

MEANING IN WORK: AN EXISTENTIAL CRITIQUE OF THE DISCOURSE OF CALLINGS

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This paper is a critique of the discourse of work that is being indirectly promoted by the Job-Career-Calling model and the Spirituality in the Workplace field as they both encourage meaning in life to be found through one's work, i.e., through finding one's Calling. Using existential philosophy I argue that this "Calling" discourse is problematic as it situates work as the primary source of meaning for human existence. Although this may be appropriate for some people, for others it results in the inauthentic life.

Introduction

Reflecting on the meaning of life may be spurred by psychological crisis but it may also arise from an acute awareness that Henry David Thoreau was correct: most people do lead lives of quiet desperation. (Bellioti, 2001: 10)

The Job-Career-Calling model and the Spirituality in the Workplace field are both implicitly promoting the importance of work in Western society, i.e., that meaning is found through one's work. They imply that viewing work as a calling is preferable to work as a career and especially a job (Freed, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). As a result of work being privileged in this way people are being encouraged to find work that they view as a Calling in life. It is no longer sufficient to have work that is viewed as a job or even as a career. People are expected to make their work the main source of meaning in life, and to believe that fulfillment in life is directly dependent on their work life. However, does viewing work as "only" a job preclude a meaningful life? Is a career or calling necessary in order for the individual to view his or her work life as meaningful? Does the person who views work as *only* a job have a greater challenge in living a meaningful life than people who view work as a career or calling? Or, is it the opposite, that in fact other (non-work) avenues of life present a greater opportunity for fulfilling needs that lead to a more meaningful life? These questions will be explored in this paper.

One way to analyze how an individual makes choices and understands his or her work life in the quest for meaning is through existential philosophy. Existential philosophy provides compelling insights into the nature of the individual self, the circumstances and dilemmas of everyday life, and in particular, it gives us a way to view the creation of individual meaning, i.e., the *authentic life* in existential terms. It has been described as a way to interpret the predicament or dilemma of people in modern Western society and the resulting anxiety and anguish (Collins, 1952; May, 1959). Golomb (1995: 200) notes, "the existential question today is not whether to be or not to be, but how one can become what one truly is." Existentialism focuses on creation of the self, argues that human meaning is a subjective experience, and emphasizes that the goal of human existence is the meaningful or authentic life, specific to the individual. The starting point for an existential approach is the recognition that the human self is "the true center of philosophy and... the sole legitimating authority" (Lavine, 1984: 326). The existential self, as opposed to the 'psychological' self, is not pre-determined but continually being constituted by how the individual experiences the world and reflects upon those experiences (Kierkegaard, 1980). The self, therefore, is "one whereby my

personal history is very much a product of my current ‘situation,’ and how I construct my self and pursue that self that I am not yet” (Earnshaw, 2006: 124). The goal of life from an existential perspective is that the individual freely and consciously chooses his or her life.

In this paper I will argue that the discourse of privileging work that is implicitly being encouraged by the Job-Career-Calling model and many scholars in the spirituality in the workplace field is problematic from an existential perspective in that: (1) There is now a growing societal pressure on people to make work their primary source of meaning in life which is contrary to the individual freely and consciously choosing his or her life, and; (2) For many people, an emphasis on work may not be the path to the Authentic life as they may be ignoring other elements of life. Despite the importance of work in Western society, it is only one aspect of a person’s existence among many pieces, which ultimately must fit coherently together in order for one to feel that his or her life is meaningful.

The Job-Career-Calling Model

The Job-Career-Calling model provides a practical method to investigate the importance of work in a life with its three distinct categories. The model was introduced in the classic book, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), which was an in-depth look at how life was being lived in the United States. Bellah et al (1985) argued that people were oriented to their work in three distinct ways, as a Job, as a Career, or as a Calling. They defined a Job as “work as a way of making money and making a living...supports a self defined by economic success, security and all that money can buy,” a Career as work that “traces one’s progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation...yields a self defined by a broader sense of success, which takes in social standing and prestige, and by a sense of expanding power and competency that renders work itself a source of self-esteem,” and a Calling as work that “constitutes a practical ideal of activity and character that makes a person’s work morally inseparable from his or her life...links a person to the larger community...a crucial link between the individual and the public good (Bellah et al., 1985: 66). Therefore, a person with a Job orientation views work primarily as a means for economic gain, a Career orientation as a development path, and a Calling orientation as purpose in life and work that the individual would engage in even if he or she had no financial need for work (Bellah et al., 1985). The Job-Career-Calling categorization can be thought of as a continuum of personal investment with a Job orientation placed at one end, a Career orientation in the middle, and a Calling orientation at the far end (Wrzesniewski, 1999).

