or in terms of bringing assistance to people in war zones. However, something the interviews showed is that the actual impact that the interviewee is having is less important than the person’s self-perception of the impact. Some people are able to recognize the impact they are having while others are not able to tangibly see such impact.

**Impact unperceived:** Four people voiced their disappointment and frustration because they felt they were not having any impact. One of the participants interviewed shared his feelings about his last job with the international development agency of his government:

The outcome [of my work] was a little bit disappointing for me ... I didn't feel like we had a big impact ... There was a lot of changing policies in countries ... which might be very important and might do a lot of good for a lot of people... but I never felt anything when I did my work because I didn't see anyone.

Other participants mentioned that the feeling of impotence and frustration arises when they discover that there is a systemic problem: "When I started to realize how the system works, who were the real groups of power, I knew that changing things didn't depend on me; I couldn't do anything." A similar feeling was shared by a person working in drug cartel-controlled areas: "There are the arms, the narcotrafficker, the corruption ... without money, without the right people, it is impossible to change anything." The consequences of not perceiving the impact are frustration and lower levels of life and job satisfaction, as articulated by one of the respondents:

You're doing what you're doing because you believe in the social impact, but it's hard to track. A lot of times you're going on fumes of belief and then sometimes the data bursts your own bubble. It is not the money you're making or the ladder that you're climbing. The feedback loop is the impact, which may take years to track, so you're not sure if it is happening. Then it hits you personally when things aren't working.

**Impact perceived:** On the other hand, there were participants that were able to perceive their impact and describe the specifics of the impact. For example, the participants talked about "valuing the small changes I make daily," or mentioned "one word, one connection, one piece of advice make me feel fulfilled," or "every time one of them [the ultimate beneficiary] looks me in



the eyes, and in their eyes, I can see the light, and they say thank you for changing my life.

That's when I feel, this is all worth it ... the meaning really comes from the one by one changing a person's life." Some of the participants mentioned the importance of feeling that you actually have the agency to make a change. Below is a thought from a respondent who works in a war zone:

There were moments where I felt that we saved these people's lives, some individuals, that we visited people in prison and we convinced, the rebels, that we really had to take them to the hospital because they would die, and they were wounded or something, wounded enemy fighters. They would let us take them after a discussion, which would give you this feeling of power somehow that you can actually make a difference.

**Prioritization:** The last theme encountered is one that talks about participants' priorities. Some will prioritize the ultimate beneficiary of their actions over themselves while others decide to prioritize the beneficiaries and themselves. This is similar to the concept illustrated by Grant (2013) about givers and takers: "If takers are selfish and failed givers are selfless, successful givers are otherish: they care about benefiting others, but they also have ambitious goals for advancing their own interest" (p. 157). Interestingly, only two individuals working in the social sector identified with Grant's phrase. The rest of the people interviewed struggled to accept the phrase, since "their own interest" was mainly the well-being of their beneficiaries; they cannot distinguish between their own interests and others' interests. The main difference in this group of individuals was between those who only prioritize the beneficiary and those who understand it is important for them to prioritize themselves *and* the beneficiary (almost at the same level), otherwise they would not be able to act effectively. Reframing Grant's phrase, it is not about

benefiting others and advancing my own interests but about benefiting others and advancing my own goals *to better benefit others*.

***They are the priority:*** One children's rights advocate stated: "I see the other human rights advocates being ill, getting burnout ... similar to me ... no one takes care of us. I am taking care of everyone, but who takes care of me?" Similarly, another individual who works with children in highly violent environments said: "My priority is the children; they will die if I don't do anything." Another person, who had worked with social entrepreneurs for more than a decade, commented: "So many of them [social entrepreneurs] did not have any money, were living out of loans, were getting divorced ... that type of life was not sustainable for them, and it was not sustainable for their social impact either." For this group, the only possible priority is the others.

