A Quest for Meaning

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Answering the question of what you are meant to do in life can be a thought to ponder as you lie sleepless in the middle of the night. Or you can put form and structure to the question and set out to find the answer. Thanks to recent research on the topic of “callings,” we have fresh insights into an ancient concept.

“I’ve always been interested in why some people seem to live full, rich lives, while others seem less satisfied with their chosen path,” says Dr. A.R. Elangovan, associate professor of organizational behaviour at UVic Business and one of three researchers who examined this topic.

Elangovan along with Dr. Craig Pinder and Dr. Murdith McLean began to dig deeper into the topic. The origin of the concept of callings has its roots in religion. However more recent thinking has associated the concept with one’s occupation. While the term has been used differently over time, three things remained constant: a calling is action-oriented; it communicates a clear sense of purpose, and a desire to make the world a better place.

“Consider the nursing profession,” says Pinder, an authority on work motivation and a distinguished professor of organizational behaviour at UVic Business. “Their work can be dangerous and hard on their health; they are exposed to germs and sometimes abusive behaviour. From an OB/scientific point of view, it is hard to understand why someone would undertake this work. However, in my experience I found nurses to be compassionate and understanding, so I was intrigued by what motivated them to undertake this work.”

How does an individual find their calling? “While some people may suddenly realize what they are meant to do, many others arrive at the same conclusion after many years of doing,” says Elangovan.

Others can take a more systematic approach. The researchers found four conditions were necessary in order for one to find their calling.

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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Canada’s Competitive Advantage

At UVic Business, we take our responsibility to improve the practice of management through research, and thus improve our understanding of human behaviour and potential very seriously. The production of outstanding research is a core value within the faculty and we embed this value in our vision statement.

We are continually challenged to adopt new ways of generating and disseminating knowledge and engaging with the broader community to support the needs of an increasingly complex world. Implications of more pluralism and a wider range of research approaches are profound as we pursue the broader goals of more rigorous and relevance. As we move forward to create the knowledge that will enhance Canada’s management capacity and competitive advantage, we need to be explicit about our research strategies and goals. We will need to work more closely with practitioners and generate insights using research approaches that move us outside our methodological comfort zones.

As mentioned by J.W. Lorsch and others, it is also critical that we recognize the role of management research and business schools within the broader university community. As universities move toward integrating knowledge both as science and as culture, management research, and business and management schools are in an excellent position to act as knowledge producers and brokers among the science, business/industry and the wider community.

I’m proud to say that we have established a strong record of research productivity. Using data prepared by Professor Paul Beamish of the Ivey School of Business, and factoring in size, UVic Business ranked first in Canada between 1995 and 2000 in terms of articles published per full-time faculty member. A recent internal analysis showed that our engagement in research has become stronger over the years. In fact, the total participation rate of faculty members active in research is 84 per cent for the period 2004 to 2008.

PhD in International Management & Organization Established

UVic Business has introduced an innovative PhD program that will train prospective scholars to become part of the cutting edge of management research and teaching. The program’s focus is international management and organization with specializations in business strategy, organizational behaviour and theory, human resources and cross-cultural management, or business and sustainability. The four-year program is internationally-focused and includes mentorship, small classes with close associations with professors, optional industry practicum and international research exchange to enhance research capabilities; comprehensive teacher training; and a competitive funding package.

Application details are online; candidates are invited to apply earlier than the annual deadline of Feb. 15. Classes begin September 2010. For more information about the PhD program, visit www.business.uvic.ca/phd.

Global Issues Frame International Business Research

UVic Business international business faculty members continue to be engaged in a variety of research activities. The global financial crisis provides the backdrop for a number of these research initiatives, as do the increasing inter-linkages in the global economy. For example, research is underway on how fluctuations in the Canadian dollar affect the sales, productivity, survival, and profits of Canadian firms; investor responses to environmental risk in foreign direct investment; alliance management capabilities and alliance portfolio performance; global cities and international location strategies; determining which capabilities are important for the success of global account managers and how to cultivate these capabilities in a cross-cultural context; globalization strategies of emerging market firms and how they transfer their competencies; and the effects of interpersonal networking.

