

# Occupational callings in a context of structural restrictions



## Chamados ocupacionais em um contexto de restrições estruturais

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to evaluate the moderating effect of structural constraints on the relationship between the perception of a calling, living a calling, and life satisfaction.

**Originality/value:** This is the first attempt to discuss the role of structural restrictions on the consequences of perceiving a calling in the context of a developing country.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We conducted quantitative research with 165 Brazilian professionals (structural equation modeling).

**Findings:** The results showed that perceiving a calling is positively associated with living a calling and satisfaction with life, in general. However, both relationships were moderated by structural constraints, so that the stronger the constraints, the weaker the relationships described above. This result indicates that seeing a job as an occupational calling does not always lead to desirable outcomes, as it is often advocated by the vocational and career literature and career guidance professionals. Thus, it is suggested that the limitations on access to resources should be taken into account in career guidance processes so that individuals are more aware that, in cases of resource constraints, occupational calling may not provide the much-acclaimed positive career outcomes. Implications for theory and practice and suggestions for future research are presented.

**Keywords:** calling, career, life satisfaction, professional achievement, structural constraints



## Resumo

**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar o efeito moderador das restrições estruturais na relação entre a percepção de um chamado, viver um chamado e a satisfação com a vida.

**Originalidade/valor:** Esta é a primeira tentativa de discutir o papel das restrições estruturais nas consequências da percepção de uma vocação no contexto de um país em desenvolvimento.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** Realizamos uma pesquisa quantitativa com 165 profissionais brasileiros (modelagem de equações estruturais).

**Resultados:** Os resultados mostraram que perceber um chamado está positivamente associado a viver um chamado e à satisfação com a vida, em geral. No entanto, ambas as relações foram moderadas pelas restrições estruturais, de modo que quanto mais fortes as restrições, mais fracas as relações descritas. Esse resultado indica que considerar um trabalho um chamado nem sempre leva a resultados desejáveis, como muitas vezes é defendido pela literatura de vocação e carreira e por profissionais de orientação de carreira. Assim, sugere-se que as limitações de acesso a recursos sejam levadas em consideração nos processos de orientação profissional, para que os indivíduos estejam mais conscientes de que, em casos de restrição de recursos, chamados ocupacionais podem não produzir os tão aclamados resultados positivos na carreira. Implicações para teoria e prática e sugestões para pesquisas futuras são apresentadas.

**Palavras-chave:** chamado, carreira, satisfação de vida, realização profissional, restrições estruturais



## INTRODUCTION

Occupational calling concerns professions that are compatible with personal identity and values and a sense of purpose (Ahn et al., 2021; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Studies on this theme have gained strength in the last years, deepening the understanding of its antecedents and consequences. The wide variety of existing careers and the spread of the understanding that people can find meaning and purpose at work (Felix & Cavazotte, 2019), allied to the tyranny of freedom – pressure on the individual to “be whoever he/she wants” (Schwartz, 2000) –, have made individuals seek careers that meet their calling, thus providing greater satisfaction with life (Duffy et al., 2017; Nóbrega & Felix, 2021). However, several factors are decisive for an individual to be able to live a perceived calling. In this study, one of them stands out: structural constraints – reduced access to opportunities due to macroeconomic conditions, for example. We argue in this study that the lack of structural conditions weakens the chances that a perceived calling will be experienced and lead to greater satisfaction with life (Duff & Autin, 2013; Duffy, Bott et al., 2014; Duffy, Blustein et al., 2016). This is in line with previous studies on the career literature that suggest the importance of contextual elements for career development (Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2017).

Over the past decade, an increasing amount of research in the vocational literature has focused on individuals who do not have the privilege of experiencing the desired careers (Duffy et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2022). Sometimes, individuals are unprepared to pursue the desired career and live their callings as formal jobs, and, as a consequence of this impossibility, many people suffer from psychological and emotional problems (Berg et al., 2010), feel confused about their own identity (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007), and have several other implications. Nunes and Felix (2019) and Felix and Blulm (2020), corroborating the chain of missed callings, state in their results that individuals with unattended occupational callings are more negatively affected when compared to individuals who do not even perceive a calling for a specific career. In turn, some studies indicate that these individuals who answer their career calling have, as a consequence, an improvement in personal growth, job satisfaction, and health (Duffy et al., 2011; Duffy, Douglass et al., 2014).

