

The Song of the River: A Study of Vocation in the Lives of Fundraisers

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Abstract

Viewing fundraising through the filter of vocation can provide fundraising professionals with an added layer of context and meaning to their work and bring resulting benefits to the organizations they work for and the communities they serve.

The Song of the River: A Study of Vocation in the Lives of Fundraisers explores what fundraising professionals think about the concept of vocation and their experience of it within their work. Findings from intimate interviews with leaders in the philanthropic field and a broad based survey of fundraising professionals across North America are considered in the light of an extensive review of available literature.

The study demonstrates a measure of diversity among fundraisers as it relates to how they define and experience vocation in their lives and in the workplace. This is particularly so when the respondents are considered across gender, nationality, age and tenure. Yet, there is a high level of consensus that the link between vocation and philanthropy is significant and requires professionals to consider their work within a larger philosophical framework.

This research considers organizational culture and the introduction of cultures of vocation within the philanthropic sector. The characteristics of such a culture are considered as well as the resulting benefits and implications for leadership.

Ultimately, it will be revealed that vocation resonates among fundraisers. A contemporary understanding of vocation encourages reflection among fundraising professionals about the meaning of their work to themselves and to the world. A vocational approach can enrich the lives of fundraising professionals, deepen their commitment to philanthropy and enhance organizational culture for the betterment of all.

The Song of the River

Sing your own song, said the river
Sing, sing your own song.
Out of yesterday song comes.
It goes into tomorrow,
Sing your own song.

With your life fashion beauty,
This too is the song.
Riches will pass and power,
But beauty remains.
Sing your own song.

All that is worth doing,
Do well, the river said.
Sing, sing your own song.
Certain and round be the measure,
Every line graceful and true.

Time is the mold, the weaver, carver,
Time and the workman together,
Sing your own song well,
Sing well, the river said,
Sing your own song well.

From The Blue Cat of Castle Town
by Catherine Coblenz

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Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

Spend some quality time around fundraising professionals and it won't take long for one or two to express the meaning and satisfaction they gain from their work. For some, this comes from generally knowing that, through their efforts, they are helping organizations achieve their missions, which in turn benefit society in a myriad of ways. For others, there is an added sense of personal calling they bring to their work. They claim fundraising is in fact an expression of a vocation, motivating them, inspiring passion and nurturing in them a sense of purpose and personal mission.

The word vocation itself is fraught with various (sometimes contradictory) meanings, powerful religious imagery and cultural challenges. Yet, it is also an idea embraced by those with deep commitment to make a difference in the world and is therefore worthy of exploration within the context of fundraising.

This project explores the concept of vocation, what fundraising professionals think about it and what value it may bring to fundraising professionals and the organizations they work for.

Problem Statement

There is a need to examine the concept of vocation in relation to those who are actively engaged in fundraising.

Purpose

Numerous leaders in the philanthropic sector have challenged fundraising professionals to be more than mere fundraising technicians. These leaders suggest there should be a corresponding alignment of personal values, commitment, passion and vision for the change we would like to see in the world. This challenge raises many questions and vocation may provide some of the answers.

Paul Pribbenow suggests that vocational exploration and education is a major responsibility for the fundraising profession. He says, “if we believe that we are called to serve the public practice of philanthropy, then educating each other about the meaning of that call seems like an essential aspect of our professional work.” (1998, p. 6). This study therefore is essential to continuing the dialogue about the nature of fundraising and the role of fundraising professionals, within a greater philosophical context.

Background

A set of assumptions provided the foundation for this research paper. First, it is assumed that all people have, or can discover a sense of calling or vocation. Vocation is understood as a universal concept, reserved not only for some special or unique people, but for all. This assumption is a powerful and equalizing factor as vocation is explored.

Second, the word vocation will be used fairly consistently throughout the project. While the term vocation is often understood within a religious and particularly Christian context, the concept it represents is demonstrated and expressed (sometimes with a different word) throughout various traditions of belief, cultures and histories. Examples of this

diversity are reviewed here. However, for the purposes of this project, the term vocation will be used as a point of entry for all readers.

Third, when fundraising is one's vocation or an expression of it, it is understood that their vocation is also the individual's job or livelihood. Outside the scope of this study, it is acknowledged that many people may find not just their avocation, but also their vocation in actions or activity well outside what they do to make a living.

Four, the study does not intend to suggest that fundraising must be viewed in the light of vocation nor that professional fundraisers who claim vocation as part of their experience are morally or professionally superior. While the very nature of fundraising is important to consider within the context of vocation, this project explores a concept that may provide an added layer of context and meaning to the work of fundraisers, at a point in history when many are seeking such layers in their work.

The terms "fundraising" and "fundraisers" used through this paper refer to the action and the individuals who engage in philanthropic activities related to the raising of charitable funds within an organizational or community context. It is acknowledged that other terms are used in the field to describe this work including development, advancement, resource development, philanthropic services to name only a few. "Fundraising" and "fundraisers" were selected for simplicity. For those who prefer the use of other terms to describe such activity, it is hoped the terms chosen are not unduly distracting nor lessen the perceived value of the content of the research.

Significance

There is little material available that specifically addresses the overlap of vocation and fundraising with more than a passing reference or imbued sense of obviousness, as though everyone understands and makes the same connection. Even the word vocation itself may be an obstacle. In recent decades vocation has been applied liberally and broadly in social and educational contexts, no longer being an exclusively religious term.