***We are the priority:*** This group of individuals understand that the impact they are making is not just for others but also for them. When prioritizing the other, when helping the other, they are also helping themselves: "I think we are more selfish than what we think, it is in our own interest to help others, it is not about others' interests; it is about our own interest, that is what makes us happy." Another senior director in the field of humanitarian aid explained:

For me ... it is less and less about me. It's more and more about family and how the organization is doing with my community ... I get a great deal of joy from that as well. I certainly benefit from all of that too. In a way, that's taking care of myself and taking care of others at the same time ... when your career is about supporting other people that's [your interests and their interests] are intertwined.

Another group of individuals recognizes the need to take care of themselves in order to be better equipped to do their jobs and benefit others. For example: "The best I can do for my cause, is to preserve myself." Some acknowledged the importance of putting in place limits to protect

themselves. That requires saying “no” in some circumstances without feeling guilty or selfish.

According to Grant and Rebele (2017), this type of person is called a self-protective giver. As an example, the director of a social organization shared:

... I would put on my own oxygen mask first ... for example, if I say yes to everyone that wants to meet me, I would be working till midnight; that means you are going over the limit. You are not taking care of yourself. But if you feel like, if it is that one person that really needs ... I would not go to the show and I would talk to him, that feels okay to me.

The majority of the people in this study recognize the importance of taking care of their emotional and physical needs. However, only two out of sixteen identified with the phrase: “I spend enough time taking care of myself.” When trying to understand better this contradiction (they believed it was important to take care of themselves in order to take care of others, but in fact they were not taking enough care of themselves), the majority said that while they might not prioritize the socially accepted way of taking care of themselves (working less in order to exercise more, sleeping well and eating well), they do feel that they take care of themselves in other ways, such as having a job they love, taking time off to travel, to be by themselves or by nurturing positive relationships.

Half of the people in the study highlighted the importance of having their basic needs covered, especially financially. Some even considered that if your calling is not financially rewarding, you might need to find another job or put your calling on hold, in order to achieve financial stability. One of the people interviewed said: “It is very important to have a salary that allows you to live decently ... if not, then you get stress, you lose your focus and at the end, you are not able to concentrate on having an impact.”

## Discussion

Based on the analysis of the interviews, we can conceptualize individuals living their calling in the social sector along one continuum: *calling survivors*–*calling thrivers* as illustrated in Fig. 1. Individuals located on the *calling survivors* side of the spectrum, as illustrated in Fig. 1, will tend to experience more negative outcomes such as burnout and decreased levels of life satisfaction and worse job performance. Individuals located on the *calling thrivers* side of the spectrum, as illustrated in Fig. 1, will tend to experience more positive outcomes such as a sense of meaning, intrinsic motivation, greater life satisfaction, and improved job performance. What allows individuals to move along the spectrum and experience more positive or negative outcomes are the ten themes or characteristics found in this study, as shown in Fig. 1. (positive relationships, self-awareness, sacrifice, work centrality, responsibility, privilege, empathy, motivation, impact achieved and prioritizing). The way these ten characteristics are interpreted by the individuals will determine the positive and negative outcomes of living a calling in the social sector. None of the individuals in this study were located on the *calling thrivers* side in all ten dimensions. The findings show a continuum, meaning that people working in the social sector cannot necessarily be categorized as a calling thriver or survivor, but a combination of both. However, the more an individual can locate him or herself in most of the categories on the *calling thrivers* side, the greater the probability that they will experience more positive outcomes from his or her calling. In addition, the ten characteristics are related and interconnected. Each reinforces and complements the others. This means that if a person works to *move* a variable towards the calling-thrivers side of the spectrum, other variables might move too and vice versa.

Let me illustrate the model with an example. Veronica, the executive director of a human rights organization, cannot imagine doing anything else in the world: no other job could bring

about the satisfaction she feels; she feels an inner motivation to work. For her, unlike some of her friends, a high salary has never been a primary motivation [*motivation*]. Ryan and Deci (2000b) define intrinsically motivated as “doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable” and extrinsically motivated as “doing something because it leads to a separable outcome” (p. 55). Ryan and Deci (2000a) state that intrinsic motivation, which Veronica is expressing, is correlated with interest, enjoyment, felt competence, and greater psychological well-being. However, Veronica has a decent salary that allows her to live a life she is comfortable with [*prioritization*].