Despite the contribution of these previous studies, some research gaps remain. First, although the effects of individual constraint variables that hinder the relationship between perceiving a calling and its desired conse-





quences have been analyzed, there is a need to better understand the effect of more structural variables related to the environment, such as the degree of heating up of the economy and availability of jobs (Mansur & Felix, 2021). Second, it is necessary to understand the effect of this moderation in a more unstable and less favorable economic context, and the moderation effect is expected to be pronounced due to greater uncertainty and less access to opportunities when compared to economically favorable scenarios, such as those of developed countries. Brazil would be an adequate environment to fill this gap due to its unbalanced distribution of income (Felix & Cavazotte, 2019). Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the moderating effect of the perception of structural restrictions in the relationship between the perception of a calling with the meaning of life and living this calling (Dik et al., 2020).

This study brings theoretical and practical contributions. It contributes to the literature on occupational calling theory by identifying conditions in which the relationship often perceived as true between perceiving a calling and positive career results applies. This is a relevant advance, given that studies on occupational callings carried out in developing economies are scarce (Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020). As for practical contributions, it is expected that this study will help career counselors and even workers to have a more realistic expectation of the effects of developing a vision of work as an occupational calling. Somehow, it can be said that this study seeks to provide a “reality check” about the effects of a romanticized narrative that has been spread of seeing contemporary careers as necessarily endowed with a deep existential meaning.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Occupational callings

Occupational calling is a psychological construct that is generally implicit in several theories related to career, such as the self-efficacy and expectations theories, instead of being a completely new theory (Duffy et al., 2018; Hong & Hong, 2020). Its definitions can be grouped into two perspectives: neoclassical and modern. In the neoclassical definition, callings are understood as an invitation from a sense of destiny or a divine source that calls the individual to perform a job of a prosocial nature in their career (Baumeister, 1991). In the modern definition, we find an emphasis on the internal direc-





tion that makes individuals search for self-fulfillment and happiness in their careers. In this modern perspective, the one adopted in this study, it is proposed that an occupational calling is a sense that comprises the following components: 1. feeling called by something external, beyond oneself, toward a particular career, 2. the expression of a person's sense of life, and 3. willingness to meet the needs of others or benefit them (Duffy et al., 2011).

The three components of this definition of occupational calling are similar, respectively, to three other relevant literature: meaning of life, meaningful work, and prosocial motivation at work (Walsh et al., 2020; Dik & Duffy, 2009). Studies on the meaning of life suggest that part of a life well lived is a life with meaning, in which people define their experiences considering that sense of purpose (Duan et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2011). This view has been extended to models of meaningful work. The literature on meaningful work has been dedicated to investigating its proxies, such as intrinsic motivation at work (Allan et al., 2016), engagement at work (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015), and the patterns of subjective meanings of work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). The literature on prosocial motivation tends to associate it with high levels of persistence, performance, productivity, and job satisfaction (Hu & Liden, 2015). Although these three pieces of literature are sources of the three components of the definition presented in the previous paragraph for occupational calling, the theoretical tie between these items makes the meaning expressed in the concept of occupational calling relevant and unique. Evidence of the growing relevance of the construct in the career literature has been the recent publication of articles on the subject in high-impact journals in the field (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Xie et al., 2017; Buis et al., 2019). This study explores the relationship with two specific variables: life satisfaction and living a calling.

## **The roses: Positive consequences of occupational callings**

Individuals can experience occupational callings in different ways (Duffy & Dik, 2013). It is possible for individuals to seek, perceive, and live a calling. These steps are in ascending order according to the experimentation of occupational callings and reveal conceptual differences. While searching concerns the degree to which an individual seeks to identify their calling, perceiving indicates the degree to which the notion of a calling underlies someone's posture in relation to work. Finally, living a calling implies the degree to which the perceived calling is activated through the exercise of





work (Duffy et al., 2017). This distinction is relevant in this study, given that perceiving and living a calling are distinct constructs.

Thus, a relevant question arises: is there a positive relationship between perceiving a calling and living it? Does the fact that someone identifies that there is an invitation to pursue a significant career, which allows the individual to define their identity through work, leads them to, in fact, live a career with these characteristics? In general, studies carried out in economically developed countries in North America and Europe suggest the existence of a discriminating validity and a positive relationship between both constructs (Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2017). This means that when people perceive their callings, they probably activate self-regulatory mechanisms (Peng et al., 2019; Allan et al., 2016) that move them to adopt short- and long-term actions that facilitate a work condition in which the individual can express their calling (Douglass et al., 2016). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is suggested:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between perceiving a calling and living a calling.