Job Orientation Career Orientation Calling Orientation

Low personal investment High personal investment

In a Job orientation, work represents the minimal personal investment whereas this is highest at the Calling orientation end of the continuum. People with a Job orientation view work as primarily “financial necessity” and typically they are counting the days until retirement with the belief that at that point they will be free to do what they really want to do in life. A Career orientation lies in the middle of the continuum as it involves a greater investment for the individual than a Job but less than a Calling. “The notion of a ‘career’ implies an organizational ladder to be climbed, but it also stands for an institutionalized life path and a series of choice processes” (Moen, 1998: 41). People with a Calling orientation to work do not separate their work from the rest of their life as people can do with a Job or Career orientation; a Calling *is* their life.

Historically, a career has been considered as work that is desirable, i.e., people are encouraged to seek out a career and not view their work as only a means of financial gain (Collin &

Young, 2000). However, in recent years careers have been replaced in importance by callings and people are now being encouraged to “find their calling” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Novak, 1996). Callings were originally related to religious endeavors, i.e., “called by God,” and examples include Mother Theresa and Billy Graham (Delbecq, 2004; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004). Sometimes the term Calling is used interchangeably with vocation while others differentiate between the two with calling being defined as an “external” call, i.e., outside the self, and vocation being defined as an “internal” call (Dik & Duffy, 2009). “A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009: 427). Callings have also been associated with work that serves the greater good of society (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, & Rozin, 1997). From a secular point of view, callings are usually identified by asking people what they would do with their lives if they did not have the financial need to work.

Whereas the Job-Career-Calling model was originally suggested in 1985, research on the model itself began in 1997 and the primary researcher to date has been Amy Wrzesniewski of New York University (Wrzesniewski, 1999, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006).

Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) investigated the Job-Career-Calling model by surveying 196 university employees and found considerable empirical support for the distinction between the three orientations. They also found that work orientation was not occupation dependent, i.e., within the same occupation you could find people who viewed the same work as a job, career or calling. The work itself does not necessarily matter, only how it is regarded by the individual. For example, working as a police officer may be a Job for one person, for another it is a Career and for others still, a Calling. “Satisfaction with life and work may be more dependent on how an employee sees his or her work than on income or occupational prestige” (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997: 31). Lastly, they claim that the same work can start as a career or even a calling but over time turn into just a job. The new nurse may at first see his or her work as a calling but this may change significantly over time and later in life consider the same profession as a job.

We believe that we have demonstrated that it is easy for most people to assign themselves to one of the three Job, Career, or Calling dimensions, based on degree of agreement with three paragraphs representing the three work-relations. The differentiation of the three orientations was clearer and easier than we had anticipated. In accord with our predictions, we presented evidence indicating highest life and work satisfaction for respondents who see their work as a Calling – even when income, education, and occupation are at least roughly controlled (the administrative assistants). (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997: 30-31)

In her Ph.D. dissertation on the Job-Career-Calling model and job loss, Wrzesniewski (1999) found that work orientation influences behaviours after suffering a job loss. She also reported a relationship between age and work orientation. Her results indicate that younger job seekers were more oriented towards a career while older job seekers had stronger orientations towards callings.

Preliminary research implies that the most contented and therefore productive people are those who see their work as a calling (De Klerk, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006). “Calling-oriented individuals report higher job and life satisfaction, even after controlling for income, level of education, and occupation, than people who view their work as jobs or careers. These employees also report higher work motivation and are less likely to regret their choice of occupations” (Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2006: 74).

Freed (2003) investigated the relationship between the three orientations and job satisfaction,

and found support that people with a Job orientation were least satisfied with their work, people with a Calling orientation were most satisfied, and that people with a Career orientation were in the middle. Other research has proposed that having a calling is connected with being perceived as a “success” in life (Heslin, 2005). It has also been suggested that people may be able to “re-craft” i.e., reframe their conception of their work, and change their view in order to find greater meaning in it (Parry, 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For example, if a hospital cleaner could connect his or her work to the greater purpose of helping others, then the work could be viewed as a calling instead of a job and result in greater meaning for the individual.