Veronica receives so much fulfillment from her job that she has consciously decided to sacrifice some of her weekends and yoga classes in order to focus on her work [*sacrifice*]. The sense of agency and her intrinsic motivation have reinforced each other (Deci & Ryan, 1987). In this case, Veronica chooses to sacrifice; she is autonomous in her decision. Autonomy is defined as a “behavioral engagement that is congruent and fitting with one’s values, interests, and needs” (Greenberg, Koole, & Pyszczynski, 2004, p. 450). Autonomy is associated with positive outcomes, such as better psychological health, intrinsic motivation, and less pressure and tension (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Brown & Ryan, 2015). If Veronica had decided against making these sacrifices, she might have suffered negative consequences. According to Greenberg and colleagues (2004), people who are “unfree”, either because they feel pressured to act in a certain way that goes against their will are less well individually and socially. When an individual lacks autonomy, the result is less-than-optimal performance and a lower quality of engagement (Greenberg et al., 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Veronica likes working late into the day in the office very much, when everyone else has gone home, because this is when she can concentrate on what is important and plan the next

steps in the advocacy campaign of the month. Most of the day her work occupies her mind; she is constantly thinking about how to do things better [*work centrality*]. Work centrality is defined as the degree of importance that an individual attributes to their work in terms of their life as a whole (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994). People like Veronica, who consider work as a central life interest, identify their work as playing an important and central role in their lives (Hirschfeld & Feild, 2000). This work centrality could result in negative consequences if it involves a work exclusivity approach rather than a work-life integration approach. Work exclusivity could lead to or be an indicator of workaholism (Dik & Duffy, 2012). Workaholism could bring about negative outcomes such as worse job performance, lower job satisfaction, lower levels of mental and physical health, and disrupted relationships (Dik & Duffy, 2012; Duffy et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2016).

However, Veronica does not have a work exclusivity approach; she rarely misses dinnertime at home, as one of the highlights of her day is sharing this meal with her husband and daughter. She knows how to integrate her family into her work. In fact, the next weekend all the family will attend a fundraising event for immigrants in the United States [*work centrality*]. Veronica demonstrates that work is central in her life but understands the importance of integrating other aspects in order to increase her quality of well-being and job performance. This is in line with a new approach, work-life integration, which differs from the traditional work-life balance. The work-life balance implies a trade-off or a zero-sum game (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998). In work-life integration, work and one's personal life are not competing priorities but complementary ones. According to Friedman (2014), the most successful people are those who can integrate the different spheres of life and exploit the passions and powers of self, work, home, and community.

Veronica feels a sense of gratitude that she is able to help solve the immigration problem in her country; she is so grateful for having received the best education in the country and that she is now able to give back [*privilege*]. She is not acting from a place of guilt linked to decreased levels of life satisfaction. On the contrary, she feels an urge to act out of gratitude for what she has been given or what she has earned in life.

Unfortunately, the situation of immigrants in the United States has become very delicate lately. Veronica feels a tremendous sense of responsibility and much frustration because the problem is so complex that she feels she will never be able to solve it, as though she is battling against a whole system [*responsibility*]. The feeling of limited and unlimited responsibility can arise from the ability or inability to set concrete goals. In both alternatives (feeling of unlimited and limited responsibility) the goals are set very high. This is a good thing, since high goals bring improved job performance and higher levels of satisfaction (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2006; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). However, if the goal is vague or abstract, as in the case of Veronica, the result is a lack of motivation and frustration (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2006; Locke et al., 1981; Latham, 2004). Veronica will need to set specific goals to limit her responsibility in order to experience more positive outcomes.