The literature points out that perceiving a calling has positive consequences, among which satisfaction with life stands out. This suggests that the mere fact of identifying an invitation to live a more meaningful career would lead individuals to greater satisfaction in relation to their existence (Hirschi & Hermann, 2012). The psychological mechanism for this is that a great expectation of living a calling leads individuals to greater feelings of hope that such a calling will be lived, which, in turn, make people more satisfied with their lives (Duffy et al., 2017).

In other words, a greater expectation of living a calling increases the individual's sense of hope that the calling will be lived, and consequently, makes these individuals have greater satisfaction with life.

Such a positive association has been found both in research with students (Zhang et al., 2015) and adults who were working (Peterson et al., 2009). In addition, there are qualitative studies that also suggest that individuals with an occupational calling are happier and have a sense of accomplishment in life (Felix & Cavazotte, 2019; Berg et al., 2010). Thus, hypothesis 2 is suggested:

- H2: There is a positive relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction with life.





## Not all roses: Insights of the work psychology theory

The hypotheses presented so far suggest positive effects of perceiving a calling. However, this work uses an alternative theoretical framework to support the idea that perhaps the perception of an occupational calling is not necessarily something that produces positive effects under any circumstances. Almost all studies published to date on the subject have been carried out in developed countries, with the participation of people living in countries where there is financial stability, which makes life safe even in alternative professions (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Felix et al., 2018). However, how can contextual differences related to different access to opportunities affect the chances that the perception of a calling will turn into positive results? The theory of work psychology is used here to answer this question (Duffy, Blustein et al., 2016).

According to this theory, becoming able to experience the desired career path depends on access to opportunities, and the same line of argument can be transposed when analyzing the effects of living a perceived occupational calling (Nielsen et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2017). Such an argument challenges the internal and restricted emphasis on intrasubjective elements (for example, beliefs of self-efficacy and motivation) commonly advocated in approaches more focused on the agency of the individual (Duffy et al., 2017). In opposition to such a thesis, the theory of work psychology directs the emphasis to the role of structural and contextual factors (for example, economics, employment restrictions, and gender and racial discrimination) in the process through which individuals seek to realize their professional motivations (Blustein, 2013).

The work psychology model positions income and work volition (belief that the power of choice exists, even in structural conditions of scarcity) as antecedents of decent work (Duffy et al., 2017). According to this model, higher levels of these two predictive variables increase the chances that individuals will build careers in which they find greater emotional and financial security, access to health, time to rest, fair compensation, and alignment with personal and family values – dimensions of decent work (Dalla Rosa et al., 2020; Blustein et al., 2016). Thus, volition refers to perceived and intangible access to opportunities, while income is characterized as tangible access.

Researchers on occupational calling have supported the idea that individuals with income and volition restrictions continue to perceive the calling to certain jobs, although they are often unable to live them (Duffy et al., 2017; Hirschi et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2013). In other words, the work volition







and income restrictions are identified as antecedents that inhibit the possibility of living but perceiving a calling. This scenario characterizes a portion of society that has the expectation of living a job that offers a greater sense of purpose but cannot achieve this in their lives (Berg et al., 2010). Despite the contribution of these studies – carried out in developed countries –, there is no clear questioning as to how much a specific dimension of volition – the perception of the scarcity of opportunities, which is external to the individual – impacts the effects of living a calling. In this study, attention is directed to a variable in the work volition that plays this role: structural restrictions.

## Structural restrictions as moderators

Structural restrictions refer to limitations found in a given social environment so that individuals have access to opportunities for the development of their careers (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). They are connected to the concept of institutional void, which is the absence of institutional facilities, regulations, and norms that are necessary for a well-functioning economy (North, 1990). In countries with high levels of social and financial inequality, such as Brazil, individuals' levels of perceived structural restrictions may vary (North, 1990). Although the idea of suggesting a positive relationship between perceiving and living a calling is common, regardless of the circumstances (Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2017), there is evidence that this relationship can be mitigated in the presence of certain contextual variables. For example, Duffy et al. (2017) found evidence that, in the presence of greater work volition, the relationship mentioned tends to intensify. Given that work volition has structural constraints as one of its components (Duffy, Diemer et al., 2012), it is possible to theorize that such a relationship also occurs when the model is tested with structural constraints as a moderator. The mechanism for this hypothesis is as follows: when perceiving a calling and having a high level of structural restrictions, individuals are likely to face greater difficulties in activating such a calling in a formal position (Berg et al., 2010), despite the existence of an agentic argument, according to which the context is irrelevant (Duffy et al., 2013), in part of the literature on occupational calling. Thus, we propose hypothesis 3:

- H3: The perception of structural restrictions moderates the relationship between perceiving and living a calling, so that the greater the perception of structural restrictions, the weaker the relationship between perceiving and living a calling.

