

# **The Shape of Work that Satisfies: A Qualitative Study of the Perspectives of Special Education Teachers who Experience their Careers as a Calling**

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## **Abstract**

Callings refer to life and work roles that are experienced as personally rewarding and meaningful because they are perceived as serving purposes beyond oneself. Individuals who approach their careers as a way of living out their callings report higher levels of motivation, satisfaction and happiness at work. They also demonstrate greater engagement and commitment to their jobs. The pursuit of careers that are callings often require the individuals involved in them to make tough decisions and significant sacrifices, which could exact a toll on the other spheres of their lives. Organisations that have employees with a calling orientation to their work should tailor efforts to promote their success and well-being by carefully attending to its obvious benefits and hidden burdens. This paper describes a qualitative study that examined the experiences of twelve teachers in a special education school in Singapore who report a strong sense of calling. Through in-depth interviews, participants offer insights into the characteristics of that calling and its impact on their lives. Thematic analyses revealed a number of personal attributes and competencies shared by the participants as well as several salient features of their teaching practice as contributing factors to their potent experience of work as a calling. These findings will inform interventions and initiatives in the area of career and professional development for individuals and organisations.

Key words: