

Differentiating between vocations and careers.

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Recently, there have been a significant number of calls for constructionist forms of career counseling and development which prioritize occupational decision-making that honour the values of the client or participant, rather than those which solely stress approaches which meet the needs of the labour market (Savickas et al., 2009). Encouraging participants to consider their occupational identity as a 'vocation' as opposed to a 'job' or a 'career' is a small, but significant nuance that changes how individuals develop career plans and learn. Due to the ongoing prevalence of the 'career paradigm', however, it can often prove difficult for university students to differentiate between jobs, occupations, careers, professions and vocations. This paper aims to clarify how vocational thinking differs from other forms of occupational ideation in a way which is informed by the authors experience in introducing the concept of vocational thinking to undergraduate and postgraduate business students. The paper hopes to assist faculty, researchers, career counselors, students and others who work with, or in fields associated with, the concept of the vocation, in order to clarify how theory on the concept has developed over time and to suggest avenues for developing vocational practice, as well as signposting areas requiring additional research.

The Protestant Work Ethic

Organised work is a feature of all developed civilizations. As societies urbanize and modernize a need for specialized forms of labour emerges which more adequately address the radically diverse requirements of large populations who make their homes in condense urban conurbations, emerges. Marx (1995) outlines how the turning away from agrarian ways of living to more industrial settings, led to a condition where workers were less connected to the changes in seasons and the requirements of subsistence that underscored traditional lifestyles. Economic, social and cultural change, in short, changes the way we think about work.

Dawson (2005) outlines how work in medieval times was considered a burden which distracted individuals from finding their true, authentic, spiritual nature, and one of the privileges of the feudal aristocracy was that they didn't have to work, or at least, worked less than the peasantry. The concept of vocation, or *calling*, at this time was one which had an expressly religious connotation. The individual was called by God to serve Him, largely through committing to priestly prayer and abstinence, or through adhering to the strictures of monastic life. Christianity had annexed the Platonic concept that this temporal world was just a shadow of a greater transcendent reality. The faithful were urged to renounce pleasure and material acquisition in order to obtain salvation in the next world.

Religion, surprisingly, has played an enormous role in the development of the contemporary capitalistic world, and the first major study to outline why this is the case was provided by the German sociologist Max Weber in the early 20th century. Rather than assuming work and business activity to be a field of social

practice that was dissociated from (or even polar to) the world of transcendent spirituality, 'Weber found an elective affinity between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of early capitalism, generating forms of life that made foresight, prudence, calculation, and accumulation not just legitimate but potential indicators of salvation' (Rose, 2007). Although capitalism as an economic practice existed prior to the advent industrial society, the way in which it impacted on how the individual works is, historically speaking, more recent. If one is to consider the events which led to the development of contemporary capitalism we might be tempted to think of the emergence of financial institutions in Renaissance Italy, or the start of Industrial Revolution in the late 18th Century. Weber traces the emergence of the 'spirit of capitalism' or the degree to which individuals in certain regions committed to the requirements of capitalistic success to an event which led to far-reaching unintended consequences: Martin Luther's pinning of his '95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences' to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, which is often seen as the catalyst which began the Protestant Reformation.

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic & The Spirit of Capitalism* (1992) provides a lucid account of how this impacted on the ways in which people think and conceive of their work in contemporary capitalistic society. Weber sees modern capitalism as oriented around the continuous acquisition of economic wealth for its own sake, rather than for the benefits that this wealth can bring. The *Financial Times* weekend edition magazine which is titled *How to Spend It*, for example, reminds the beneficiaries of financial capitalism that there are reasons to accumulate vast resources of wealth in a post-secular world. Weber was interested in why certain regions of Europe had grown more prosperous than others since the Industrial Revolution, and particularly why these regions tended to be 'more protestant', and why impoverished countries were 'more Catholic'. Catholicism's primary focus on attaining salvation in the afterlife depended on activities such as acquiring indulgences, confessing sin, and participating in organized sacramental activities which involved removing oneself from the mundane world through forms of prayer which was celebrated in the monastic ideal.

