

The Impact of Civil Servants' Career Calling on Their Learning Behavior—The Mediating Effects of Career Commitment

Jianglin Ke¹, Yuan Zeng¹ and Chen Chen^{1,*}

¹School of Government, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

*Corresponding author. Email: Chenchen93@mail.bnu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Although various positive effects of career calling have been found, few studies link career calling with civil servants' learning behavior. In order to address this problem and find out the way to promote the self-regulated and continuous learning of the civil service team, from the individual level, we developed a model theorizing that career calling helps civil servants' keep learning behavior with career commitment as a mediator. According to the SPSS analysis of 367 civil servants' questionnaire data, it is found that career calling of civil servants has a significant positive effect on their self-regulated learning and continuous learning behavior, and career commitment plays a significant partial mediating role in it. In all, this study not only addresses the effects of career calling on learning behavior from the perspective of career commitment, but also demonstrates the importance of career calling and career commitment in the field of public management. Therefore, the organization should strengthen the ideological construction of the civil servants, once the civil servants sense and realize the importance of their own career and the responsibility and mission in this job, they can have self-regulated and continuous learning behavior from the internal cause.

Keywords: career calling; career commitment; self-regulated learning; continuous learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction of civil servants is one of the important contents of party building. Under the government-led management system, civil servants play an important role in promoting the implementation of various policies and guidelines, the learning behavior and advancement of civil servants has received extensive attention. Career calling originated from religious beliefs and then extended to the professional environment. This concept has made scholars realize that career choices and career development are not limited to finding a job, and people are also looking for their inner career calling. When people pursue external material conditions such as salary and status, they will also pursue the meaning and impact of their career on individuals, and the mission and responsibilities that result from it [1]. This has become a starting point and thinking point for studying the self-regulated learning and continuous learning behavior of civil servants. At the same time, the working atmosphere of government departments makes civil servants more prone to inertia than other professions. Career calling is to regard occupation as a kind of value orientation. It is an individual's willingness to associate occupation with life meaning and responsibility, and generate related proactive behaviors. Therefore, this research explores the impact of internal factors on the learning behavior of civil servants from the subjective

individual level, that is, conducting research to explore the correlation between career calling and learning behavior, and introduce career commitment as mediator.

2. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Main Effect

Career calling is a subjective psychological perception [2]. Self-regulated learning has received widespread attention from educational psychology since the 1980s. Zimmerman (1989) defined the concept of autonomous learning as the active participation of students based on Bandura's social learning theory [3]. Based on the literature, we define the self-regulated learning of civil servants as a conscious, active and active learning behavior based on subjective wishes, that is, to improve their work ability, actively setting learning goals and completing them as planned. The current research on learning behavior not only focuses on self-regulated learning, but continuous learning has also gradually attracted scholars' attention. London and Mone (1999) define the concept of continuous learning as the purposeful acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities by individuals in order to meet expected future needs, emphasizing development or learning needs, and thinking that people who can continue to learn are often to meet the needs of constantly exceeding their current level [4].

Combined with the theory of self-determination, individuals are free to choose their own behaviors to meet their own needs based on their environment. Under this potential, people tend to choose behaviors or tasks that are beneficial to their own development and are interested in performing them. This is generated by internal motivation. Steger and Dik (2009) found that employees with a higher level of career calling often have a higher evaluation of the meaning of the profession, thus promoting employees' aspirations at work and more willing to fight for career development [5]. Dobrow and Tost-Karas (2011) found that career calling is positively associated with employee engagement [2]. Serow (1994) pointed out that teachers with career calling are more likely to choose to devote their free time to related work tasks to pursue better work results [6]. The research found that the richness of experience and sense of responsibility have a positive role in promoting personal continuous learning, and is affected by the mediating effect of intrinsic motivation through the research of Japanese system engineers and auto sales personnel [7]. Based on this, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: The career calling of civil servants has a positive effect on their learning behavior.