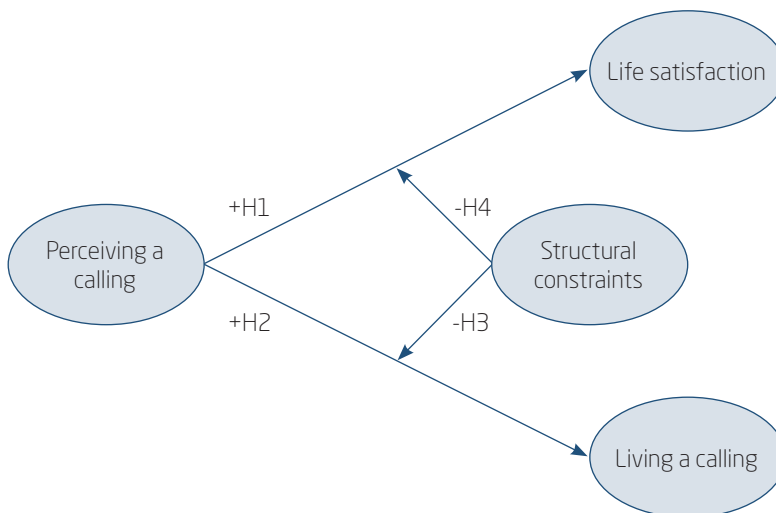


Similarly, the conditions under which the positive relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction with life are also discussed here (Wilson & Britt, 2021) can be mitigated in the presence of the perception of structural constraints. It is possible to argue that the mere existence of a calling itself can cause an improvement in life satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2009) for the simple fact that the individual creates a meaning for work and has a greater expectation in relation to the career. However, this expectation can be frustrated in the long run (Berg et al., 2010) as not all perceived callings can be experienced in practice due to factors such as scarcity of opportunities and lack of training for the individual (Felix & Cavazotte, 2019). Thus, it can be argued that, in contexts in which there are fewer opportunities for the development of work, the likelihood that a calling will lead to greater satisfaction with life decreases. Thus, we suggest hypothesis 4:

- H4: The perception of structural restrictions moderates the relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction with life, so that the greater the perception of structural constraints, the weaker the relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction with life.

Next, we present the structural model that guided the research.

**Figure 1**  
*Initial structural model*



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study, of a quantitative nature, was carried out based on the application of self-administered questionnaires, at first, to a group of 549 graduate students from an educational institution in Southeast Brazil who held a professional occupation for at least five years. Among them, 59 responded to the request to answer the questionnaire. In the second step, individuals who received the initial questionnaire were asked to forward the questionnaire to people who had lived their professional careers for at least five years (snowball sampling) (Nunes et al., 2017), which made it possible to reach 153 new participants (totaling 212 individuals). Of that total of 212 participants, 47 responded that they did not have an occupational calling, thus leading to a valid final sample of 165 respondents.

To investigate relationships between variables, we chose the partial least squares path modeling (PLS-PM) technique as an approach for modeling structural equations because it is a statistical approach considered adequate to conditional exploratory models that allows simultaneous estimates of several dependency relationships (Hair et al., 2016), adhering, therefore, to the theoretical model of research. All items were translated into Brazilian Portuguese, and the translation of the instruments was carried out through the back translation method (Zeidabadi et al., 2016).

Based on the initial research model (Figure 1) and in line with the recommendations of Chin (1998) and Barclay et al. (1995), an estimate of the minimum sample size was made, considering a significance level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.8, average effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), and two predictors. The minimum sample size would be 68 observations. Therefore, the sample size, with 165 observations, exceeds the minimum. It is added that this sample size is sensitive to the reduction of the effect size until  $f^2 = 0.06$ ; other parameters are kept constant. Finally, it is noteworthy that the *plspm* package version 0.4.9 was used for data processing in the software R version 3.5.3 in the application of the PLS-PM technique.

We used the subscale of the presence of two items from the Brief Calling Scale (BCS), by Dik et al. (2012), to assess the participants' degree of perceived calling. The five-point Likert scale was used as a response basis for the participants, in which 1 = "strongly disagree", and 5 = "strongly agree".