Banaga (2000) analyzed the interviews of sixteen people between the ages of 38 and 78 to investigate why people may view their work as a calling. The results indicated that callings are related to contribution and concern for others, and usually aligned with one’s faith. “The results of my study show that spirituality and religion can have a significant influence in the experience of work” (Banaga, 2000: 218). Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) surveyed 3091 first-year university students using a 20-item scale to investigate the presence of or search for a calling. They concluded that, “students searching for a calling and those who obtain a calling are at very different points in their career development, and that the process to find a career calling may take a considerable amount of time...it may not be until some students feel a calling that they truly understand the importance of work in their lives” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007: 598). In a review of the literature on Callings, Dik and Duffy (2009) hypothesize that finding a calling may be related to the influence of family and critical events in a person’s life, e.g., disasters such as the 9/11 attacks, or a more personal one such as a parent dying of cancer. They call for more research into the origins of callings and how ‘finding your calling’ might be encouraged in people (Dik & Duffy, 2009). This call has been echoed simultaneously by the Spirituality in the Workplace movement.

Spirituality in the Workplace

...as a context for human development, work activities provide a venue for becoming more than one used to be. In and through work, individuals develop themselves by expressing the occupational interests, vocational talents, and work values that move them from a felt negative to the perceived plus. This progressive development constitutes a spiritual quest for meaning and self-completion that, in the process, helps people become someone they want to be, a person they themselves would like. (Savickas, 1994: 5)

The “Spirituality in the Workplace” movement has added a new voice to the meaning in work discussion for academics and lay people since it emerged in the mid-1990s and has developed as a field quickly over the past decade (Bell & Taylor, 2004; Dalton, 2001; Elmes & Smith, 2001; Fox, 2003; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Gibbons, 2000; Harrington, Preziosi, & Gooden, 2001; Howard, 2002; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a, b; McCormick, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999b; Ottaway, 2003; Tischler, 1999). However it is viewed from a variety of perspectives and subsequently defined in many ways. Some scholars regard it from a religious perspective, i.e., bringing God into work practices, while others view it from a secular perspective. “Spirituality at work is not about religious beliefs...it is about people who perceive themselves as spirited beings, whose spirit needs energizing at work. It is about experiencing real purpose and meaning in their work beyond paychecks and task performance” (Harrington, Preziosi, & Gooden, 2001: 155). Dalton (2001: 18) comments that “it is possible to speak of spirituality as a universal human activity because life is filled with experiences that drive us to question and seek answers on the meaning and purpose of existence.” Mitroff and Denton (1999b: 83) define spirituality “as the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe.” No matter how it is defined it is clear that spirituality in the workplace is an attempt to bridge the gap between work and the overall pursuit of a meaningful life.

We each need to find meaning and purpose and develop our potential, to live an integrated life. Spirituality encompasses the way an individual lives out his or her sense of interconnectedness with the world through an ability to tap into deep resources... spirituality is both highly individual and intensely personal, as well as inclusive and universal (Howard, 2002: 231).

The interest in spirituality and work has been linked back to the 1960s, when people were rebelling against many institutions and looking for different life experiences (Tischler, 1999). It has been connected to the 1980's and the "generation of wealth" as people were making increased salaries but were still not happy with their lives (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). The changing of the psychological contract between employee and employer, downsizing and massive company layoffs, and increased use of technology are also considered to be motivators of the spirituality movement (Harrington et al., 2001). Additionally influencing the spirituality and work movement is a heightened awareness of the fate of humanity and the world. Jaccaci and Gault (1999: 22) comment that "this renaissance, this dawning and awakening of humanity, is the emerging era of evolution...it is a time of our conscious creation of human evolution shaping all life on earth." Lastly, the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States had a significant on people. Since 9-11 many are re-evaluating their lives and their work, as they search for a deeper meaning in life, more than just achieving career success (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Howard, 2002; Wrzesniewski, 2002). "We are at a time in history when we need to revise our entire view of ourselves, the nature of work and leadership of organizations" (Cacioppe, 2000: 48).

There are, of course, both physical and psychological benefits to having a healthy spiritual life. Parker-Hope (2001: 9) notes that "increasingly, the medical profession is promoting the notion that a person's spiritual well-being may be as important a factor in long-term health as are diet and exercise...it [the value of spiritual health] has become a widely accepted area of medical study." There has also been a connection proposed between spirituality and emotional intelligence -the more in touch with his or her spirituality, the greater will be his/her emotional intelligence, and therefore the more productive he or she will be at work (Tischler, Biberman, & McKeage, 2002). Lastly, a spiritual workplace, although it is debatable what that actually means, has been linked to ethical behaviour (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Moberg, 2001; Pava, 1999).

However, many scholars in the spirituality in the workplace field are reinforcing the Job-Career-Calling model in arguing that work should be "meaningful" to the individual, and that work should be where we find our "purpose" (Fox, 1994; Harrington et al., 2001; Herman & Gioia, 1998; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a, 1999b; Raelin, 2006).