This study identifies themes that will help define vocation in an inclusive and accessible manner and explore the diverse connections made by fundraising professionals between their understanding of vocation and fundraising. The research will then consider the value that a vocational approach may bring to the practice of fundraising, fundraising professionals and the organizations they work for.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Introduction

To achieve the objectives of this research, the methodology used to gather data included:

1. Literature Review
2. Key Informant Interviews
3. Survey of Fundraising Professionals

Literature Review

There is little material available specifically about fundraising and vocation. However, there are many sources on vocation, calling, personal development, theology, psychology, the professions, career planning, organizational development and human resources. Drawn together and applied to the context of fundraising, the material is useful in addressing the research questions established to guide the research process.

The literature review drew from a variety of traditional and non-traditional sources. These sources ranged from books, journal articles, websites, speeches, and conference presentations to newsletters and e-newsletters (such as Paul Pribbenow's "Notes for the Reflective Practitioner") and sources from related bibliographies and reading lists.

Of further value was the Library at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, the resource library of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library. The Lilly Endowment website featuring the depth of their investment into the exploration of vocation was a fascinating source of information. Also referenced was the site for the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy.

Key Informant Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted in person (or by phone where limited by geography) with eleven senior fundraising professionals to obtain information about their understanding and experience of vocation. Each of the expert interview subjects were considered leaders in the field or known to have a strong sense of personal commitment to fundraising. The list of Key Informant Interview subjects is included as Appendix B.

At the time of the interviews, one subject represented a corporate foundation, two subjects' hospital foundations and five subjects' educational institutions. Three subjects were consultants to the non-profit sector (but coming from specifically fundraising backgrounds). Of the group of eleven, five were women, seven were Canadian and the years of fundraising experience ranged from 4 to 46. Six held the CFRE designation and one held the ACFRE designation. Further, five of the subjects were published authors.

The interview took the form of a personal conversation guided by twelve open-ended questions. The questions were formulated in response to findings from the literature review and from the guiding research questions. The questionnaire is included as Appendix A. Results from these interviews are outlined in the Findings section.

Survey of Fundraising Professionals

A survey instrument was developed and used to collect relevant information from a large pool of fundraising professionals. The questions addressed how the subjects felt about their work, their understanding of vocation and their related experience in the work place.

The survey consisted of twenty-one questions followed by an invitation to respondents to provide personal comments. The questions were crafted to test findings from the literature review and Key Informant Interviews. The survey was emailed to networks of professional associations and individual fundraisers (with a request for them to share it with colleagues) across North America, Europe and Australia.

While there was no way to track how many people received the survey, and the correlating response rate, 194 surveys were completed and submitted online through the surveymonkey.com portal. Instructions included in the survey instrument asked that only

those working as fundraisers in the fundraising profession, fill out the questionnaire. The survey is limited by the integrity of the respondents. The survey design restricted respondents to submitting only one completed survey and most questions on the survey were mandatory. A sample of the survey is provided as Appendix C.

Summary

The research methods chosen were identified as being the best alternatives to collect the required data to fulfill the requirements of the project, particularly so for the Key Informant Interviews.

For many of the key informants, as is evidenced in the summary of these interviews, conversation about vocation took them back to critical points in their lives. This required them to share insights from their own personal growth experiences and articulate things they perhaps had known but never verbalized. The treasure of information resulting from these personal conversations could not have been as effectively captured in any other way.

The survey of fundraising professionals gave opportunity to test some of the themes and information trends that emerged from the key informant interviews. And finally, the literature review formed the basis of both the interviews and the survey.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

Introduction

There are few sources in the literature that specifically address vocation as it relates to fundraising. The literature review therefore presented an opportunity to research

vocation, the results of which were applied to fundraising, then tested through the key informant interviews and the survey.

The following questions serve as headings to present a review of related literature:

1. What is vocation?
2. What value does vocation bring to the individual?
3. What does a sense of vocation bring to the fundraising workplace and what are the implications?

What is vocation?

This research has highlighted a broad range of meanings attributed to the word vocation. This makes distilling a single, working definition of vocation challenging.

In a book review by Gabriel Fackre (2002), he quotes from the book The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher, “Rather than producing a systematic definition of ‘vocation’, we decided to draw upon our diverse perspectives in a way that did not smooth out the differences among them. The volume is a conversation, not a credo”. (p. 32).

In similar fashion, this research reflects many conversations. A review of the available literature has produced a multitude of perspectives on vocation, some of them religious, others academic, still others based on nothing more than personal experience and reflection. While Christianity has influenced many in their understanding of vocation in a religious context, other traditions also have much to offer in a spiritual, and deeply personal context. By embracing the breadth and depth of vocation and the major themes that emerge,

the wealth inherent in the concept itself can be recognized and bring meaning to the lives of fundraising professionals of all backgrounds.

In many circles today, vocation is generally synonymous with a job or profession. Worse in the eyes of Mahan, “it connotes the world of skills taught in the evening at the local high school after you’ve spent your day doing something even less interesting”. Indeed, “vocation is worthy of liberating from night school” (2002, p. 9) and upon closer inspection, has much more to offer.

Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, which comes from the verb *vocare*, to call, with the English equivalent being the noun “call” or “calling” (Frochlich, 1999, p. 2).

The varied definitions of vocation seem to be distinguished by the origin of the call and the ultimate purpose of it. Parker Palmer, in his book Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation (2000) says, “Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening...Vocation does not mean a goal I pursue. It means a calling that I hear” (p. 4). In many faith traditions, including Christianity, the call very specifically is from God to be of service to others. For others, the call may be considered to emerge from the soul or of a broader commitment to humanity to do something of value and significance.

Vocation and Faith

In considering vocation and fundraising, we must acknowledge the diversity of belief, practice and experience of those within our profession. From this perspective we can understand vocation more fully.

Vocation has traditionally been understood and connected to the Christian tradition, where there is a definite evolution. In A Historical Survey of Christian Vocation (2002), Dr.

Bud Bence considers vocation from the time after the New Testament (approximately 4 A.D.), through the Reformation of Luther and Calvin, on to John Wesley and present day Protestantism.

In the Roman Catholic Church, vocation was understood almost exclusively in terms of the priesthood, a particular class of Christians who renounced the things of the world to follow Christ full-time. These individuals were called to a higher level of accountability, spirituality and prestige, leaving everyone else to lead nominally Christian lives with little sense of divine calling.

However, at the time of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin challenged this two-tiered system. Luther universalized the “call” or vocation with his focus on the priesthood of all believers, and Calvin with his doctrine of divine election. Thus, all believers were called, called to serve God within their daily endeavors and activities. In fact, Mackenzie (1997, p. 2) suggests that, “It is the monastic life that has no true calling. It is an escape from the true obedience God calls us to”.

To Luther, vocation was a task set by God, not a path selected by free human choice. Contrarily, it was the Renaissance humanist Erasmus that increasingly emphasized the discovery of one’s own character and talents – the deliberate choice of a way of life and a career consistent with one’s nature, aptitudes and constitution (Bogart, 1994, p. 15).

Other faith traditions share a similar concept of being called for a purpose. In the Jewish faith, it is called *tikkun olam*, or being called by God to “repair the heart of the world”. Muslims consider it “surrendering to the will of God”. Hindus refer to *dharma* or the path of sacred duty and Buddhists speak of finding their right livelihood to express compassion to all things (Hanh, 2002).

Outside of religion, Existentialists claim a deep sense of personal and social responsibility in the world that is linked to vocation (Stein, 1985, p. 213). Kierkegaard himself insisted that the individual's highest good is to find his or her own unique vocation and to commit to a personally valid way of life.

It seems then that vocation originates from the divine or from the soul of the individual as a call to do something meaningful with one's life and that benefits others.

Vocation and the self

Some interesting things have been written about the role of vocation in the development of personality and self-concept. Jung said, "True personality always has vocation, which acts like the Law of God from which there is no escape. Who has vocation hears the voice of the inner man; he is called. The greatness and the liberating effect of all genuine personality consists of this, it subjects itself of free choice to its vocation" (Bogart, 1994, p. 7).

Strongly influenced by Jung, psychologist and author James Hillman in his book The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling (1996) draws from the mythology of Plato to explain his "acorn theory" of calling. Hillman writes, "each life is formed by a particular image, an image that is the essence of that life and calls it to a destiny, just as the mighty oak's destiny is written in the tiny acorn" (p. 3). He contends that by exploring themes and experiences from one's past, we can discover clues to our calling that have been there all along.

Maslow, in his theory of five levels of human need, identified vocation as being at the top level of the need for self-actualization. He said, "I find that...self-actualizers are

dedicated people, devoted to some task “outside themselves”...Generally the devotion and dedication is so marked that one can fairly use the old words, vocation, calling or mission to describe their passionate, selfless and profound feeling for their “work”...” (Treadgold, 1999, p. 86).

In his book Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose (2002), Brian Mahan considers the value of vocation, and draws a comparison with following pure ambition where the prestige of the achievement depends more on the dignity of the role than the one who fills it. He says, “This is not the case with vocation. Vocation speaks to a gracious discovery of a kind of interior consonance between our deepest desires and hopes and our unique gifts, as they are summoned forth by the needs of others and realized in response to that summons” (p. 10). No wonder he agrees with theologian Frederick Beuchner who said, “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Palmer, 2000, p. 16).

Two powerful themes emerge about vocation following the thinking of Mahan and Beuchner and evidence in the literature; one, vocation is an expression of identity, values and passion and two, vocation is active.

First, Lesage suggests that a vocation is a moral commitment and the ultimate fulfillment of an individual (1966, p. 92). Bellman talks about his vocation as allowing him to become more fully himself (1990, p. 1). Parker Palmer expands, “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am, I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live – but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life” (p. 3). He

goes on to explain that the calling is from within, encouraging him to be the person he was meant to be.

The Boston College Intersections Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment Project for the Exploration of Vocation, engages its' students in dialogue about vocation by asking framing questions. One of the questions is "What gives you joy?", suggesting that such a fundamental question actually matters. Towner (2002, p. 193) writes of the Old Testament, "It is clear that human beings are created with vocation...If God plants vocation within us at our very creation, then we cannot be fully ourselves until we sign up in God's cause, thus becoming part of something bigger than ourselves. The Bible defines vocation as a matter of full human life....".

Martin Seligman (2002), a proponent of positive psychology, understands vocation as an expression of one's key signature strengths. In fact, he suggests that we can each craft our job to become our vocation, or an expression of our truest selves by discovering our signature strengths and creating opportunities to exercise them each day.

Second, the literature makes a strong case that vocation is active and that we are summoned by the needs of others. Extending Beuchner's definition of vocation, why would we be called to where the world's deep hunger is if it's not to do something when we get there?