The six-item Living Calling Scale (LCS) (Duffy, Diemer et al., 2012) was used to assess the degree to which participants felt they were experiencing their callings in their careers. The five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", plus an additional "not applicable"

option for those who did not feel a connection to a particular line of work, was used for the participants to respond to the items.

The general satisfaction with life of the participants was measured through the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985). Participants responded to items on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The perception of structural constraints was measured using a scale found in Duffy, Diemer et al. (2012). In that study, structural restrictions are presented as a first-order variable of the second-order construct work volition. In order to meet the theoretical assumptions that support the elaboration of this study, only four items were considered on a five-point Likert scale for the Structural Constraints (SC) construct.

Table 1 shows the operational definitions of the model’s latent variables (LV) and the items in Brazilian Portuguese – the language in which the research participants responded to the questionnaire.

**Table 1**  
*Operating the variables of the initial research model*

Latent variable	Type	Manifest variables	Scale
Perceiving a calling (PC)	Exogenous/ reflexive	PC1 – “Eu tenho um chamado para um tipo específico de trabalho”.	Ordinal (1-5)
		PC2 – “Eu tenho uma boa compreensão do meu chamado, pois se aplica à minha carreira”.	
Life satisfaction (LS)	Endogenous/ reflexive	LS1 – “De muitas maneiras, minha vida está próxima do meu ideal”.	Ordinal (1-5)
		LS2 – “As condições da minha vida são excelentes”.	
		LS3 – “Estou satisfeito com a vida”.	
		LS4 – “Até agora eu tenho conseguido as coisas importantes que eu quero na vida”.	
		LS5 – “Se eu pudesse reviver a minha vida, eu mudaria quase nada”.	
Living a calling (LC)	Endogenous/ reflexive	LC1 – “Eu tenho oportunidades regulares para viver meu chamado”.	Ordinal (1-5)
		LC2 – “Atualmente estou trabalhando em um emprego que se alinha com meu chamado”.	

(continue)

**Table 1 (conclusion)*****Operating the variables of the initial research model***

Latent variable	Type	Manifest variables	Scale
Living a calling (LC)	Endogenous/ reflexive	LC3 – “Eu estou constantemente vivendo meu chamado”.	Ordinal (1-5)
		LC4 – “No momento, estou envolvido em atividades que se alinham ao meu chamado”.	
		LC5 – “Eu estou vivendo meu chamado agora no meu trabalho”.	
		LC6 – “Estou trabalhando no trabalho para o qual me sinto chamado”.	
Structural constraints (SC)	Moderating/ reflexive	SC1 – “Eu sinto que forças externas realmente limitaram minhas opções de trabalho e carreira”.	Ordinal (1-5)
		SC2 – “O estado atual da economia me impede de trabalhar no trabalho que eu quero”.	
		SC3 – “Fatores negativos fora do meu controle pessoal tiveram um grande impacto na minha escolha atual de carreira”.	
		SC4 – “Os empregos que eu gostaria de prosseguir não existem na minha área”.	

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors based on Diener et al. (1985), Dik et al. (2012), Duffy, Allan et al. (2012), and Duffy, Diemer et al. (2012).

## RESULTS

For the evaluation of the reflexive measurement models, the 1. unidimensionality, the importance of the first eigenvalue, and the composite reliability indicator; 2. convergent validity, external loadings, and the average variance extracted (AVE); and 3. discriminant validity, cross-loadings and the criterion link of Fornell and Larcker (Sanchez, 2013) were verified.

When evaluating the external loads of the moderating variables (MV), we identified that the perceiving a calling 1 (PC1), structural constraints 4 (SC4), and living a calling 1 (LC1) variables had values equal to 0.628, 0.594, and 0.633, respectively, thus indicating that PC explains 39% of the variance of PC1, SC explains 35% of SC4, and LC explains 40% of the variance of LC1 – that is, the square of the external loadings. Hair et al. (2016) suggest

that MV with external loadings lower than 0.4 be eliminated from the construct and that those with external loadings greater than 0.4 and lower than 0.708 have their exclusion evaluated.

Thus, through the evaluation of the impact on the indicators of unidimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validities, it was possible to adjust the measurement model through an interactive process with the model's re-estimation.

Table 2 presents a summary of the results. It is worth noting that all variables were kept in the model because, despite the tests being done without them, there was no significant improvement in the fit of the model, although in reflexive constructs, the MV overlap – the reason why the exclusion of an MV does not hinder the results, unlike formative constructs.