Protestantism's challenge to Catholicism involved placing a stronger sense of personal responsibility on the individual for ensuring that they were productive individuals. Calvin's version of Protestantism, and its doctrine of pre-determination attempted to undo the technology of repentance and forgiveness that was found in the Catholic sacramental practice of confession. Instead, the believer's access to Heaven was not something they could 'fix' with the assistance of a priest; instead their salvation was predetermined before birth. Where the Catholic faith system expected and facilitate moral imperfection, Calvinism expected perfection in the lived behaviour of the 'Saved'.

If a person is pre-determined to go to Heaven or Hell after death, regardless of their behaviour, we might imagine that this would grant individuals a certain

amount of freedom in how they chose to conduct themselves in the world. But, according to Weber, this was not the case.

‘The question, Am I one of the elect? Must sooner or later have arisen for every believer and have forced all other interests into the background. And how can I be sure of this state of grace?’ (Weber, 1992 p. 65).

Weber states that a key way for believers to get this assurance was to engage in productive worldly activity because the world exists for the glory of God.

‘In practice this means that God helps those who help themselves. Thus the Calvinist, as it is sometimes put, himself creates his own salvation, or as would be more correct, the conviction of it. But this creation cannot, as in Catholicism, consist in a gradual accumulation of individual good works to one’s credit, but rather in a self-control which at every moment stands before the inexorable alternative, chosen or damned’ (Weber, 1992 pp. 69-70).

In Catholicism, one could gain ‘points’ through indulgences, good works, and repentance; in Protestantism, where one must constantly monitor oneself in order to remain convinced of your membership of the ‘Saved’, the believer could only *lose* points for less than saintly behaviour. The believer then, must live a highly productive life in *this* world, accumulating wealth only as an indication that they are among those whom God has elected to save, and unemotionally re-investing it in a way that increases self-assurance of their pre-determined path to Heaven. The Protestant Work Ethic provided a form of selfhood that aligned with the requirements of modern capitalism; a will to re-invest rather than spend or squander, and a cool, financialized rationality. This selfhood had its foundation in a faith system that led to areas populated by devout protestants quickly rising within the economic ascendancy, and it is this ‘spirit’ which continued to prosper for the next 100 years after Weber first proposed it, even when the belief system which underpinned it went into gradual abeyance.

Weber’s Concept of *Calling*

Central to Weber’s concept of the Protestant Work Ethic was that of the *vocation* or *calling*. Anthony Giddens writes that Weber’s concept of the calling, as it emerges from the Protestant Work Ethic, ‘refers basically to the idea that the highest form of moral obligation of the individual is to fulfill his duty in worldly affairs. This projects religious behaviour into the day-to-day world, and stands in contrast to the Catholic ideal of the monastic life, whose object is to transcend the demands of mundane existence’ (Giddens, 1992). The establishment of this moral imperative became fundamental to how capitalism was enculturated. The calling, for Weber was a personal obligation for individuals to ensure whatever work they did was meaningful because it indicated that it was divinely ordained for them by God. For the believer, work

was no longer something one did solely for payment, but ‘a life task, a definite field in which to work’ (Weber et al., 1992). Treating one’s employment as a calling became ‘the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was which inevitably gave every-day worldly activity a religious significance’ (Weber et al., 1992). By subjecting themselves entirely to God’s will, the faithful were called to commit themselves to their occupation in which they found themselves.

Towards the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber writes of the effects which produced ‘the spiritualization of personality’ (p. 114) in the aftermath of the Protestant reformation. He posits that the religious roots of the Protestant Work Ethic had begun to disappear but the spiritual nature of capitalistic work remained: ‘The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so’ (p. 123). Irregardless of what we believe in a post-secular world, be we Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist or whatever, it is because we work in a global capitalistic order that ‘the idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs’ (p. 124). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ends with Weber considering what the future has in store for the Protestant Work Ethic at a time when rationalized forms of capitalism appeared to be increasing.