It is hard for many of us to separate our work from the rest of our being...we spend too much of our time at work or in work-related social and leisure activities for us to expect to continue trying to compartmentalize our lives into separate work, family, religious and social domains. As one result, the pressure many of us feel to recognize and respond to the sacred in us must find outlet in the secular workplace. If personal or social transformation is to take place, it will most likely take place at work. For, after all, life is about spirit and we humans carry only one spirit that must manifest itself in both life and livelihood. (Fairholm, 1996: 12)

To analyze the problems with this growing discourse privileging work and provide needed insights into how individuals make sense of life we can use existential philosophy.

Existentialism

The existential self is embodied. Being-within-the-world means that feelings and primordial perception precede rationality and symbol use and, in fact, activate them. The existential self is becoming. The experience of self is constantly unfolding as the individual adapts to new situations and possibilities for self-growth. The existential self is reflexive. The self is the focal point of all aspects of being: values, creativity, and emotions. The self is also the arena for the ongoing tension – if not conflict – between the individual and society. (Johnson & Kotarba, 2002: 8)

Existentialism is a multi-faceted view of the nature of individual “Being,” and as such, is made up of many varying perspectives (Baggini, 2005; Breisach, 1962; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cotkin, 2003; Grene, 1959; Kaufmann, 1989; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Schrag, 1977; Tanzer, 2008; Tillich, 1952). Though Sartre (1970: 25-26) himself argued that, “the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all,” there is general agreement that existential philosophy attempts to make sense of and provide answers to the circumstances and dilemma of the human condition. Karl and Hamalian (1974: 13) argue that, “Existentialism, ultimately, is more a frame of reference than a fixed idea...a process of thought rather than a distinct movement.” The existential philosophers challenged our conception of what it means to be ‘human’ and in doing so gave us the ambitious goal of encouraging humanity to seek out an ‘authentic’ existence.

Existential philosophy can arguably be traced back to Socrates when he famously stated that a key problem of humanity was a lack of self-examination -“the unexamined life is not worth living.” However, the initiator of existentialism, as we know it today, is considered to be Soren Kierkegaard, as he was reportedly the first to reject the emphasis on universalism (existence is consistent for all people) in favor of a focus on the individual -“my listeners, do you at present live in such a way that you are yourself clearly and eternally conscious of being an individual” (Kierkegaard, 1956: 195)? Since Kierkegaard, many others have contributed to our understanding of existential philosophy – Buber (1958, 1967), Husserl (1967, 1970), Nietzsche (1974, 1990, 1999), Camus (Camus, 1967b, 1972), Jaspers (1957, 1969), Marcel (1949a, 1949b, 1950), Heidegger (1967), Sartre (1956, 1962, 1970, 1975), De Beauvoir (1983), Tillich (1952) and Frankl (1978, 1985), each providing his or her own unique perspective (Collins, 1952; Cotkin, 2003; MacDonald, 2001; Reynolds, 2006; Wahl, 1969). Others, such as Hegel, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Kafka are sometimes included among the Existentialists, but their inclusion would be debated (Reynolds, 2006). Still others, such as Heidegger and Camus, rejected the existentialist label (perceiving it to be a negative characterization), but we cannot ignore their influence on the development of existential theory, even though they may address many different issues through their philosophy (Harper, 1972; Kaufmann, 1989; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Tanzer, 2008).

They share a common concern for what Husserl called the ‘life-world’ (Lebenswelt), for the world of everyday experience as opposed to the realm of transcendental consciousness. However, apart from this concern with the ‘life-world’ and the way in which men exist within it, it is misleading to view their work in similar terms. Each develops a theoretical perspective which, while adhering to a roughly similar position in terms of the various strands of the subjective-objective dimension of our analytical scheme, addresses itself to quite different issues and problems. (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 243)

Despite existentialism’s ancient history, it is more recently rooted in nineteenth century Europe and only really came into prominence in the twentieth century following the end of World War II (Allen, 1973; Barrett, 1962; Cotkin, 2003; Tanzer, 2008). After the war, Europe went through a long period of recovery and the general population experienced profound feelings of confusion,

questioning, and disillusionment with religion, and were therefore, looking for a philosophical direction (Breisach, 1962; Cotkin, 2003; Reynolds, 2006). Heidegger, Sartre, and other philosophers provided answers and direction for individual life through their existential philosophy.

Existentialism is based on the premise that “existence precedes essence” – that people are thrown into the world and simply exist, and their essence is created through the lives they choose to live. The emphasis of existentialism is on the individual’s experience with life and not on a preconceived human nature. “What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence...we mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre, 1970: 28). This puts the onus, and hence responsibility, on the individual and how he or she chooses to live life. This notion of the individual creating meaning is quite different from the belief that humanity has a predetermined essence (see Locke, Hobbes, or Rousseau) or that it is for example the mode of production that creates man’s essence (Marx & Engels, 1963, 1968)), although Sartre was willing to strongly consider the latter possibility in *Search for a Method* (1963). In existentialism, essence and therefore meaning is created by the individual on an on-going basis throughout his or her life. For many existentialists, humans are a “tortured” species because of their incomprehension (of the “absurdity” as some would say) of life. We are thrown into this world but, as Sartre notes below, are given no rulebook for how to live.

According to Sartre, man, if he honestly reflects, cannot help realizing that his situation is like that of the player or the artist. Herein consists the absurdity of existence. Life has the same value as a game has – that is, whatever value the players choose to give it. One has to play the game, but one is never given a book of rules. (Barnes, 1959: 49)

Not surprisingly, many of the existential philosophers were atheists and believed that the “absence of God” resulted in “emptiness” for life, hence incomprehension, which must be somehow reconciled and filled (Breisach, 1962; Harper, 1972). Kierkegaard and Tillich are notable exceptions, as they believe that the only logical answer for how to live life is through devotion to God (Reynolds, 2006; Tillich, 1952). Regardless of their religious outlook, however, the existentialists were all tapping into people’s lack of, and search for, meaning in their lives.

Although there are many types of existentialism, there is general agreement that existentialism is focused on how the individual self creates meaning in a chaotic world (Barnes, 1959; Breisach, 1962; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Sartre, 1956, 1970; Wahl, 1969). Existential thought highlights the enormous possibilities of human existence and what can “be” for individual life; the focus is on individual Being and the reflexive Self that is always being constituted. “Wherever man has seen his life and his world as infinitely possible, as infinitely variable, as infinitely problematic, there existentialism exists as a region of the mind” (Karl & Hamalian, 1974: 13). For the Existentialists, “philosophy is essentially the study of Being” (Wahl, 1969: 95), i.e., what does it mean to exist. “Existence is reached most immediately and certainly in the existing self, although not even the existentialists can settle among themselves upon the exact nature of this self as revealed in a primary inspection” (Collins, 1952: 196). Heidegger himself noted that the most important question people can ask themselves is, “What is being?” He argues that this was the only true question of significance and everything else was secondary to the investigation of existence.

The question of what is “being,” is, of course, up for great debate (May, 1983; Reynolds, 2006), but many philosophers agree that it is related to an awareness or consciousness of oneself, that one “is.” For example, consciousness makes us aware of thoughts and feelings, and of time passing. Bugental (1965: 27) defines “‘be-ing’ as a name for the process of self-aware existing.” Sartre uses the terms “being-in-itself” (*en soi*) and “being-for-itself” (*pour soi*). Being-for-itself refers to the capacity for self-reflection, possessed by most humans, while being-in-itself refers to

that which does not have this capacity, i.e., objects which have no consciousness (Reynolds, 2006). May (1983: 17) defines Being as “the individual’s ‘pattern of potentialities.’” According to Heidegger, humans are unique in that they have an understanding of “being in the world,” and they must then deal with the possibilities or paths of life from which they must choose, rather than follow through instinct (Heidegger, 1967). As we make choices, therefore, we produce a new self, but that new self is only a temporary self as the individual is always changing based on new intentions, new choices and new experiences including one’s work life. Of the many choices people make throughout their lives, work is for most, a major choice which impacts other aspects of life, as people seek to live a meaningful existence.

Existentialism and Work

We live in extraordinary times, in which a majority of people in postindustrial societies have an unprecedented array of choices about how they live and work, and what they buy. Machines are our slaves, and the basic necessities of life are, for the majority of people, relatively easy to obtain. This is an era when life should be filled with all sorts of rewarding activities. Yet many find themselves caught up not only in long hours of work but in debt, and suffering from stress, loneliness, and crumbling families. (Ciulla, 2000:234)

The discourse of privileging work that is implicitly being encouraged by the Job-Career-Calling model and many scholars in the spirituality in the workplace field is problematic from an existential perspective in two ways: (1) There is now a growing societal pressure on people to make work their primary source of meaning in life which is contrary to the individual freely choosing his or her life, and;

(2) For many people, an emphasis on work may not be the path to the Authentic and therefore meaningful life as they may be ignoring other elements of life.