**Table 2**  
*Validation of the measurement model*

Constructs	Unidimensionality			Converging validity <sup>a</sup>	Discriminant validity <sup>b</sup>
	Dillon-Goldstein's rho	First eigenvalue	Second eigenvalue	Average variance extracted (AVE)	$\sqrt{AVE}$
PC	0.838	1.44	0.559	0.673	0.820 <sup>c</sup>
SC	0.842	2.30	0.737	0.573	0.757 <sup>c</sup>
LC	0.922	4.00	1.335	0.664	0.815 <sup>c</sup>
LS	0.833	3.01	0.642	0.602	0.776 <sup>c</sup>

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

*Note.*  $n = 165$ .

<sup>a</sup> External loadings  $\geq 0.708$ , except for the manifest variables PC1 (0.628), SC4 (0.594), and LC1 (0.633).

<sup>b</sup> Cross-loadings of the variables manifest between the constructs themselves greater than with the other constructs.

<sup>c</sup> Square root of the AVE greater than the correlation between the other LV.

By analyzing Table 2, it is possible to see that all LV resulted in composite reliability values greater than 0.7, measured by Dillon-Goldstein's rho, and the first eigenvalue of the MV matrix greater than one and considerably much higher than the second eigenvalue, in line with what was suggested by Sanchez (2013), assuming, therefore, the unidimensionality of the measurement models. Sanchez (2013) states that, in this case, the MV of each reflective construct are related in such a way that they occupy the same dimensional space.

Through the results presented in Table 2, one can assume the convergent validity of the measurement models, given that it deals with the relationship between the MV of the same construct, that is, sharing the proportion of the variance in common. This result occurs through the AVE values of all LV that are above 0.5, as suggested by Hair et al. (2016), and the cross-loadings of all MV that reached values equal to or greater than 0.708 – except for of PC1, SC4, and LC1, as already mentioned –, in accordance with the criterion proposed by Hair et al. (2016) and Sanchez (2013).

Similarly, the discriminant validity of measurement models can be evidenced, which refers to the improper relationship between MV and distinct LV, that is, the degree to which a construct is different from the others. This conclusion is drawn by analyzing the results in Table 2, in which the criterion of discriminating validity for cross-loadings was met because the cross-loading of the MV with the LV of their construct proved to be higher when compared to the LV of the other constructs (Hair et al., 2016; Sanchez, 2013), in accordance with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, in which the root of the stroke must be greater than its correlation with LV of the other constructs (Hair et al., 2016).

We evaluated the structural model using the method of variance inflation factor (VIF) to verify collinearity. As a measure of model accuracy, the determination coefficient was evaluated ( $R^2$ ), and the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients were assessed through bootstrapping, for which the number of 5,000 subsamples has been defined in order to obtain more accurate estimates. The measure of predictive relevance of the model was evaluated by the average of the MV redundancy index.

The extent to which the standard error was increased by the presence of multicollinearity was assessed by VIF, which returned values below 5 ( $VIF < 5$ ), allowing the joint presence of all constructs of the model (Hair et al., 2016).

The goodness of fit (GoF) index obtained in the model was 0.4088, used as a general fit of the model. There is no unanimity in the literature or guidelines for classifying values as high, moderate, or low. According to the gradation proposed by Wetzels et al. (2009) – low GoF = 0.1, average GoF = 0.25, and high GoF = 0.36 –, in this study, we can consider the general fit of the model to be high since  $GoF = 0.4088 > 0.36$ .

Then, the path coefficients and their statistical significance were analyzed (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Path coefficients*

Relations	Coefficient	Significance
PC → LS	0.346	0.0006
Mod_PCxSC → LS (moderation)	-0.655	0.0018
PC → LC	0.711	9.86e-15
Mod_PCxSC → LC (moderation)	-0.552	0.0016

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

*Note.*  $n = 165$ ; bootstrapping = 5,000 subsamples.

It is perceived that in the direct relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction with life (PC → LS), the path coefficient is positive and has a level of significance before the limit is adopted ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This result suggests that an increase of one unit of the respondents' perception in relation to the latent variable PC, on a scale from 1 to 5, implies an increase of 0.346 in LS, that is, PC improves the perception of LS. In addition, it is clear that the coefficient of the multiplication term (relation Mod\_PCxSC → LS) is negative and significant. In other words, the perception of SC acts as the moderator of the relationship between PC and LS, making the relationship between PC and LS stronger in low levels of structural constraints. In high levels of structural restrictions, the relationship becomes weaker – the higher the level of perceived SC, the weaker the relationship between PC and LS.