2.2. Mediating Effect

Career commitment is the intensity of motivation of an individual to work in the professional role he is engaged in [8], that is, the ambition to work hard to achieve a result, which is a positive and enterprising mental state. Career calling is similar to career commitment, but career commitment refers more to the psychological contract established between individuals and career, while career calling pays more attention to the meaning and importance of career to individuals, and to meet the needs of individuals to undertake social responsibilities. Based on the work adaptation theory [9], when the work meets the needs of the employees, the employees can get sustainable development in this work field. Through interviews with 157 animal keepers in the United States, it is found that people with higher levels of career calling are more willing to sacrifice personal time, wages, and abandon comfort in order to make the zoo reach a higher standard [10]. Duffy (2010) researched college students and found that career calling has an important impact on college students' career choices. Students with a higher level of career calling have a clearer understanding of their own needs, and there are fewer resignations or job changes, and they are more likely to have a sense of identity and emotional dependence [11]. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The career calling of civil servants is positively associated with their career commitment.

The outcome variables of career commitment have also been studied by a large number of scholars at home and abroad. Aryee and Tan (1992) found that employees with high levels of career commitment are very willing to devote a lot of energy to career development [12]. People with a high level of career commitment often make more

efforts to achieve their commitment to career development goals, and ultimately enhance their own competitiveness within and outside the organization [13]. Based on the above researches, we predict the following:

H3: The career commitment of civil servants has a positive impact on their learning behavior.

To sum up, career commitment has a positive relationship with career calling and individual learning behavior. Duffy, Dik and Steger (2011) hypothesized and verified the partial mediating effect of career commitment in the relationship between career calling and job satisfaction [14]. Career commitment may be an important link between career calling and work-related results. Ok and Vandenberghe (2016) defined career commitment as an individual's interest in one's own career, which mediates the positive relationship between proactive personality and ability development [15]. Thus, we propose the following:

H4: The career commitment of civil servants mediates the relationship between career calling and learning behavior.

3. METHOD

3.1. Sample

The study collected 480 questionnaires in China and 367 of them are valid. The effective rate was 78.46%. 153 samples are male, accounting for 41.69%, and 214 women, accounting for 58.31%. Educational background includes "under college degree", "college degree", "bachelor degree", "master degree or above" and each option accounts for 5.99%, 13.35%, 57.22%, and 23.43%. Working level includes "staff member", "senior staff member", "principle staff member", "deputy section chief or above" and each option accounting for 50.95%, 29.70%, 16.35%, 3.00%. Age includes "20-30", "31-40", "41-50", "51+" and each option accounts for 36.24%, 27.52%, 29.70%, 6.54%. Working years includes "under 5 years", "6-15 years", "16-30 years", "over 30 years" and each option accounts for 37.33%, 38.42%, 21.25%, and 3.00%.

3.2. Measuring

All variables we measured were from validated scales and all items were assessed on a Likert six-point scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree).

Career calling. We used the scale developed by Dobrow (2011) [2], which is a one-dimensional scale with 12 items. The reliability coefficient of this scale was .91.

Career commitment. We adopted the scale developed by Blau (1989) [16], including 7 items. The reliability coefficient of this scale was .88.

Learning behavior. This paper used the 11-item scale of "self-regulated learning" developed by Bandura (2001) [17], the 7-item scale of "continuous learning" developed by Watanabe et al. (2011) [7]. The reliability coefficient was .92 and .89 respectively.

Control variables. Control variables includes gender, educational background, working level, age and working experience. Specifically, gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; educational background: 1 = “under college degree”, 2 = “college degree”, 3 = “bachelor”, 4 = “master or above”; working level: 1 = “staff member”, 2 = “senior staff member”, 3 = “principle staff member”, 4 = “deputy section chief or above”; age: 1 = “20-30”, 2 = “31-40”, 3 = “41-50”, 4 = “51-”; working experience: 1 = “0-5 year”, 2 = “6-15 years”, 3 = “16-30 years”, 4 = “>30 years”.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of Variables