Weber later elaborated on the concept of vocation in two public addresses, the texts of which are now widely available as the essays *Science as a Vocation* (1919b) and *Politics as a Vocation* (Weber, 1919a). In the former, Weber discusses his own position as an academic in relation to the university culture of his day. He begins by discussing the *external conditions* of working in an academic institution which refer to the work conditions, employment prospects and other factors which people are still today urged to consider as matters of primary importance when considering what line of work we should pursue. Every year demands for particular courses of study are high, and some are low, but what is interesting about this is that these generally demonstrate that a large proportion of individuals who make choices about the type of work they will do in the future do so on the basis of where they imagine the most employment to be available. For example, in Ireland from the mid-1990s to 2001 competition to get places on Information Technology courses was very strong because of the dot.com phenomenon and the rapid growth of the e-commerce sector. A bubble was emerging and more and more people wanted to be part of it. The NASDAQ index experienced a downturn around April 2001. The bubble burst and many of those who had staked their future in it were disappointed, but a more significant question went unanswered: how many people had invested time, energy and resources in trying to enter this field of productive labour did so because they felt it would provide wealth and security, rather than fulfillment and interest? During the recent global financial crisis, interest has increased in courses of study which would demonstrate that university undergraduates are seeking security in ‘professions which are seen as stable’, such as medicine and teaching. These professions are among those which are often discussed as ‘vocations’ in that they require the

individual to make a deep, significant sacrifice in order to provide value to others. Patients, children and parents depend on these professions to do some of the most important work that there is, but imagine the problems that would emerge if all of those entering these fields of labour did so for personal reasons, rather than wanting to heal the sick or prevent illness, or provide a lifelong love of learning and encouragement to children.

Regardless of the *external* reasons why people might choose a particular occupation field (employability, stability and remuneration, etc.), the *internal* reasons have a greater degree of salience in relation to vocations. In *Science as Vocation*, Weber discusses vocation as a commitment to a specialist area of work that the individual engages with in terms that almost equate with religious zeal. It is important to remember that Weber talks of scientists who have discovered their vocation as being committed to (or even obsessed by) their work, rather than their career: their vocation manifests itself in *what* they do, rather than the rewards that they get from it. They are interested in the *content* of their labour, rather than its rewards. This is important because, as Gottfriedson (1981) points out, most people make occupational choices on the basis of having perceived other people work in a field. When we do have no direct experience of working in a field, we are impressed by *personalities* and how they present themselves, and fail to consider if the work would necessarily match our own values and interests.

The Return to Vocation

The reason why there is a resurgence of interest in the concept of vocation in recent years has much to do with a more general social shift of interest in *spirituality* (or determining one's spiritual identity) in the aftermath of the Counter-Culture movement of the late 1960s. In his brilliant account of this process, Paul Heelas (1996) demonstrates how dissatisfaction with material wealth and concern about the effects of 'progress' led many people to question why they were less happy than they imagined they would be. This concern has manifested in an important way in the management research literature and perhaps can be traced back to an article by Iain Mitroff & Elizabeth Denton's in the highly influential journal, *Sloan Management Review*. In this work, Mitroff & Denton reported that managers who felt that they were doing work which took into account their entire personalities and beliefs believed themselves to be more productive (1999), and organizations which attempted to facilitate employee 'authenticity' were more profitable. This might appear commonsense: a person who chooses teaching as a career who has a genuine vocation will see that the difficulties and challenges the profession presents are elements of the work which they will continually learn from and grow. A person who selects teaching as a career on the basis that it is a relatively secure profession, but who isn't genuinely committed to fostering a love of learning amongst young people, often find themselves drained, stressed and exhausted. A vocation is something which nourishes the person's whole life (including

their non-work life), but working in a vocational field without having a calling will produce negative results in other parts of the person's life.

In this sense, finding out which work we will do is perhaps one of the most important ethical decisions that any individual can make. Many begin on an occupational path that they believe themselves to be suitable for, but either end up becoming disconnected or disengaged from it. Others, when they realize that they have commenced something that they are not suited to, seek out ways to find which direction they should commit to instead. For most though, discovering which path we should pursue is complicated by factors that lie outside ourselves.

Why is it difficult to differentiate between career and vocation?

There are a number of reasons why individuals find it difficult to think about their vocation, but easier to think about careers. The 'career' has become the dominant paradigm for how we think about work in contemporary society. We talk of professional footballers, musicians and actors having careers, and use this as a way of determining how well they are performing, usually in relation to their popularity. Careers are visible representations of work effectiveness, but they tell us nothing about the reasons why people are successful. Think of somebody whose career you would like to emulate, and ask yourself what the person does that makes their occupational life attractive to you. If we spent some time looking at these surface level attractions, we might find that there are other things that make this person influential in your personal practice of occupational ideation. Now think about the occupation you would least like to do in the world. Imagine that the person you have just thought about was working in your least-preferred field of work. Would that change your view of the person, or the work that they do?

Another reason why it is difficult to consider ones vocation is that we are living in what has been referred to as a *post-secular world* (Taylor, 2007) where many people may still be religious, but alignment with a particular faith tradition is not seen as being key to progress in the non-religious world. Indeed, discussion or representations of faith in secular organized contexts are sanctioned and are often deemed inappropriate to the world of work. In short, vocation is often seen as a religious concept which is deemed inappropriate to the world of business and organizations. Although this has been challenged significantly by research which demonstrates that individuals can have secular vocations (where they feel called by the world, a market, an organization, a sector to create some form of value, rather than the Divine) the idea of vocation is often still seen as a religious concept, rather than one which is appropriate to occupational searching and discovery. Hall & Chandler (2005) see the source of religious callings to emanate from God and are worthy of responses where the *called* person follows God's plan for their life; secular callings, on the other

hand, come from within the individual and involve the individual finding and pursuing their purpose in order to attain personal fulfillment.

The prevalence of the career discourse continues to dominate how we advise people to make decisions about their education and their working life. Vocational ideation (the practice of finding and discovering an occupation that matches the individuals values and occupational desires) is de-prioritized in favour of something called career guidance which has become something of a 'catch-all' phrase that tends to advise people on available third level courses and apprenticeships that emphasizes obtaining access to education and training, rather than encouraging participants to think deeply about where these activities will ultimately lead them in their working lives. The front page news headline of the *Irish Independent* on August 15th 2011 reported on an Economic & Social Research Institute report which identified enormous flaws within the Irish career guidance system that resulted in thousands of would-be university students selecting university courses that they were not suited to (Donnelly, 2011). Secondary school students, it was claimed, received too little career guidance too late. Students reported feeling overwhelmed by the implications of having to make a significant decision that impact on them for years to come. They also believed that an emphasis on obtaining 'points' was compounded by a lack of personal guidance as to what would be the best courses of study for them to pursue.

It is entirely understandable that students who have been brought up in the white heat of competitive entry systems to university courses continue to see education and qualifications as routes to answering questions about their vocational identity, and this often results in students *deferring* their vocational decisions until later stages of study. Not only does this make learning more difficult (perceiving the material that you encounter in any classroom as not being relevant to your personal situation makes it more difficult to engage with it), it also equates to 'throwing more education' at the problem of finding your vocation. Occasionally, students appear to think that undertaking a postgraduate course will complete their vocational identity, and effectively make their vocational decision for them. It is incumbent on everyone who makes this choice to ask themselves if they are honestly seeking a licence to practice in a particular field, or are they seeking to project this important decision outside themselves in a way which self-absolves the students of the responsibility to find and pursue work that is of value to themselves and others.

If such confusion is prevalent, then perhaps there is little wonder that students are confused by how thinking about a vocation differs to planning a career.

Why thinking about vocation is different to planning a career.

It has been my experience that students can sometimes struggle to differentiate between careers and vocations. Planning a career involves trying to change how one presents oneself the needs of a particular recruitment market.