It is also observed, in Table 3, that, in the direct relationship between perceiving a calling and living a calling (PC → LC), the path coefficient is positive and significant, suggesting that the addition of one unit of the respondents' perception in relation to the latent variable PC implies an increase of 0.711 in LC, that is, PC improves the perception of LC. It is also seen that the coefficient of the multiplication term (relation Mod\_PCxSC → LC) is negative and significant. That is, in the relationship between PC and LC, the perception of SC also acts as a moderator, making the relationship between PC and LC stronger in environments with low SC and, in environments with high SC, the relationship becomes weaker. In conclusion, the higher the level of SC, the weaker the association between PC and LC.

Table 4 presents the result of the precision measurement of the model ( $R^2$ ) related to each endogenous LV, that is, the variation in endogenous LV evidenced by the variation in the LV related to it.



**Table 4**  
*Determination coefficient and redundancy index*

Endogenous latent variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Average redundancy index
LS	0.159	0.0955
LC	0.412	0.2738

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

*Note.* n = 165; bootstrapping = 5,000 subsamples.

It is observed that the R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.16 (LS) and 0.41 (LC) can be considered relevant, mainly in an exploratory study and considering the set of variables not present in the model (e.g., life meaning). From the gradation proposed by Cohen (1988) to effect size (f<sup>2</sup>) in behavioral sciences (0.02, low; 0.15, average; 0.35, high), the R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.16 would be classified as medium and high, respectively, since:

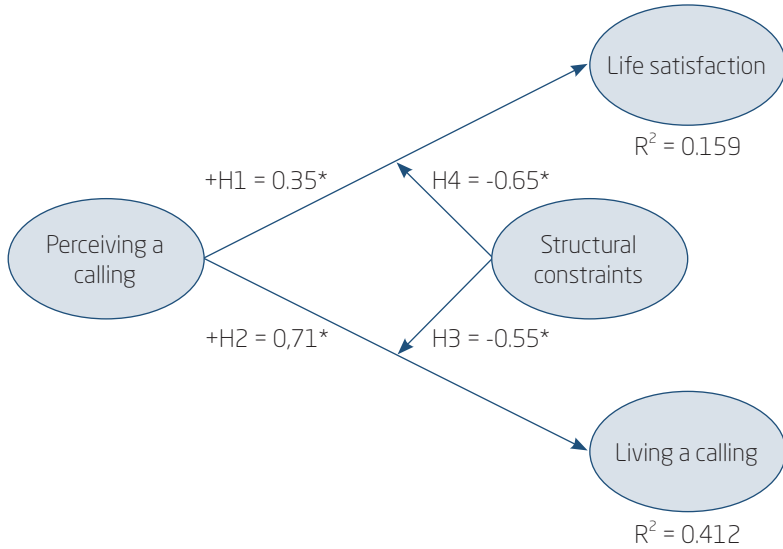
$$f^2 = \frac{R^2}{1 - R^2}$$

Thus, the R<sup>2</sup> of 0.16 and 0.41 indicate that the relationships established explain 16% of the variance of LS and 41% of LC, which gives the model a reasonable fit. It is also registered that for LS, the R<sup>2</sup><sub>adjus</sub> was 0.141, and the R<sup>2</sup><sub>adjus</sub> of the direct relationship between PC and LS, controlling the other variables, was only 0.025, indicating little loss of predictive power (0.159-0.141) and relevance of the moderate effect (0.141-0.025). For LC, the R<sup>2</sup><sub>adjus</sub> was 0.401, and the R<sup>2</sup><sub>adjus</sub> of the direct relationship between PC and LC, controlling for the other variables, was 0.319, also indicating little loss of predictive power (0.412-0.401) and relevance of the moderate effect (0.412-0.319).

In turn, the mean of the redundancy index shows how much the variation of the MV of the exogenous variable explains the variation of the MV of the endogenous variable. In other words, the MV of LS explains 9.5% of the MV of the constructs that impact it, and the LC, 27.4% of the MV of the constructs that impact it.

Next, in Figure 2, the values of R<sup>2</sup> and path coefficients are shown.

**Figure 2**  
*Results of the structural model*



*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

*Note:* \* Significant at 0.01.

Finally, Table 5 is presented, in which the results obtained in the hypotheses tests are illustrated.