These and other recent efforts have been published in several major journals over the past year. For more information about the UVic Business International Business focus, contact Dr. Saul Klein at sklein@uvic.ca.

Delighting Global Customers

By delving into the world of global account management, Dr. Linda Hui Shi and her colleagues provide new insights that will assist managers and executives better manage their relationships with multi-national enterprises.

“One of the keys to success in managing a global account is establishing an integrated organizational strategy to ensure effective vertical and horizontal communication throughout an organization. "With a global account, top-down decision making is more common," says Shi. “ ”

Shi also says that suppliers should concentrate on adding value rather than offering their global customers lower prices. "Avoid the trap of a price squeeze, lower prices drive down profit margins and with lower profit, suppliers cannot be innovative, which may ruin the relationship in the long run."

"It is very important for suppliers, when managing a global account, to go one step further, to show that you are better than other suppliers. Look beyond price and concentrate on delighting the customer."

For more information about this research contact Linda Shi at lshi@uvic.ca.
Supporting Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurs

To introduce more aboriginal youth to the idea of individual entrepreneurship, Dr. Brent Mainprize piloted an entrepreneurship camp for Nisga’a youth. “It’s an exciting time in First Nation’s history,” says Mainprize, assistant professor, entrepreneurship at UVic Business. “Through the treaty process they are gaining control of their land, natural resources and money, and with that comes all sorts of entrepreneurial opportunities.”

The camps—aimed at helping Nisga’a youth discover the opportunities and learn to gain control of their financial future — were very successful. “If the youth are geared up to see things in news ways, they can look internally within their own community, rather than leaving to find a job, and find ways to leverage the resources,” says Mainprize, who is working with the new National Chair of Aboriginal Economic Development, Dr. James Hopkins, to seek additional resources, and make the camps more widely available to Canada’s fastest growing youth population.

Mainprize has also supported aboriginal community entrepreneurship through his work with a capital funding agency, redesigning a more transparent lending process, training credit officers and incorporating cultural elements into standard business principles. As a result, loan defaults went down and community goodwill went up.

For more information about Aboriginal entrepreneurship contact Dr. Brent Mainprize at brentm@uvic.ca or Dr. James Hopkins at hopkinsj@uvic.ca.

Entreprenuers Cook up New Opportunities

Researchers are coming to realize that many entrepreneurial opportunities are not recognized, but are instead created by entrepreneurs and their stakeholders. Instead of developing detailed plans to fulfill unmet needs in the marketplace, many entrepreneurs use a logic of “effectuation” to create new opportunities. They examine what they have, who and what they know and who are they. They then take these “ingredients,” and determine what kind of opportunities they can cook up — or bring into effect — with them. These individuals pay less attention to predictive market information but instead identify multiple potential markets, use partnerships to grow in them, and take early actions to develop these markets. Feedback from early actions can then be used to adjust ventures. Recent research has identified that expert entrepreneurs are more likely to use an effectual approach, while MBA students are more likely to use a predictive, detailed planning approach. Furthermore, effectual approaches have a positive effect on venture performance.

Yet, business planning has also been found to have positive effects on venture performance. Interestingly, however, these benefits are more pronounced for established ventures rather than small start-ups, and they are stronger in cultures where managers are comfortable with uncertainty, and thus able to improvise in response to new information. Improvisational behaviour was also found to have positive effects on venture performance, but only when entrepreneurs felt competent at improvising.

Other interesting new research in entrepreneurship examines the relationship between cultural factors in entrepreneurial firms and their financial performance, the negative effect of institutional voids and corruption on entrepreneurial activities in developing and emerging markets, the determinants of social entrepreneurship, and the impact of emotions on entrepreneurial persistence and subsequent start-ups.

For information about these trends in entrepreneurship research, contact Dr. Charlene Zietsma at czietsma@uvic.ca.

It’s a Good Day for Entrepreneurs

Whether you get up feeling good, or start the day in fog of pessimism, every day can be a good day for entrepreneurs. Dr. Marilyn Uy and her colleagues Professor Robert A. Baron and Dr. Max-Der Foo, found that both positive and negative affect (feelings/emotions) have a helpful influence on the effort of entrepreneurs.