Firstly, the overwhelming existential challenge for the individual is the creation of “authentic” or meaningful existence, that is unique to each individual, and most importantly, to try to avoid the inauthentic life or living in Bad Faith. “Meaning in life is obtained through an authentic existence. The conditions for achieving this kind of existence are commitment to actualize one’s possibilities to choose and decide about the possibilities and to act on them” (Orbach, 2008: 284). The starting point for authentic action is the recognition that meaning must be determined by the individual self (Lavine, 1984). The individual must accept responsibility for his or her life and make living an authentic life a continual and never-ending goal. “Man moves physically, morally, and intellectually in view of an end, in order to attain a greater richness of his own being and existence as well as in order to enrich and enhance the being he finds in the surrounding world” (Reinhardt, 1960: 198). Authenticity is subjective to the individual and only manifests itself in the life that is ultimately lived, a life in which he or she is conscious and free. Golomb (1995: 10) notes, “though the term [authenticity] is indeed derived from *auctoritas*, the authority in question is self-directed – it is the mastery of one who freely creates the pathos of authenticity and strives to express and live it in the everyday.”

However, it is difficult to live Authentically as people are unduly susceptible to the influence of the herd (which could be other people or the discourse of the day) (Breisach, 1962; Heidegger, 1967; Pappenheim, 1959; Solomon, 1974). Heidegger says that we “fall” (fallenness) into inauthenticity and become what is expected of us in the “public arena” and behave according to the norms and rules of society. We escape from our true selves into a public life that is untrue or false. People may strive to identify a Calling that they believe to be in accordance with the norms of

society and not their true desires, i.e., made in Bad Faith. “Many people are like blind men feeling their way along in life only by means of touching a succession of other people” (May, 1953: 32). This makes choices about work difficult as people are influenced by the current discourse of work (and success in life) which equates success in life with success in the workplace. Grierson (2007: 34) notes, “If we can assign a verb to our passage through life, possibly the best fit is drift. We mark time and distance, and we may try roughly to hold a bearing, but we go where we’re pushed.” Today this means being pushed to “find your Calling” and young people are being encouraged to identify work that is their passion and to change their work if they do not see it as their passion. Ironically, then, people’s legitimate search for a more meaningful life experience, makes them vulnerable to the ‘meaning in work’ discourse. Many scholars argue that there is a “progress paradox” currently taking place in Western society – an increasing trend toward superficiality (materialism, celebrity worship, internet obsession), and at the same time, there are indications that people are also hungering for a more meaningful existence. Despite great advances in medical care and technology, and a much higher average standard of living, general well-being and happiness levels have not changed in decades (Easterbrook, 2003; Myers, 2000; Seligman, 2002). Anxiety, depression, use of medication, and suicide levels have, in fact, all dramatically increased, and meaning has become increasingly attached to security, comfort, consumption and material gain (Cottingham, 2003; Easterbrook, 2003; Myers, 2000; Wattanasuwan, 2005). The belief that increased wealth and materialism along with the resulting greater security and comfort would be the path to fulfillment and happiness has not materialized. “The great self-confidence of the Western technological nations, and especially of the United States, was in large part because of the belief that materialism – the prolongation of a healthy life, the acquisition of wealth, the ownership of consumer goods – would be the royal road to a happy life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999: 822).

Perhaps deep satisfaction is not to be found in the pursuit of material comfort, but in intrinsically meaningful activity. Accordingly, many people are reorienting their lives, away from the pursuit of wealth and towards the pursuit of meaning. They are reducing the number of hours they work, changing their jobs, working from home, or giving up work altogether. In each case, they are trading income for time to pursue goods they regard as worthwhile. (Levy, 2005: 176)

Therefore, it appears that we are increasingly searching for meaning and as a result vulnerable to the discourse that the meaningful life can be found through work. Work, whether it is a necessary evil due to the financial imperative, or our first love, is arguably one of the most important determinants of whether a person considers his or her life to be meaningful, and therefore Authentic. “Work is the most common experience of adult life... some love it, others hate it, but few of us are able to avoid it... because we spend two-thirds of our waking life on the job, work is the way we come to know the world and are known to the world... work becomes our identity, our signature on the world... to work is to be and not to work is not to be” (Gini, 2000: ix). Albert Camus’ legendary Myth of Sisyphus demonstrated what could arguably be the predicament of some people in relation to work. Sisyphus is condemned by the Gods to push a stone up a hill only to have it roll back down, and this continues forever (Camus, 1967a). Although some people love their work and their life, this picture of the futile life is undoubtedly the case for many others whether they would choose to admit it or not. For a significant number of people, life and especially their work, is mostly daily drudgery, a treadmill of existence from which they cannot get off, and from which they gradually watch time and their life pass by. It is not surprising, therefore, that many management scholars are focusing on the problem of meaning in work in the hopes of turning people’s negative experiences of work into the possibility of real engagement.