Vocational ideation involves developing a high level of self-awareness in relation to one's own ethical principles and values. If our educational systems at all levels continue to demand that students are educated on the basis of acquiring technical knowledge, rather than addressing the principles of a liberal education, participants in traditional career planning often fall into the trap of trying to accommodate their current position with a rapid changing range of requirements, which can produce some bizarre results (such as students planning to pursuing postgraduate education in fields that they have no intention of practicing).

Inevitably, when students relate their occupational goals to their own experiences and values, far superior occupational plans emerge. One of the biggest pitfalls that some students face when beginning to think about their future working lives is that they equate vocational ideation with vocational *valence*. Valence relates to the imagined benefits that a person believes they will obtain or receive as the result of pursuing a particular course of action (Vroom, 1964). We may see people who we believe to have a vocation, and come to desire the rewards that we imagine they receive from practicing it, but this means that we focus on emotional returns, rather than the significant investment that pursuing a vocation requires. The British comedian Ricky Gervais has frequently spoken about the manner in which he changed his work focus to creating quality contributions to his field, rather than for personal gain. In an interview with *Harvard Business Review* he remarked:

'I used to be a lazy person, unambitious, a slacker, but now I'm a workaholic, because of the privileged position I've found myself in. Fame is an upshot of what I do. But it's not the driving force. The making of it is the fun for me – not the money or the awards. I've never done anything for a million pounds that I wouldn't have done for free... I wasn't doing what I wanted; I was doing what I thought would be successful. I deserved to fail' (Beard, 2011).

Work-lifestyle, then, is not the same thing as a vocation. What then, is a vocation, and what is not?

What is, and what isn't, a vocation ?

Weber discussed vocation as an ethical position which is tied up with an individual's personal qualities and their beliefs. This remains the case. It is *understandable* that people might seek out work to get paid and obtain some sense of stability for themselves, particularly during difficult economic times, but it is not *sustainable*. Many people who make such a decision, do so with a view to taking a transitional occupation, until they can get 'back-on-track' so to speak. Take the following statement, which was reported in an article about the reasons why third-level students chose particular courses.

[A student] decided to study English and drama because she has always wanted to be scriptwriter; not because it was going to be lucrative. “[Finding work] will be hard but I can always fall back on teaching if needs be”, she said’ (Carroll, 2011).

From the student’s perspective, she is being practical about her career choice and many people would imagine that she would do the same thing. Most people, however, would agree that teaching is a genuine vocation. It is not excessively, well-paid, requires extensive training and ongoing preparation, is often vilified by uniformed parties who assume that the only work that a teacher does is in the classroom, and teachers are increasingly required to do more work with fewer resources, which has the potential to increase personal stress exponentially. Teaching, as a vocation, demands a deep personal commitment, because the work of the teacher matters. Everyone can remember the teacher who had a strong vocation for their work: they demanded the respect of students and colleagues alike and were enormously effective in bringing love of their subject to their students. Equally, few will be as fortunate not to have had the experience of the ‘teacher’ who did not have that vocation and suffered through their ‘job’, failing to encourage learning and even risking destroying the potential learning of their students. Most parents would be horrified to hear that people they entrust their children’s education to see their work as ‘fall back’ positions.

Vocations must align with your whole life and with those things that are most important for you achieving in your life. Vocations are ethical in the sense that they are based, not on what you can get out of them for yourself in a utilitarian fashion, but on the value that one creates for other people. *Work sustains* people who see their occupation as vocations, but exhausts those who see it as a job.

Some important questions to ask yourself about vocation?

When we try to think about the type of work we would like to do, we often become distracted by specific elements of what we think we need from employment, or that we imagine we will enjoy. Think about your ideal job, and honestly ask yourself the following questions?

Am I interested in this work because of the type of lifestyle I will imagine it will provide me with?

In other words do you imagine that the work will be easy to complete, or less stressful, or will provide you with the time and resources to do other things with your life. Work has a way of filling up our time in ways that we do not plan, and with the widespread use of various forms of cloud computing and smart communication devices, anything less than a full commitment will ultimately result in you falling out of favour with colleagues and clients who have a better commitment to the work you have told them that you have.

Am I interested in this occupation because it promises a steady pay-check.