As well as the sense of unlimited responsibility, another negative aspect of Veronica's job is her visits to the immigrants in the detention center. She suffers deeply when she sees the families being separated; she can feel their pain [*empathy*]. According to Bloom (2017), the potential consequence of feeling sympathy (what Veronica is feeling) is making the wrong moral decision; the associated bias can lead to burnout and exhaustion. Veronica was on the brink of burnout; however, her self-awareness helped her avoid this. She is working on being more self-aware about her emotions in order to protect herself against this distress. She knows that when

emotions overwhelm her, she has to stop, breathe, even take a walk, before continuing working [*self-awareness*], so she can regain motivation and maintain performance in her work. According to Brown and Ryan (2003), mindfulness or the ability to be aware could facilitate autonomous behavior, which allows individuals to be more intrinsically motivated. In the past, Veronica might have even brought some of the immigrants into her own home, but she realized that she was giving too much and becoming exhausted. She still brings some of the immigrants to her house, but she has also learned to say no when she needs time to recharge her energies, in order to have more impact [*priority*]. Veronica was able to move from one of the poles— “they are the priority”—to the opposite pole— “we are the priority.” Previously, she thought others were only possible priority. This thinking and behavior can result in burnout and decreased job performance (Grant & Rebele, 2017). Now, she acknowledges the importance of putting in place limits to protect herself, meaning saying no in some circumstances without feeling guilty or selfish. According to Grant and Rebele (2017), this type of person is called a self-protective giver and is associated with more positive outcomes.

What keeps Veronica going in the face of such difficulties is her support network, especially her family and other leaders in the sector [*positive relationships*]. In addition, she gains a lot of energy and fulfillment from those moments when she speaks with an immigrant, and she can see that she is helping them. She can recognize that the effort is worth it and see the impact she is having on the world [*impact achieved*]. The ability to see the impact a person is having could be interpreted as feedback, which is essential for job performance, commitment, and motivation (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004; Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2006; Locke et al., 1981; Latham, 2004).



When Veronica witnesses that impact, what she is capable of doing, her relationships improve (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008); she becomes happier at home [*positive relationships*]. Reis and Gable (2003) suggest that good relationships with other people are the most important source of life satisfaction and emotional well-being across people of all ages and cultures. Seligman (2011) also considers positive relationships as one of the main dimensions required for a flourishing life. In Victoria's case, her motivation raises, and she gains new inner strengths to work more and work better [*motivation*].

The model that was created, based on the research, illustrated through this example and shown in Fig. 1., represents a first attempt to map the reasons why some individuals in the social sector are able to experience greater life satisfaction and better job performance than others.

### **Study limitations**

Limitations of the study included a small, non-representative sample, time constraints, and potential biases. To begin, this study is limited to the data of sixteen qualitative interviews. The sixteen participants represent a diversity of gender, geography, type of work, and field of work. However, there are potentially other important factors to consider that enhance the diversity, such as job position. To validate the model, more interviews should be carried out in order to enlarge the sample. In addition, the participants were interviewed only once. Ideally, they would have been interviewed twice: once to identify the themes and again to better understand the differences between the participants. Finally, the interviews and coding were done by one person and regardless of attempts to remain unbiased, bias may still have arisen, for example, in the way I asked the questions during the interviews or when coding the transcripts. As a next step, it

would be recommended to introduce new members into the research team in order to validate the codes and check for biases.

### **Conclusions and implications**

The example of Veronica, in the discussion section, illustrates the situation of some of the individuals interviewed in this study. Most of the participants, after having spent more than ten years in the sector, have learned how to thrive over time. I found that most of the people interviewed still love and enjoy what they are doing. Not only do they have high levels of life satisfaction, but they also achieve good-quality job performance, which materializes in the extraordinary impact these people are having in the world. They have mastered most of the categories identified (positive relationships, self-awareness, sacrifice, work centrality, responsibility, privilege, empathy, motivation, impact achieved and prioritizing). However, many other people, not included in this study, did not make it to the ten-year mark because they burned out, and because they did not master the skills necessary to thrive, and the majority of the people interviewed are still struggling with at least two of the ten themes found.

Based on these findings, several implications should be considered. First, it is important to carry out more in-depth research into each of the ten themes found, in order to corroborate the conclusions. Each theme can serve as a hypothesis for a new study. For example, someone could study the relation between living a calling with self-awareness in relation to life satisfaction, or the implications of living a calling motivated by guilt. Secondly, it would be interesting to also analyze the correlation between the variables. According to the data found in this study, most of the themes are interrelated and influence each other. Some future studies could analyze the extent to which, if at all, an individual living his or her calling in the social sector achieves work-

life integration, whether it helps to have more positive relationships, or not, or whether the ability to perceive one's impact correlates with the feeling of limited responsibility.