As noted, work can fulfill a variety of needs for the individual and the choice of work is usually one of the most important choices we make in life. Many people may come to feel that their work should be their life’s Calling. For some, the choice may lead to authenticity while for others it

may result in bad faith -made unconsciously or as the result of the societal pressure of the current discourse that is privileging work. “The situations into which human beings are cast are multiple...however described, they must be experienced inwardly by each individual, each Dasein, each being-in-the-world; and each living subject must effect his own authentic relationships with the situations he encounters throughout the “instants” of his life” (Greene, 1967: 129).

Above all else, existentialism is about awakening or rebelling from the “ordinary person” syndrome, the routine pattern of existence that society can inadvertently or overtly place on people (Olson, 1962; Reynolds, 2006; Wild, 1966). Breisach (1962: 4-5) contends that, “Existentialists have asked for a life in which man continuously questions his purpose and accepts responsibility for his actions, one which truly reflects man’s special position in this world.” From birth, different societies ingrain in people an imperative to live the “good” life, one which is usually determined by the approval of other people in that society. For example, in our Western context, a young person may choose to pursue a certain profession because it is one in which the parents have encouraged as opposed to what the person truly would like to do. This is traditionally followed by marriage, children, home ownership, and planning for retirement without perhaps thinking about the real desire for any or all of these things. The first problem with privileging work, therefore, is that growing social pressure to have a calling can prevent individuals from making informed, authentic choices. The second problem is the emphasis on work itself. A person’s life consists of a number of components, and like various pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, they must fit together in order to translate into authentic existence. Work is only one aspect of the puzzle that makes up a life and must fit with other aspects of life. “How people work affects the way in which they spend their time away from work, for it places constraints on the enjoyment of “free time” and conditions the overall mode of adjustment to life” (Rinehart, 2006: 1). Work and the other areas of a life (for instance family, hobbies, athletics and spirituality), should not be viewed as separate domains but merely as different components of the puzzle that is meaning. Viewing work and home life as totally separate implies that people can view each component separately and compartmentalize their life, which most research today shows is rarely the case (Cinamon, 2006; Eikhof, Warhurst, & Haunschild, 2007; Haar, 2006; Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Perrone, Webb, & Blalock, 2005).

It could be that the interesting, fast-changing, and emotionally demanding work offered by tomorrow’s organizations will not prove to be the end-all and be-all to the elf-developer. Aspirations of getting more time with family and pursuing personal goals hint at other dimensions to their identities. To the extent we can set aside simplistic notions that ‘self-actualization’ is the pinnacle of human motivation, this makes room to consider how family feeling, community membership, and spirituality are transcendent aims of human development. (Mirvis & Hall, 1994: 378)

The existential Self is continually being constituted, and a person may be moving towards authenticity or away from it. For example, people may be influenced to believe that having a Calling is a necessary part of living a meaningful life; however, after having experienced a Calling they realize that they do not feel ‘right’ in this life, and regret their decision. A high priority on one’s work life will be especially difficult to sustain as a person ages and changes how he or she views life (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993, 2005; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001; Wethington, Kessler, & Pixley, 2004). A person at age forty usually regards his or her life very differently than when he or she was thirty or twenty years of age, and as the individual changes, so too may his or her relationship to work. For example, upon graduation from university many students will usually seek a job or career that pays them the highest salary. They may choose work based on financial need if they have large financial debt accumulated throughout their university years, and pass up work that they would prefer in favor of work that pays the highest salary. As people age, their life circumstances will undoubtedly change, as well as their personal views on what is important to

them. This means that they may look to other possibilities when it comes to work or to expand other components of their life or to add new avenues of life. “There is a search for meaning and new life goals: Spirituality is becoming increasingly important, especially for people at mid-life. With the former goals now viewed in a different perspective, and with time seemingly suddenly shorter, the person may begin to search for new values, goals, and meaning in life” (Hall, 2002: 113). A young person may become a teacher with the initial feeling that he or she has found a calling, but as the years pass the work is viewed as a career and finally as a job. If they believe that their work should be a calling this will result in anxiety and frustration and perhaps existential angst.