If you have solely financial motive for getting into a field, be warned: economic conditions change at a pace that economists never can predict. Security and stability are important, but what is secure one year can become risky the next. People with vocations are engaged in a continual process of self-improvement and development. By working on the way they do their job, they ultimately find new ways to create value for all types of groups.

Jamie Oliver, for example, is more than a celebrity chef. Even during his initial forays into the world of fame, Oliver always stressed the importance of sourcing quality food. This principle has led him to establish a range of successful enterprises, but also has transformed him into a campaigner against poor nutritional standards in school settings and establishing social enterprises which help young people from troubled or disadvantaged backgrounds to change their own situations. If Jamie Oliver had focused on his work as a job or a career, his talents would probably have been realized, and he may have enjoyed a certain amount of fame. By practicing his work as a vocation, however, he has achieved significantly more than this. If you pursue an occupation *solely* to create value for yourself, (as something that you think will pay you well, make you famous, or be fun) then the work is not really a vocation.

Am I interested in this work because of other people tell you that they think you'd be good at it?

With the very best of intentions, people who do have genuine vocations tend to evangelise about them to other people, and seek to share the fulfillment that they have found with other people. The enthusiasm of others for what they think you will excel at is infectious, but can provide a serious distraction. In the midst of the cynical attitudes and general negativity which often prevail in public discourse, we can find ourselves attracted to points of positivity. It is important to remember that people with authentic vocations have found a match with their personal 'life-paradigm' and the work they do. The way to find a vocation is to find a similar match for yourself, whilst realizing that your vocation is dependent on understanding who you are yourself, and the value that you ultimately want to create. A vocation is not a particular form of work; it is a *relationship* that you have with the work you do.

Following other people's advice to enter a particular field, without having any direct experience of it, is very dangerous. Many people invest significant energy and resources in training for particular types of work, only to find out that the reality of this work does not meet their expectations. This disconnect between vocational valence and reality is a high-risk area for encountering occupational disappointment. It is important that this gap be addressed in two ways:

- (1) Ask people who are currently working in the occupational field you would like to enter what the most challenging or stressful aspects of their work is. Seek out stories of discomfort or disillusionment and try to place yourself in these narratives.
- (2) Try to get some real experience of these challenging aspects of the work. Every workplace is different, but the challenges can be shared across sectors and industries. Think of the part-time work you do, or the societies and group that you may be a member of, and seek out opportunities to *practice* aspects of your vocation that may involve dealing with uncomfortable situations such as hostile or challenging behavior.

It is essential that you remain conscious of the fact that the career discourse does not always promise personal fulfillment, but aims to identify strategies and tactics by which individuals can *advance* themselves in organizations. Although this means that when organizational circumstances change, the career trajectories of individuals may become de-railed, thinking about your work as a vocation is not without risk. It is important that participants in vocational ideation processes such as taught courses or counseling sessions are clear about these.

Disadvantages of introducing the concept of vocation into occupational planning.

People who have strong work ethics have always been open to exploitation. For example, 'Robert Peel, the father of the nineteenth-century Tory Prime Minister, would employ only Methodists in his Lancashire cotton mills and calico printing factories because of their sobriety, honesty and responsibility' (Heelas, 2005). Weber outlines this in a section early in *The protestant ethic & the spirit of capitalism* where he draws attention to capitalism as system which requires low wages to be paid. Because workers will naturally resist this, 'Labour must, on the contrary be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling' (p.25). In a highly controversial article in the *Journal of Health Economics* in 2005, Heyes suggested that proposals to increase the pay of nurses, as a measure to address the shortage of numbers entering the nursing profession, would result in attracting the 'wrong sort'. By 'wrong sort', he meant people who are only interested in the stability, mobility and money that the nursing profession can provide. His logic goes as follows: if nurses were paid more, the profession would become full of individuals who do it for reasons other than patient care, and this would eventually impact on the quality of care provided.