On the more practical side of the implications, it is arguably important to equip people living their calling in the social sector with the skills to thrive while having impact in the world. This could take the form of stand-alone training or it could be integrated into universities. This would be particularly applicable to undergraduate and graduate programs that people looking to work in the social sector usually choose to study, such as international affairs, public policy, international development, humanitarian aid, and social entrepreneurship. It is also important for organizations to support their staff members toward a thriving calling. Some of the participants in the study mentioned the importance of relying on the support of their managers and organizations. Personally, with the knowledge acquired during the Master's in Applied Positive Psychology and the process of writing this capstone, I will recreate a fifty-hour course at Amani Institute called "The Inner Journey of a Changemaker" with the objective to better equip and support the new generation of individuals who will be helping us to shape the world in a better way.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Interview Guide

This document was sent to the participants of the study 2-3 days before the interview.

#### **Calling in the social sector and its consequences** *Interview Guide*

First of all, thanks so much for taking the time to take part in this interview! This is a short guide about what to expect from the interview. The interview will have four sections.

- **Section 1:** Sharing why I am doing this research and the definition of calling
- **Section 2:** Questions about your work and calling
- **Section 3:** Discussion about a List of statements
- **Section 4:** Closing

#### **Section 1 - Defining calling**

Most people see their work as either **a job, a career, or a calling**.

- People who consider that they have a **job** are interested in the job as a means to an end.
- People that consider their work as a **career** expect more rewards than just a salary but recognition and status.
- People with a **calling** find that their work is inseparable from their life.

A calling is “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”.

According to this definition, we can distinguish three main important components.

- The first is that the individual is **called by something bigger than itself**, such as spirituality, a legacy, or a deep connection with humanity.
- Secondly, that calling will have a **positive effect on the society as a whole**.
- Finally, that calling is connected to a **great sense of meaning and purpose**.

#### **Section 2 – Questions**

1. Considering the former definition, would you say that do you see your job as a calling?
2. Why you do what you do? Why that and not something else?
3. What would you say are the main benefits of living your calling?



4. Tell me about three high points in your career when you felt most engaged and proud of yourself and your impact in the world. What was it about you that allowed this experience to emerge in each of the three moments?
5. Can you remember a time when your calling was in the way of your happiness?
6. Can you remember a time when you consider quitting your calling?
7. What do you do to care for yourself emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually that contributes to your calling?

**Section 3- Look at this list. What resonates with you? What doesn't resonate with you?**

1. I have a moral duty to use my skills to solve social problems.
2. My job defines me.
3. I need to do something to help people or the planet if not, no one else will do it.
4. When I see someone suffering, I suffer too.
5. I am willing to sacrifice a lot to solve the social problem I am trying to solve.
6. I spend enough time taking care of myself.
7. I feel guilty about what I have, compare to the ones that do not have it.
8. I feel I need to compensate for the unfairness in the world.
9. I always feel things will be better.
10. My work is in harmony with other activities in my life.
11. The urge is so strong, I can't help myself from doing my work.
12. Sometimes, I think that I am spending too much time on my work and not enough on other activities in my life.
13. I care about benefiting others and the planet, but I also have ambitious goals for advancing my own interests.
14. My work reflects the qualities I like about myself.
15. I put others' interests ahead of my own, I often help others at the expense of my own well-being.

**Section 4- Closing**

If you were to give a colleague advice on how to sustain him/herself in the Changemaker journey what advice would you give?

## **Appendix B – Consent Form**

### **Dear Participant,**

You are being asked to participate in an interview for a research project. Your participation may help me, a graduate student in the Master of Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania, learn more about the effects of calling in individuals. Your involvement in this research and the insights you provide may help to develop an intervention to improve wellbeing in individuals with a high calling.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to answer questions about how calling affects your attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You do not have to answer or do anything you don't want to.

### **What happens if I don't want to participate?**

You can choose whether you want to be in the study or not. There is no penalty if you decide not to be in the study.

### **Can I leave the study before it ends?**

You can quit the study whenever you want to.

### **What are the risks?**

This study should not be risky for you, and you cannot get hurt from doing anything for this study. You might get tired or bored from answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to.

### **How will I benefit from the study?**

There are no direct benefits for you, but the research community and society may gain an improved understanding about the effects of calling and how to manage it in order to have a sustained calling and well-being.

### **How will you record my responses?**

We will record audio during the interview and may also take written notes during the session.

### **Will my answers be kept confidential and private?**

Identified data will only be disclosed to the general public after expressed consent by you. If you do not want your data to be disclosed to the general public, confidentiality will be maintained.

### **Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

No, participants will not be paid for participating in the study. However, I commit to share with you the results of the capstone and provide an in-person meeting if requested.

### **Who do I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have questions about the study, please contact the Researcher Ilaina Rabbat at her email [ilarabbat@gmail.com](mailto:ilarabbat@gmail.com) or phone number +14156182235. If you have questions about your rights

as a participant in the research study, please contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania at 215-898-2614.

### **Participation Agreement**

*I have read this form. Any questions I have about participating in this interview have been answered. I agree to take part in the interview and I understand that taking part in this program is voluntary. I do not have to take part if I do not wish to do so. I can stop at any time for any reason. If I choose to stop, no one will ask me why.*

*By signing below, I agree to participate in this interview. By doing so, I am indicating that I have read this form and had my questions answered. I understand the interview will be audio recorded. I understand that it is my choice to participate and that I can stop at any time. I also understand that my name, age, country, type of work and gender will be published along with my quotations only if I expressly authorize it, and that if I do not authorize it, confidentiality will be maintained by assigning a study ID number and maintaining a separate list linking study ID numbers with unique identifying information.*

**Appendix C - Axial and Selective Codes**

#	Axial codes	#	Selective codes
1	Support network	1	<b>Positive Relationships</b>
2	Family members providing support		
3	High quality connections with beneficiaries		
4	Peer support for hard times		
5	Human connection and happiness		
6	Being present	2	<b>Self-Awareness</b>
7	Connection with self		
8	Body awareness		
9	Meditation and breathing	3	<b>Sacrifice</b>
10	Trade-off between work or impact and family		
11	Feeling that work is more important than other aspect of life		
12	Receiving less money than in other jobs		
13	Having no choice, I have to sacrifice something		
14	I decide to sacrifice because it is for a period of time/special moment	4	<b>Work Centrality</b>
15	Expectation that the job will provide everything		
16	Work competes with other aspects of life		
17	Identification with job		
18	Prioritization of job over other aspects of life		
19	Life Integration		
20	Enriching your calling	5	<b>Feeling of responsibility</b>
21	Committing to my calling		
22	Using my skills to make an impact		
23	Being responsible and enjoy it		
24	Being responsible out of guilt		
25	Unlimited responsibility	6	<b>Feeling of Privilege</b>
26	Limited responsibility		
27	Feeling guilty because of what I have		
28	Feeling blessed and grateful for what I have	7	<b>Empathy</b>
29	Feeling lucky for what I have		
30	I deserve what I have		
31	Suffering when others suffer		
32	Strong connection with others		

33	Taking action		
34	Setting boundaries and limits		
35	Disconnection with the real purpose	8	<b>Motivation</b>
36	Automatic Pilot		
37	Ego and recognition		
38	Motivation from wounds		
39	Doing what I love		
40	Alignment - Intrinsic motivation		
41	Intangible social impact	9	<b>Impact</b>
42	Visible social impact		
43	Having patience to see social impact		
44	Frustration and disappointment		
45	Understanding my specific contribution		
46	Prioritizing others before self	10	<b>Prioritization</b>
47	Prioritizing the calling before basic comforts		
48	Feeling of selfishness and unreasonable		
49	Self-care		
50	Taking care of self to achieve the desired impact		