A vocation is not what you do for a living – it is your very life. Gafni suggests, "Living means being called – and responding" (2001, p. 1). This explains Mackenzie's comparison of monastic life as escapism and not vocation. Vocation actively meets the needs of others as an expression of the best of oneself.

However, James Hillman warns against viewing vocation exclusively as the action or the work, but rather the way it is done. Citing a study of twenty-eight hospital cleaners in New York City, Seligman (2002, p. 168-169) believes that “any calling can become a job and any job can become a calling.”

In the study, the cleaners who saw their jobs as a calling did things to make it meaningful. They saw themselves as critical to healing patients, they timed their work to be most efficient, they anticipated the needs of doctors and nurses in order to allow them to spend more of their time healing and the cleaners also took particular interest in the patients they interacted with. The cleaners in the job group saw their work simply as cleaning up rooms.

The implications of this in the context of philanthropy are significant. Philanthropic organizations are based on the premise of action - addressing needs, making change or improving people’s lives. Through the lens of vocation, fundraisers can rightly view themselves as active facilitators in this process. What they bring to their roles, including their values, matters and can be mirrored in their work and the organizations they work for.

What value does vocation bring to the individual?

The literature provides a broad view of vocation and what it brings to the individual life. There are three core thoughts expressed in the literature (the first presented with three sub-sets) about the difference vocation makes. Each of the three thoughts represents a dance between the “inner” and the “outer” life and greatly informs our perspective on vocation and the individual experience.

1. The first core thought is context – there is consensus that a sense of vocation A) provides feelings of satisfaction and meaning, B) draws one into greater community with others, and C) brings an integrated view of the world and one’s place in it.

A. Vocation provides meaning. In Personalism and Vocation, Lesage (1966, p. 92) says, “A vocation is the ultimate fulfillment of an individual. A vocation embraces talents, individual work and action in a perfect physical and spiritual fulfillment”. Clearly, this resilience and fulfillment gives way to a strong sense of purpose and Madeleine Bunting has been quoted, “Vocation provides a profound sense of personal purpose, and doing what you should be doing with your life. At it’s best, that purpose and usefulness can enrich a sense of value and belonging in the world”. (2001, p. 2).

B. Vocation builds community. The literature suggests that people lack something truly remarkable when they do not realize vocation in their lives. These individuals are cut off and unaware of the possibilities of community and connected-ness to others. Towner says, “We are miserable when we lack a sense of purpose. Vocation allows us to be part of something bigger than ourselves which is both our joy and our security”. (p. 193).

In fact, through the Exploration of Vocation Project, the Lilly Endowment hopes to encourage students to understand the “mutually interrelated nature of their various endeavors” through viewing their work in terms of a calling or vocation.

(www.ptev.org/rationale). Parker Palmer, in his simple yet profound book Let Your Life Speak (2000) imaginatively talks about the “ecosystem” in which he was planted, “the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and

community, can I embody the great commandment to love my neighbor and myself.” (p. 17).

C. Vocation nurtures perspective. McKenzie (1997, p. 2) describes vocation as helping to overcome the dualism of separate sacred and secular spheres and brings personal wholeness. Sinetar paints an even clearer picture when she says that, “Vocation fills the gap between what we do out of love, artistry, passion, inspiration (or the “spiritual”), and what we do to survive in the world, such as paying bills and meeting personal responsibilities (the “material”). (Terranova, 1995). Bogart views vocation as “a unifying story that brings together the social, individual, and the sacred or transpersonal dimensions of the life world.” (1994, p. 11).

By addressing through vocation this dichotomy of the inner and outer, or spiritual and material, it seems that individuals become better equipped to understand the value of the work they have to do. In his book Consulting as a Calling (1990), Bellman provides a fascinating perspective on what it is to make a difference in the world. “We make a difference...and it is not that important. So why bother? Why bother writing? Doing? Being? Because there is some small voice deep inside me that seeks expression, that wants to give meaning to itself, that wants to define itself. It somehow puts aside the relative unimportance of it all and says, “I will become myself”. (p. 33).

Within a philanthropic context, the meaning, community and perspective of vocation can take on real depth and contribute to both the philosophical and practical consideration of the sector. They articulate a way fundraisers can view their inner and outer experience, for the enhancement of both.

2. This leads to the second core thought that emerged from the literature – that vocation requires great personal responsibility. The responsibility is not just to act (as discussed in the section on defining vocation) and realize one’s full potential, but also to be careful. Bogart refers to this caution as the “shadow of vocation”.

In his intriguing essay in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* Finding a Life’s Calling (1994), Bogart identifies the dark side of vocation as inflation or grandiosity. He says, “For example, how can we distinguish between the healthy need each person has to define a vocation and an inflated or megalomaniacal form of expressing one’s sense of calling, which may lead to interpersonal difficulties, problems in social adjustment, or that may be a sign of serious mental disorder? Moreover, let us not forget that wars have been fought because one person’s or one nation’s sense of vocation conflicted with that of another.” (p. 31).

While this may seem to be an extreme consideration, even Dr. Robert Payton in his book Philanthropy (1988) warns against what has been referred by others as the “sin of pride” among philanthropic professionals. Payton, in asking readers to ask themselves if they are living for philanthropy or off philanthropy, speaks of virtue by association. He suggests that self-righteousness and sanctimoniousness are rampant in the philanthropic sector, where it seems that the moral worth of those engaged in philanthropy is inflated while the moral worth of those engaged in other forms of work is deflated. Payton further suggests that those who live *for* philanthropy (rather than *off* philanthropy) embrace it as vocation and may have a clearer understanding of their motives for being engaged in the work they do.

3. The third core thought related to what vocation brings to the individual is that vocation is sustaining. Research identifies a strong relationship between having a sense of vocation and reduced levels of stress, depression and related physical symptoms. This research is particularly interesting as it brings the consideration of vocation from the theoretical or spiritual realm to that of the physical reality.

Concentration camp survivor and great twentieth century psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl wrote in Man's Search for Meaning (1984, p. 163) "Once an individual's search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering".

This seems to be substantiated by Richard Treadgold who conducted research and wrote Transcendent Vocations: Their Relationship to Stress, Depression and Clarity of Self-concept (1999). Treadgold discovered that being engaged in meaningful work as a calling was correlated negatively with stress and depression (i.e. there was less incidence) and correlated positively with clarity of self-concept (i.e. there was a greater incidence). Further, he found that those engaged in meaningful work as a calling had better problem-solving abilities and healthier coping skills during times of difficulty.

Writing about his own experience of depression and resulting discovery of vocation, Parker Palmer says, "One sign that I am violating my own nature...is a condition called burnout. Though usually regarded as the result of trying to give too much, burnout in my experience results from trying to give what I do not possess – the ultimate in giving too little! Burnout is a state of emptiness, to be sure, but it does not result from giving all I have: it merely reveals the nothingness from which I am trying to give in the first place. When the gift I give to the other is integral to my own nature, when it comes from a place of

organic reality within me, it will renew itself – and me – even as I give it away.” (2000, p. 49).

In the study by the Canadian Policy Research Network in 2003 on professional fundraisers in Canada, more than 61% of fundraisers agreed or strongly agreed that their job was very stressful. This has enormous implications in the workplace. The research on the physical benefits of vocation generates more questions than answers, but it does provide some insights worthy of further exploration by individuals and organizations alike.

What does vocation bring to the fundraising workplace and what are the implications?

The sources are generally silent regarding vocation in the workplace. There is much more material on the meaning of work and managing human resources effectively.

In considering vocation in the workplace many questions come to mind including: does vocation, and discussion about it, belong in the fundraising workplace? What difference can vocation make in the workplace and what value can it bring? How then can a vocational approach to work be nurtured or supported formally and informally by colleagues and leaders?

In the material reviewed, it is assumed that work without meaning is empty, whether vocation is involved or not. Further, a vocational approach can help one identify meaning in a job where meaning may not be so obvious, and give oneself opportunity to express vocation each day.

The literature related to vocation and the workplace is considered under three headings: the current state of the workplace; vocation and the workplace; vocation, the

employee and the employer. Issues that arise include the increasing quest for meaning at work, the role of leadership and management, and issues around recruitment and retention.

The current state of the workplace

In his book Authentic Happiness (2002), Martin Seligman declares, “Money amazingly is losing its power! While real income in America has risen 16% in the last thirty years, the percentage of people who describe themselves as “very happy” has fallen from 36 to 29 percent.” He predicts, “A calling is the most satisfying form of work because, as a gratification, it is done for its own sake rather than for the material benefits it brings. Corporations that promote this state for their employees will overtake corporations that rely only on monetary reward.” (p. 165).

This may prove to be sage advice for philanthropic organizations as the field of fundraising continues to emerge as a career of choice. In 1997, Duronio and Temple found that among the fundraising professionals interviewed, challenge or personal responsibility and commitment to the organizations cause and mission were the two most important reasons for choosing their present position. Salary and benefit considerations followed in third place.

Six years later in 2003, the Canadian Policy Research Network study discovered similar responses from fundraising professionals surveyed, as well as the fact that 89.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, “I feel very committed to the kind of work I do in my job.” (p. 55). Research such as this emphasizes Seligman’s position that people have increasing expectations of the workplace and of their work experience.

By definition, philanthropic organizations are mission-driven. It is suggested therefore that such organizations are uniquely positioned to take the lead as creators of workplaces that support personal vocation. Workplaces where at the least employees are encouraged to discover a vocational approach to their work with flexibility to apply what they learn. As fundraisers we can transform lives through philanthropy. There can be organizational structures that help us transform our own.

On his role as a consultant to organizations, Bellman has said, “I want to help people work on what is important in their lives and particularly on those issues that involve work. This often means helping them gain another perspective on what their life is about so that they can see what work is about.” (2000, p. 33).

Vocation in the workplace

From the literature reviewed, there is agreement that there are many ways that vocation can be supported in the workplace and that it is absolutely appropriate to do so. Parker Palmer agrees that wrestling with issues of vocation is important and should happen in the workplace. “Our frequent failure as leaders to deal with our inner lives leaves too many individuals and organizations in the dark. We could lift up the value of inner work (because) if people skimp on their inner work, their outer work will suffer as well. Inner work is a personal matter but not a private matter.” (2000, p. 91).

Madeleine Bunting (Terranova, 2001, p. 3) adds her insight, “A real issue to grapple with is how vocation collides with the managerial state. How do you quantify empathy, patience, forbearance and intuition? With the rush to improve efficiency, people can feel marginalized and unappreciated. In the bid to increase management control and raise

standards, there is a real risk of a decline in standards caused by an emotional disengagement in jobs where the quality of the relationship is crucial, such as health, education and social work.” It is suggested that fundraising could appropriately be added to that list.

More specifically, in his study on vocation in the workplace, Treadgold recommends, “Organizational development specialists would be well-advised to consider incorporating management strategies and organizational designs that encourage employees to discover their inner calling, which will increase their intrinsic motivation and help them embrace their work as an expression of a transcendent vocation. This could be done by training employees to identify characteristics negatively correlated to meaningful work, such as increased stress and depression, and then using that information to redesign work activities and methods that would tap the employees’ intrinsic motivation, even their life callings.” (1999, p. 101).

It seems that philanthropic organizations, as centres of engagement, community and service, would benefit from embracing inner work and the discovery of vocation as part of the “public practice” of philanthropy as proposed by Dr. Paul Pribbenow. This demands the emotional engagement of the fundraising professional.

Vocation – the employee and the employer

The literature suggests that in the workplace, both the employee and the employer share vocational responsibility. There is a clear relationship between positive emotion at work, high productivity, low turnover, and high loyalty (Seligman, 2002, p. 183), meaning that shared responsibility is a good investment by any organization.

Seligman uses the concept of signature strengths to help employers and employees acknowledge and understand vocation in the workplace. He recommends people should choose (or craft) work that best enables them to use their signature strengths. When recruiting, he recommends selecting employees whose signature strengths mesh with the work they will do. This insight will lead to higher performance, increased commitment and higher staff morale as it identifies and embraces the strengths of individuals and empowers the employee and the organization within which they work.

Employers can have a special role in encouraging vocation among employees. Lesage (1966, p. 125) laments that, “Vocations die or disappear for lack of encouragement as a result of ignorance, mistakes, or individualism of those who could have helped them.” Employers could benefit from understanding this. While vocation may not be the work one does for a living, it is central to one’s life concept (Bogart, 1994, p. 12) and impacts how one does and feels about what they do to make a living. Perhaps by being aware of vocation in each other, we can provide that encouragement and help to others when it is needed.

Discovering vocation requires thoughtful reflection as is suggested in Donald Schon’s book, The Reflective Practitioner (1983), and the related work of Paul Pribbenow that encourages the reflection of those who work in philanthropy. It requires asking difficult questions like what is the nature of philanthropic work? Why do I choose to participate in this work? What difference am I making when I show up every day? Even in an article for the Harvard Business Review, Reawakening Your Passion for Work, Boyatzis, McKee and Goleman suggest that a strategy for increased personal meaning is to create “reflective structures” or time and space for personal reflection and self-examination.

Summary

The literature review provides insight into the concept of vocation, the value it brings to the individual, what it can bring to the fundraising workplace and implications for both the employee and the employer.

Vocation emerges as a result of emotional engagement, personal and collective reflection and can be nurtured and supported in individuals by others. The literature suggests that everyone has a vocation and that it is an active expression of identity, values and passion. Individuals experience personal fulfillment, a sense of meaning and lower rates of stress and depression when they embrace vocation.

There is an important connection between vocation and community within the context of fundraising. Fundraising is an activity of relating to others, building community and strengthening organizations for the greater good.

Vocation belongs in the workplace and can indeed be a powerful source of motivation and commitment among fundraising professionals. By incorporating vocation-supportive structures and practices, employers and employees share in the discovery process and the resulting value vocation can bring to the workplace.

Chapter Four

Primary Research Findings

Introduction

The findings of the Project Demonstrating Mastery are presented and analyzed under each primary data gathering methodology:

1. Key informant interviews
2. Survey of fundraising professionals

Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of the key informant interviews was to learn more about vocation from the perspective of eleven senior leaders within philanthropy. This exploration was facilitated by questions relating to how the subjects defined vocation, what their experience of vocation was, how it related to their work in fundraising and possible implications for resource and organizational management.

The results of the interviews are presented in two parts. Part One summarizes the demographic profile of the subjects. Part Two provides the interview questions, each followed with a summary of responses for the question. As most of the questions were open-ended, answers ranged from one word to more extensive explanations and insights. For the purposes of clarity and organization, each summary presents a synthesized view of the responses and reflects the key points offered by the subjects versus a detailed transcription of each response.

Part One – Demographic Profile

Please describe your occupation?

The most common responses to this question were administrator, fundraiser and consultant (each at 27%). Facilitator and educator each followed at 10%. The variety of descriptions offered reflect an interesting diversity of identity among individuals who do similar work but view their role differently.

What is your gender?:

Of the informants, 55% were male and 45% were female. A balance of men and women was desired when subjects were selected to be interviewed.

What is your age?:

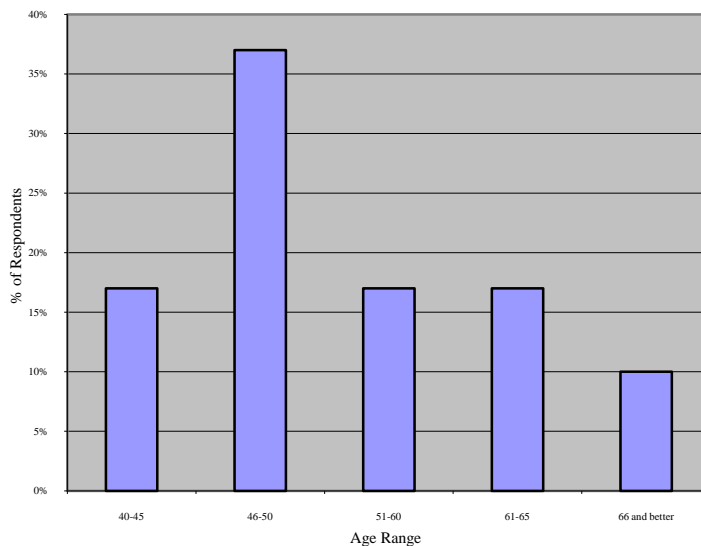


Figure 1

Senior fundraising professionals were specifically sought as subjects for the interviews and this is reflected in the above 40 years age ranges.