Similarly, with regard to the teaching profession, Stephen Brookfield writes that teachers are often encouraged to think of their work as a vocation 'to justify their taking on backbreaking loads... Teachers who take the idea of vocation as the organizing concept for the professional lives may start to think of any day

on which they don't come home exhausted as a day wasted – or at least a day when they have not been “all that they can be” (1995).

Exploitation at work, however, is not something solely which people who have vocations are prone. If a well-developed sense of vocation is achieved, the individual focuses primarily on their *work* rather than any other organizational or managerial concern. By treating this work as vocation they become very clear which elements contribute to their sense of vocational self-hood, and which ones are ancillary to the sense of fulfillment they get from their role. Vocations are about creating *value* where a need exists, and individuals who find that their organizational ‘realities’ draw them away from doing this, are quick to find new places to practice their calling. In final episode of the first series of the excellent HBO TV series, *The Wire*, Lt. Daniels discovers that an officer under his command has been drawn into police department politics by a high ranking officer. Daniels advises

‘A couple of weeks from you’re going to be in some district somewhere with eleven or twelve uniforms looking to you for everything. Now some of them are going to be good police, some of them are going to be young and stupid. A few are going to be pieces of s**t. But all of them will take their cue from you. You show loyalty, they learn loyalty. You show them it’s about the work, it’ll be about the work. You show them some other kind of game, then that’s the game they’ll play... Comes a day when you gonna have to decide whether it’s about you, or the work’.
(Van Patten, 2005)

There has been a significant amount of debate about whether management is a profession or a practice. If we view our managerial work as a vocation, we can model behaviors based on integrity and increase the quality and impact of the work we do, increasing our service and increasing the value that we seek to provide.

Suggestions for practice.

Vocational ideation demands critical reflection from all those who would practice it. That means as students, educators, researchers and guidance professionals we need to develop clarity about not just what it is we do, but *why* we do it. When we consider choosing or changing our occupations we need to develop a solid rationale for articulating the occupational route we select. This means that we should not be able to simply say why you have chosen a path, but we should be able to *convince* ourselves and others of the reasons we have choice.

When assisting students to research their vocation it is important that we don't anchor students to one particular method of doing this, but instead provide a menu of options for them to chose from so they can decide on the most appropriate way to find their occupational path. It is essential that we are clear

that if students decide to interview people who they believe to practice a particular vocation that they do not confuse this with actually having a vocation. People often 'fall into' roles and make the best of them. This does not mean that it is their vocation. It is important that when interviewing people about an occupational path, that they find someone who could potentially act as a mentor, rather than someone who simply works in a particular field. As mentioned above, if you undertake a vocation to create value for yourself alone, then you are not really practicing a vocation.

It is important that everyone be clear that vocations are not end-points; they are journeys. Working in a vocation is a *process* that involves continually improving and expanding your field of knowledge and experience. By 'doing' a vocation, countless ways of creating new or different forms of value are uncovered. The best way to begin, again as stated above, is to start practicing the vocation; every effort should be made to start engaging with elements of the work as soon as possible. Vocational activity cannot be postponed. Believing you are too young or too old to practice your vocation should not be used as an excuse – you either do it, or you don't.

Avenues for further research

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, interest in the field of vocation is growing in relation to 'constructionist' approaches to studying occupational ideation. This entails a turning away from traditional positivistic research approaches that have too long found favour in the psychological, managerial and organizational science disciplines. Social constructionism studies the nuances and processes that individuals employ in daily life to make sense of themselves and their world (Gergen, 1999). A more sociological approach to understanding occupational planning is skeptical of deterministic models or generalizations about how always people think or feel about things, but tries to understand how the individual sees themselves in relation to their environment and their sense of selfhood.

Many have articulated that since Weber's thesis that few have actually significantly updated or genuinely revisited the topic. We need to understand how people come to term with vocation and the other terms that they use for it. We need to understand what forms the beliefs of individuals about vocations, or their non-existence. We need to understand how the concept of vocation can be rehabilitated in the practice of occupational guidance which has become dominated by the 'career paradigm'. We need to fully understand the 'dark side' of the process of vocational ideation, and to determine how people can be encouraged to have more fruitful relationships with their life's work.

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