Perhaps deep satisfaction is not to be found in the pursuit of material comfort, but in intrinsically meaningful activity. Accordingly, many people are reorienting their lives, away from the pursuit of wealth and towards the pursuit of meaning. They are reducing the number of hours they work, changing their jobs, working from home, or giving up work altogether. In each case, they are trading income for time to pursue goods they regard as worthwhile. (Levy, 2005: 176)

From an existential perspective we exist contingently, much of life cannot be predicted, and what may be meaningful at one point may have no meaning at a different point in time. Bugental (1965: 40) states, “Man lives in contingency...can and does take action that affects his awareness and experience...takes such action without ultimate guide posts of universal values or built-in instincts...in constant relation with his fellows while yet being separate from them.” Despite efforts to live authentically, it is difficult for most people as many events may be out of their control. Therefore, slipping into “bad faith” is always a potential danger, and shadows every person’s existence. For example, an occupation may be meaningful for many years for an individual but later in life hold little interest besides the salary; unfortunately, a typical situation for many people (Grierson, 2007; Hollis, 1993). Numerous unforeseen events will take place throughout the course of our lives. Some of these events will affect the self positively such as marriage and children, while others will affect the self negatively, e.g., death of a loved one or being fired. The effects of these unforeseen “happenings” of life (that all individuals will experience) are dependent on how they are interpreted by the individual. For example, the 9-11 tragedy resulted in varying states of existence depending on how the experience was interpreted by the individual. For some people it resulted in a major change in how they viewed their work (Wrzesniewski, 2002).

What is important to understand is that the same or similar ‘conditions’ can generate a shift from authentic to inauthentic ways of being, or vice-versa, or, indeed, provoke no shift at all. The impact of a tragedy like the destruction of the World Trade center in New York City may have been experienced by some as a moment of illuminating authenticity, but it as surely induced an inauthentic stance in others. Equally, for some it may have had no impact whatever upon their currently adopted way of being. (Spinelli, 2005: 111)

Ultimately, the pieces that make up a life, especially one’s work life, must fit coherently together in order for one to feel that life is meaningful. It does not matter how the life is judged by others, only how it is perceived by the individual. Therefore, what is of the most importance is how the individual perceives his or her overall life, and the value placed on work will vary based on how other components, e.g., family, hobbies, community involvement, that make up one’s life are perceived. Orbach (2008: 283) notes, “Authentic being is creating, and constructing one’s life on the basis of what one thinks, feels, and desires and not on conventions, norms, fashions, or expectations of others. In other words, to be oneself is to realize and actualize one’s subjectivity and one’s own possibilities and unique potentials.” This means that for some people work will be highly valued, i.e., as a Calling, whereas for others it will be far less important (Career or Job). The current discourse of work is conditioning people to believe that they must have a career or calling. However, a Job could be a conscious authentic choice for many people who wish to put their time and energy

into other aspects of life as opposed to their work life. Work that is viewed as a job and that can be left at the office tends to be less time-consuming and stressful. Banaga (2000) noted that a Calling may be connected to increased levels of stress and Careers and Callings are certainly much more time-consuming and have much greater effect on the individuals overall life (Wrzesniewski, 1999; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Most importantly, how many jobs can be callings, realistically? Most people would prefer to have a decent job that they can enjoy and which provides a reasonable income, but many have to settle for work that it not fulfilling and is far from a calling.

According to existentialism it does not matter how we view work; all that matters is that we choose our self by choosing our work freely. And this does not necessarily mean getting everything we desire, e.g., becoming leader of a country or a famous actor. "It is necessary to point out to 'common sense' that the formula 'to be free' does not mean 'to obtain what one has wishes' but rather 'by oneself to determine oneself to wish' (in the broad sense of choosing)" (Sartre, 1956: 483). Finding meaning in our work is not the existential goal; the goal is only that we consciously and freely choose our life.

Conclusion

The authentic life may indeed include work as a Calling, but the authentic life may also include work as a Job. What is important is that existence is judged by the individual and there are many ways to exist in this world. According to Sartre, we must never allow our humanity to be defined by others, only by ourselves (Sartre, 1956). No matter how well society may view a type of work, e.g., medical doctor, teacher, or artist it may be the wrong choice for that particular individual. "I may be connected to value, contribute to a wide network of relationships, and be deeply appreciated by my society, but if I lack the feelings, attitudes, intentions, and beliefs appropriate to my situation, my sense of meaninglessness will be acute" (Bellio, 2001: 80). And so it is up to the individual to ascertain whether the need for balance or security is authentic or externally imposed. "Ultimately, if he is to achieve authentic existence, the individual must make his decision alone, but this decision, made in solitude, at the same time reaches out into the social context which determines the self's concreteness" (Schrage, 1977: 201). A life lived for others is contrary to the main tenet of existentialism; that is, for the individual to "choose one's life" (Sartre, 1956). However, if the individual takes responsibility for the choice, then it could be argued that it is chosen in good faith and potentially leads to authenticity. The danger is not in what we choose as work, but in how we choose that particular work; if we give up our freedom to choose by not questioning our being. Therefore, the preliminary conclusions of this paper suggest that we must start to probe the emphasis on work as the primary source of meaning in life and particularly question the assumed value of a work calling.

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