SPSS 20.0 was used to calculate the data. Table 1 shows the results of mean value, standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficient. There are no abnormal results of mean value and standard deviation. From the results, it can be seen that the independent variable career calling has a significantly positive relationship and with the mediating variable career commitment and the dependent variable learning behavior (self-regulated learning and continuous learning), there is also a significant positive correlation between the mediating variable career commitment and the dependent variable learning behavior.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of variables (n=367)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Gender	1.58	0.497									
Educational background	2.98	0.780	.015								
Working level	1.73	0.878	-.164**	-.178**							
Age	2.07	0.963	-.103*	-.532**	.577**						
Working experience	2.02	0.925	-.090	-.380**	.557**	.795**					
Career calling	3.98	0.879	-.117*	-.104*	.120*	.196**	.115*				
Career commitment	3.79	0.958	-.123*	-.012	.059	.091	.020	.844**			
Learning behavior	4.21	0.787	-.108*	-.024	.021	.090	.004	.724**	.747**		
Self-regulated learning	4.18	0.792	-.096	-.039	.022	.101	.015	.730**	.745**	.984**	
Continuous learning	4.26	0.845	-.119*	-.001	.020	.069	-.012	.672**	.705**	.965**	.903**

*p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001

4.2. The Regression Analysis

In order to further determine the relationship of related variables, we use the regression analysis to conduct in-depth analysis. Meanwhile, the collinearity diagnosis was carried out. The research results showed that the variance inflation factor (VIF) of model 1 to model 23 was less than the critical value of 10, which met the standard; The Durbin-Watson value of model 1 to model 23 is in the range of no autocorrelation at the test level of $\alpha=0.05$. The

above test results show that the following model is acceptable.

The regression results of Table 2 show that career calling have significant positive effects on learning behavior ($\beta=0.728$, $P < 0.001$), self-regulated learning ($\beta = 0.734$, $P < 0.001$), continuous learning ($\beta = 0.676$, $P < 0.001$). H1 is validated. The career calling have significant positive effects on the career commitment of civil servants ($\beta = 0.853$, $P < 0.001$). H2 is validated.

Table 2. The effect of career calling (N=367)

Dependent variables	Learning behavior		Self-regulated learning		Continuous learning		Career commitment		
	Models	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Control variables									
Gender		-.104*	-.032	-.091	-.020	-.116*	-.050	-.113*	-.030
Educational background		.046	.046	.035	.035	.060	.059	.053	.053
Working level		-.045	-.053	-.051	-.059	-.033	-.040	.004	-.006
Age		.273**	.074	.276**	.075	.252*	.067	.226	-.007
Working experience		-.180	-.094	-.171	-.084	-.182*	-.103	-.152*	-.051
Independent variables									
Career calling			.728***		.734***		.676***		.853***
R²		.033	.534	.032	.541	.033	.466	.031	.721
Adjusted R²		.020	.527	.018	.534	.019	.457	.018	.716
F		2.465*	68.840***	2.361*	70.798***	2.440*	52.279***	2.320*	155.011***
ΔR²		.033	.501	.032	.510	.033	.433	.031	.690
F		2.456*	387.519***	2.361*	399.933***	2.440*	291.650***	2.320*	889.9049***

*p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001

The regression results of Table 3 show that career commitment have significant positive effects on learning behavior ($\beta = 0.739$, $P < 0.001$), self-regulated learning (β

$= 0.739$, $P < 0.001$), continuous learning ($\beta = 0.696$, $P < 0.001$). H3 is validated.

Table 3. The effect of career commitment (N=367)

Dependent variables	Learning behavior		Self-regulated learning		Continuous learning	
Models	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13	M14
<i>Control variables</i>						
Gender	-.104*	-.020	-.091	-.008	-.116*	-.037
Educational background	.046	.007	.035	-.004	.060	.023
Working level	-.045	-.047	-.051	-.054	-.033	-.035
Age	.273**	.105	.276**	.109	.252*	.095
Working experience	-.180*	-.067	-.171	-.059	-.182*	-.077
<i>Independent variable</i>						
Career commitment		.739***		.739***		.696***
R ²	.033	.562	.032	.561	.033	.502
Adjusted R ²	.020	.555	.018	.553	.019	.494
F	2.465*	77.012***	2.361*	76.564***	2.440*	60.450***
ΔR ²	.033	.529	.032	.529	.033	.469
F	2.456*	434.932***	2.361*	433.437***	2.440*	339.074***

*p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001

The regression results of Table 4 show that the regression coefficient of career calling decreases after adding career commitment into model, but it is still significant. The results of model 15 to 17 show that coefficient value β of career calling decreased from 0.728 to 0.336, the results of model 18 to 20 show that coefficient value β of career

calling decreased from 0.734 to 0.357, the results of model 21 to 23 show that coefficient value β of career calling decreased from 0.676 to 0.285. This indicates that career commitment partly mediates the relationships between career calling and learning behavior (self-regulated learning, continuous learning). H4 is validated.