**Table 5**  
*Results of the hypotheses tests*

Hypotheses	Results
H1: PC impacts LS.	Supported
H2: PC impacts LC.	Supported
H3: SC moderates the relationship between PC and LC.	Supported
H4: SC moderates the relationship between PC and LS.	Supported

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

## DISCUSSION

The results allow dialogue with the literature in three central aspects. First, the study challenges the dominant view in the literature and in career



counseling practice that perceiving an occupational calling leads individuals to greater satisfaction with life, regardless of structural conditions (Duffy et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2015). Unlike this work, the studies published so far on the subject have been carried out in developed countries, where there is greater financial stability, enabling a safe life even in alternative professions (Duffy & Dik, 2013). In a context with low structural restrictions, the simple fact of perceiving a calling would lead individuals to greater satisfaction in relation to their existence (Hirschi & Hermann, 2012). Thus, this work made it possible to identify that, in a less favorable economic context, the effects of seeing work from the perspective of an occupational calling are less positive for the individual in terms of their satisfaction with life. This is a relevant reflection as there is a tendency in the Brazilian scenario to care for the practical notions derived from studies conducted in other contexts without there being a due consideration of the consequences of doing so.

Second, the result also allows bringing to light the importance of analyzing the level of structural constraints when discussing the relationship between perceiving and living a calling. Despite the existence of an agentic argument, in which the context is seen as irrelevant (Dik et al., 2020), other studies argue that a high level of structural restrictions causes individuals to face greater difficulties when activating a calling in a formal position (Berg et al., 2010). Thus, there are mixed results in the literature, which sometimes defends the individual's agency power and sometimes emphasizes the relevance of the context (Mansur & Felix, 2021). In view of this discussion, this work is added to those that argue that the search for LC does not occur in a void but is circumscribed by a set of restrictions and access to opportunities that influence the probability of a perceived calling being experienced.

Third, the study is in line with the assumptions of the work psychology model, which positions income and work volition (belief that the power of choice exists, even in structural conditions of scarcity) as explanatory variables of decent work (Duffy et al., 2017). The idea that higher levels of these variables would increase the chances that individuals will build careers with greater financial, physical, and emotional security (Blustein et al., 2016) is in line with the findings of this research. Thus, this study adds to others in the literature on occupational calling that have suggested that income and work volition restrictions inhibit the possibility of living but not of perceiving a calling (Hirschi et al., 2018).

The results demonstrated the pronounced moderating effect of the perception of structural restrictions in a more unstable and less favorable economic context, with greater uncertainty and less access to opportunities





when compared to the economically favorable scenarios of developed countries. Therefore, it can be assumed that environments with great structural restrictions directly affect the individual's ability to live a perceived calling, as the greater the perception of structural restrictions, the smaller the relationship between perceiving a calling with life satisfaction and living a calling.

## CONCLUSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main conclusion is that the positive effects of perceiving a calling under living a calling and satisfaction with life depend on how much the individual perceives that they are in a context favorable to the construction of a meaningful career. Thus, it is noted the importance of considering the context in which individuals are inserted when discussing the effects of perceiving an occupational calling.

If the career literature dominantly continues to disregard economic and employment restrictions of some work contexts, there is a risk of creating unrealistic career expectations in individuals living in less favorable contexts (Baruch & Vardi, 2016). As much of the career literature is produced in countries with more favorable structural conditions, a dictatorship of happiness can be created in working environments such as Brazil (Felix & Cavazotte, 2019), in which individuals are socially pressured to pursue a calling and live a purpose. It is worth mentioning that it is not a matter of disregarding occupational calling but of drawing attention to the importance of having a more realistic and conscious discussion considering the limitations and “thorns” that exist on the way.

This study has limitations that can be overcome in future studies. First, despite emphasizing the importance of the individual's perception of the structural context in which they are inserted, the study was conducted with a sample of Brazilians only. Future research may expand the sample to other emerging countries in order to seek broader evidence for the thesis supported here. Second, the effects of the interaction of variables at the individual level were not considered in the model studied. It is possible that individuals with personal characteristics, such as career adaptability or resilience, react differently to highly structurally constrained environments. Third, the sample consisted of 165 respondents, which, although satisfactory, could be expanded.

In practice, the results presented here can support the decision-making of professionals predisposed to abandon a solid career in order to venture



into their occupational callings in uncertain and insecure scenarios, in which structural restrictions and institutional void are predominant. In addition, it is expected that career counselors will take the realistic view presented in this study into account so that individuals are more aware that, in contexts of resource constraints, occupational callings may not generate highly acclaimed positive results. This may apply to both employees and self-employed professionals.

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