“We decided to examine the importance of affect in entrepreneurship because we often hear that there are no well-developed norms, scripts, or rules for entrepreneurs to follow when they create a new venture,” says Uy. “Some entrepreneurs say that they ‘make it up as they go along.’ And decades of careful research indicate that it is precisely in such situations that our emotions tend to exert the strongest and most far-reaching effects.

“Negative affect signals that things are not going well in the venture and usually leads an entrepreneur to expend more effort on tasks requiring immediate attention. Positive affect signals that things are going well. One might think that this would reduce effort; however, we found just the opposite. Positive feelings increased venture effort, particularly efforts that are future-oriented, because positive affect encouraged future-oriented thinking.

“High effort levels often pay off for entrepreneurs and help them attain success, and it is especially important for them to persevere in the early-stage in order for their venture to have a reasonable chance of success.”

The results of their research can be found in the “Journal of Applied Psychology.” For more information on Uy’s research, contact her at muy@uvic.ca.

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To Script or Not to Script

Do you think scripts are just for actors? Well think again. Service scripts are a design and management technique that provide employees with a detailed guide for their interaction with the customer during a service encounter. “Even though scripts are commonly used in the hotel industry to ensure a consistent level of service, few empirical studies have been done to determine their effectiveness,” says Dr. Liana Victorino, assistant professor of service operations management at UVic Business.

To fill that gap, Victorino, Dr. Rohit Verma and Dr. Don Wardell developed a video experiment to determine the impact scripting has on customers’ assessment of service quality. They developed service scenarios that depicted different scripting approaches for two types of encounters: a standardized interaction at check-in, and a more customized encounter at the concierge desk, to examine customers’ impressions of scripts.

Their findings suggest that customers’ perceptions of scripted encounters are mixed. “We found that customers easily detect when scripts are being used for both encounter types. For standardized encounters, such as checking in at a hotel, scripting did not have an effect on perceived service quality. On the other hand, for customized encounters, such as concierge requests, a highly scripted approach was found to negatively affect customers’ views of quality.”

Victorino says that savvy service managers should note that the indiscriminate use of scripts could influence their customers’ perception of service quality and in some cases this effect might be detrimental. By taking into consideration customers’ views of scripting, service managers will be able to appropriately match script level to the service encounter type. This alignment will enhance service design and delivery efforts and as a result should positively influence how customers perceive the service experience.

The full report is available at no charge from the Center for Hospitality Research, chr.cornell.edu. For more information contact Liana Victorino at lianav@uvic.ca.

New Influences on Service Management Research

Emerging technologies continue to have a strong influence on service management research. Understanding how firms can utilize technology to support customer participation in the design and delivery of the service experience is a central theme in this line of research. Social networks also are a relatively unexplored opportunity to better understand how customers gather information and make choices on service decisions.

Integrating channels is a related theme. Customers now have so many ways of receiving service and communicating with organizations (Internet, mobile, in-person, call centres, mail) that traditional customer relationship management systems are being challenged. Combined with the growing need to customize and personalize service, research is ongoing on how best to accomplish service excellence in the multi-channel environment.

A Quest for Meaning cont’d

“It could be a tragedy, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or a curiosity or a religious experience, but something will compel an individual to search for meaning in their life,” says Elangovan. “They won’t stop until they find it. Another piece of the puzzle is attentiveness. Our lives are bombarded with stimuli and our inner voice gets drowned by all the noise — you must be willing to listen and hear the call. You also must be willing to try out new things, and finally, become more aware of your own self,” says Elangovan.

“Finding one’s calling may be a mixed blessing,” says Finder. “People with callings have convictions, and if the work being done is contrary to the calling then there is potential for conflict — they may need to find a new job.”

He says organizations can also support an employee to find their calling. “They can create a culture that encourages risk taking or encourage an employee to try new things — don’t punish carefully designed ideas that don’t work out,” says Finder.

This new research into the concept of callings adds to traditional perspectives on career development and occupational choice. The researchers hope to stimulate further discussion and inquiry into the concept of callings including the possibility of an individual having more than one calling.

Their paper is in press at the “Journal of Vocational Behaviour: Callings and Organizational Behaviour.” For more information contact: arelango@uvic.ca; cpinder@uvic.ca; mmclean@uvic.ca.