Table 4. The mediating effect of career commitment (N=367)

Dependent variables	Learning behavior			Self-regulated learning			Continuous learning		
Models	M15	M16	M17	M18	M19	M20	M21	M22	M23
<i>Control variables</i>									
Gender	-.104*	-.032	-.019	-.091	-.020	-.006	-.116*	-.050	-.036
Educational background	.046	.046	.022	.035	.035	.012	.060	.059	.035
Working level	-.045	-.053	-.050	-.051	-.059	-.057	-.033	-.040	-.038
Age	.273**	.074	.077	.276**	.075	.078	.252*	.067	.071
Working experience	-.180	-.094	-.070	-.171	-.084	-.062	-.182*	-.103	-.079
<i>Independent variable</i>									
Career calling		.728***	.336***		.734***	.357***		.676***	.285***
<i>Mediator</i>									
Career commitment			.458***			.441***			.458***
R ²	.033	.534	.593	.032	.541	.595	.033	.466	.524
Adjusted R ²	.020	.527	.585	.018	.534	.588	.019	.457	.515
F	2.465*	68.840***	74.704***	2.361*	70.798***	75.498***	2.440*	52.279***	56.478***
ΔR ²	.033	.501	.059	.032	.510	.054	.033	.433	.058
F	2.456*	387.519***	51.710***	2.361*	399.933***	48.111***	2.440*	291.650***	44.111***

*p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The empirical results have shown that career calling is significantly positively correlated with self-regulated learning ($\beta=0.734$, $p<0.001$) and continuous learning ($\beta=0.676$, $p<0.001$). This is consistent with the related

research on career calling [14][18][19]. That is, people with a higher level of career calling are more able to feel the importance of the profession for the realization of personal value and the contribution value to others in society, so they are more willing to improve themselves from their own perspective, and maintain long-term proactive learning for better handling work affairs and adapting to changes in the complex environment, which reflects the prosociality of career calling. This also explains why Chinese government leaders have repeatedly emphasized that as the civil servants of the people, they must keep in mind the original intention of struggle and the historical mission of the people. Only when they regard the profession of civil servants as a calling, a job with high expectations, can they be strict with themselves, demand themselves with high standards, constantly pursue a better improvement through self-regulated and continuous learning for the welfare of the people and expect more career calling, which is consistent with the results of Seller et al. (2005) on women who believe in Christianity [20]. Career commitment has a significant partly mediating effect on the relationship between career calling and learning behavior. When an individual associates his career with the realization of his own life value, he will have more emotional dependence on the profession, and he is willing to continue to engage in the job both psychologically and in action, and civil servants have the willingness to take the initiative. As a result, they will have long-term self-regulated learning behavior and continue to complete the related work of the profession, which is consistent with the research conclusion of Bunderson (2009) [10]. On the contrary, when civil servants have a poor perception of the profession and tend to leave their jobs, the continuity and initiative of learning will also be affected.

From the perspective of learning internal driving, this study selects the internal variables of civil servants' career calling and career commitment. At present, most researches on career calling focus on the variables of job outcomes [2][6][14]. This study supplements the outcome variables under the positive effect of career calling, and also extends the research objects from employees, college students, etc. to the staff of government departments. At the same time, career commitment plays a mediating role in the relationship between career calling and learning behavior, which produces corresponding emotional dependence based on establishing a high level of recognition of the profession, thus making civil servants adhere to self-regulated learning. This study makes up for the current lack of research on civil servants' learning initiative and persistence mechanism, enriches the relevant theories on how to promote and manage civil servants' learning, and puts forward a relevant basis for civil servants to bear in mind their original mission in theory.

Suggestions for the management of civil servants. First of all, society is in a period of rapid development, only through continuous learning can government staff survive and develop in the new century society [21]. Therefore, the rectification and management of civil servants should start from the essence. They should be able to perceive their mission and people's expectations, and connect them with

the realization of the value of life. This is also reflected in the process of selecting suitable young talents to join. Organizations should focus on their ideas about the professional nature and work content of civil servants, and try to give priority to those who match the overall values of the organization in the selection process. Secondly, career commitment is the dependent emotion and behavior formed based on establishing an identity with the job. Therefore, the organization also needs to help individuals form and realize their career commitment, such as periodically investigating their current work emotion so as to realize accurate management; and it is necessary to carry out some activities to communicate with role models, which will enable them to better manage their behaviors, and learn to approach the role models through hard work.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. M. Berg, A. M. Grant, and V. Johnson, "When callings are calling: Crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings," *Organization Science*, vol. 21, pp. 973-994, 2010.
- [2] S. R. Dobrow, J. Tosti-Kharas, "Calling: The development of a scale measure," *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 64, pp. 1001-1049, 2011.
- [3] B. J. Zimmerman, "A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 64, pp. 329-339, 1989.
- [4] M. London, E. M. Mone, "Continuous learning," San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 1999.
- [5] M. F. Steger, B. J. Dik, "Work as meaning: Individual and organizational benefits of engaging in meaningful work," Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- [6] R. C. Serow, "Called to teach: A study of highly motivated pre-service teachers," *Journal of Research & Development in Education*, vol. 27, pp. 65-72, 1994.
- [7] S. Watanabe, M. Tareq, and Y. Kanazawa, "When openness to experience and conscientiousness affect continuous learning: A mediating role of intrinsic motivation and a moderating role of occupation," *Japanese Psychological Research*, vol. 53, pp. 1-14, 2011.
- [8] B. A. Hall, R. P. McKay, and B. K. Mitsunaga, "Dimensions of role commitment: career patterns of deans in nursing," *Communicating Nursing Research*, vol. 4, pp. 99, 1971.

- [9] R. V. Dawis, L. H. Lofquist, "A psychological theory of work adjustment," Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- [10] J. S. Bunderson, J. A. Thompson, "The Call of the Wild: Zookeepers, Callings, and the Double-Edged Sword of Deeply Meaningful Work," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 54, pp. 32-57, 2009.
- [11] R. D. Duffy, "Sense of Control and Career Adaptability among Undergraduate Students," *Journal of Career Assessment*, vol. 18, pp. 420-430, 2010.
- [12] S. Aryee, K. Tan, "Antecedents and outcomes of career commitment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 40, pp. 288-305, 1992.
- [13] T. W. H. Ng, L. T. Eby, and K. L. Sorensen, "Feldman D C. Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta-analysis," *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 58, pp. 367-408, 2005.
- [14] R. D. Duffy, B. J. Dik, and M. F. Steger, "Calling and work-related outcomes: Career commitment as a mediator," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 78, pp. 210-218, 2011.
- [15] A. B. Ok, C. Vandenberghe, "Organizational and career-oriented commitment and employee development behaviors," *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, vol. 31, pp. 930-945, 2016.
- [16] G. Blau, "Testing the generalizability of a career commitment measure and its impact on employee turnover," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 35, pp. 88-103, 1989.
- [17] A. Bandura, "Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents," Age Information publishing, 2001.
- [18] D. T. Hall, D. E. Chandler, "Psychological success: When the career is a calling," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 26, pp. 155-176, 2005.
- [19] J. F. Domene, "Calling and Career Outcome Expectations: Mediated Role of Self-Efficacy," *Journal of Career Assessment*, vol. 20, pp. 281-292, 2012.
- [20] T. S. Sellers, K. Thomas, J. Batts, K. Ostman, "Women called: A qualitative study of Christian women dually called to motherhood and career," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, vol. 33, pp. 198-209, 2005.
- [21] J. S. Wessels, "Equipping public officials for the challenges of responsible governance: A South African perspective on lifelong learning," *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, vol. 66, pp. 311-324, 2000.