What is the number of years you have worked in fundraising and/or philanthropy?:

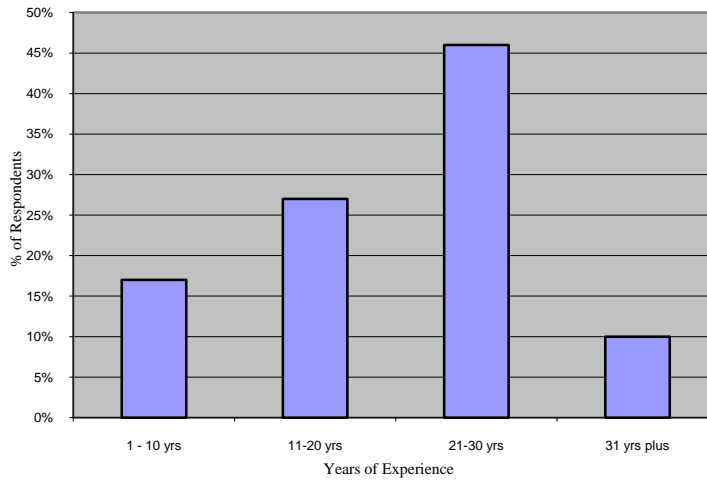


Figure 2

All the subjects were considered to be senior professionals. One subject had less than five years experience in fundraising but had made a transition from being a corporate CEO to head a large foundation.

What sector do you currently work in?:

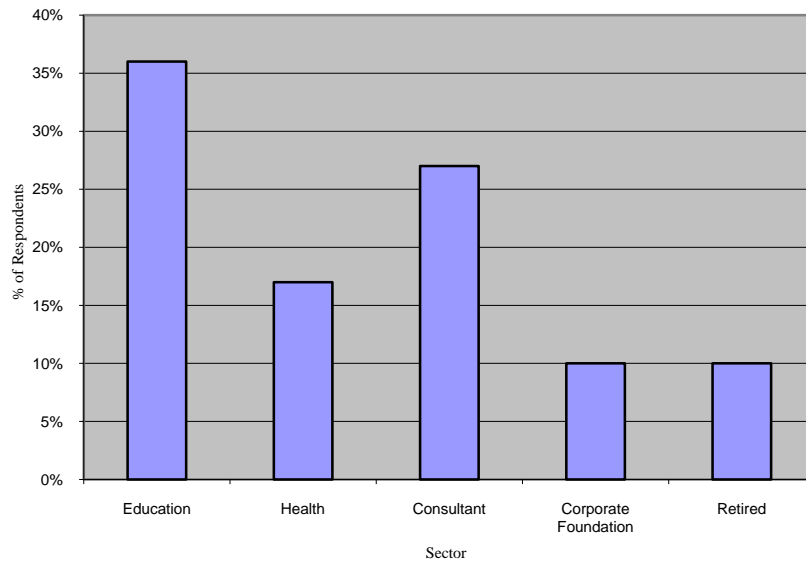


Figure 3

What is your current compensation?:

* Irrespective of currency

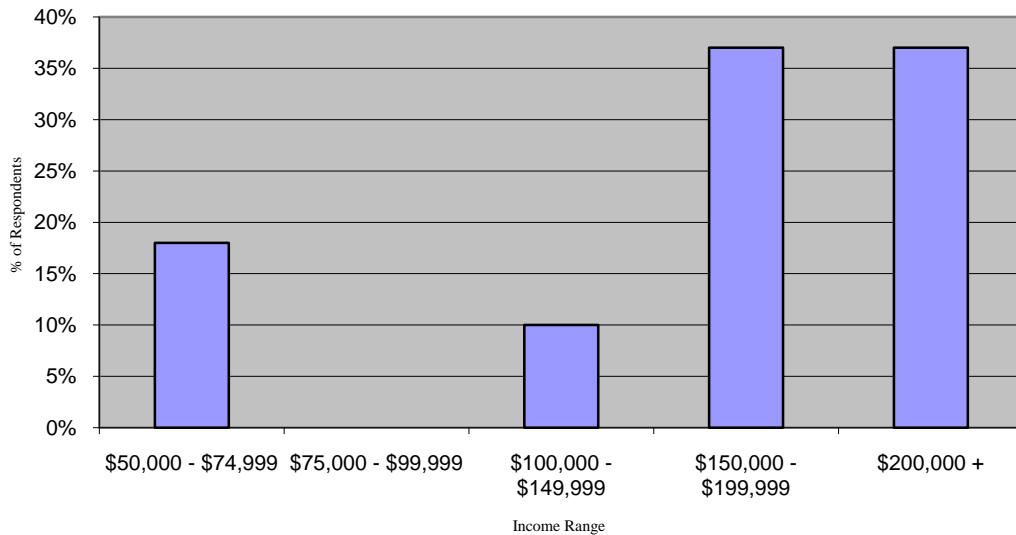


Figure 4

Subjects were from different locations across North America and no currency adjustments were made between salary ranges reported in Canadian and United States dollars. 82% of subjects making over \$100,000 reflects their senior roles and entrepreneurial enterprises (i.e. consulting).

Part Two – Key Informant Interview Questions and Summarized Responses

Question 1: How do you define vocation?

How fundraisers defined vocation was among the most fundamental questions of this study. While each subject defined vocation with slight but importance differences, the culmination of answers provided an intriguing and comprehensive perspective on the concept.

In fact, four themes emerged from the answers to this question. In summary, the key informants defined vocation as a call to personal wholeness in service to others, with the call originating from a divine source and/or from the soul of the individual.

One, vocation is a call to wholeness; the responsibility to become the fullness of ones self by linking skill, passion and experience. One subject put it this way, “vocation is what we do with how we link work, community, family and volunteerism to experience a sense of oneness.” Another subject explained, “I believe we all have the same vocation – vocation is an innate and fundamental call to personal growth and wholeness. We pursue work or interests that align with our own selves to best express vocation.”

Another subject referenced this consonance. He talked about being especially gifted for or attracted to something as a result of “genetics, internal wiring or the environment.” It would seem then that vocation is a deeply personal experience rooted in the self and in how people view themselves and their role in the world.

Two, vocation is about service and being responsible to and for others. *Meeting the needs of others, responding in service to others, having compassion for others, making a difference to the lives of others* were key phrases in most of the responses to this question.

Three, vocation requires commitment. Many of the subjects referred to passion and embracing a vision of the future they were committed to. There was little room in their definitions for lackadaisical status quo. Rather, “vocation is a practical and philosophical commitment!” (note again the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’) and “an obligation to give and support with zest and enthusiasm!” This commitment and dedication speaks to an inner motivation that leads to the fourth theme to emerge from question one, the source of vocation.

Four, vocation has a variety of sources. While the subjects were not specifically asked what they thought the source of vocation was, some interesting findings emerged from what they did offer in their definitions of vocation. Of the eleven subjects, only three directly referenced calling or vocation as being a call from God or of God. About an equal number implied a more general spiritual source referencing the soul or a greater power. The balance did not indicate a particular source for vocation. Regardless of the source, it seems that for those who claim vocation, the call has great personal credibility and meaning.

These findings closely reflect the findings of the literature review.

Question 2: How did you learn about the concept of vocation?

For many of the subjects, discovering their vocation was when they learned that vocation existed. For others, they may have heard the word vocation but it was not until their own experience that the word took shape.

Subjects referenced three main places where they learned about the concept of vocation. The significance of the answers suggested that people learn about vocation from many sources. Vocation can be taught and nurtured in others and, at the very least, opportunities can be created for others to learn about vocation and experience it for themselves.

First, the role of family and other mentors seemed to be particularly critical. “My father had a vocation. I learned from watching him about commitment to one’s vocation. I always knew I would have one.” “We never used the words vocation or calling but I learned about it from my parents and our community, particularly from conversations about what was important in life.” Another subject spoke about a particular author having a fundamental impact on his life and his understanding of vocation.

Second, subjects learned about vocation from religious sources or a faith community. One subject grew up in the church and was particularly and deeply intrigued by the vocational commitment of the nuns and the priests. One of the subjects attended seminary and another studied religion at the graduate level, giving them opportunity to learn and reflect about vocation.

The third method cited by four of the eleven subjects was personal experience. One subject shared, “I learned about vocation as a teenager. I worked as a volunteer and it was a life-changing experience. I realized my life could make a difference!” “I learned from my own experience and it was like being drawn like a magnet to work that was values based.”

Question 3: Do you have a vocation?

All of the subjects identified with having a vocation. 18% that responded “I think so” but seemed to be hesitant only because of not having viewed their work and life in that context before.

Question 4: What is your vocation?

In response to this question, not a single subject said their vocation was a particular job, for example a fundraising officer or university president. Rather, the subjects referenced higher-level ideas, values, areas of interest and causes. Some of the responses to the question included: *philanthropy, teaching, writing, civic engagement and community building*.

Other answers provided were: *to make a difference by supporting the less privileged, to be an engaged participant, working together with others to who are concerned about social issues and using my gifts and strengths to help others*. Even more descriptive was,

“My vocation is public philanthropic leadership and expanding the concept of philanthropy to help us show our love for each other.”

The answers reflect the definitions of vocation provided by the subjects in that their vocations reflect values of service and self-fulfillment. The subjects later make connections between what they view as their vocation, their work in fundraising and the values of philanthropy.

Question 5: How did you come to know what your vocation was?

As identified in question 2, for many of the subjects personal experience was what led them to a fuller understanding of vocation. From the interviews, four themes emerged from how they each discovered their own vocation. Vocation deepens over the years but for many, the inspiration and influence happens much earlier in their life, often as a result of their upbringing, a personal turning point or of public engagement.

First is personal crisis. Personal turning points and moments of challenge and questioning seem to be fruitful ground for the growth of vocation. Five of the eleven subjects referenced either a time of personal crisis or other significant turning point in their life that led them to discover their vocation. One subject shared, “I started to sense a deep disconnect with the values of the organization I worked for and realized just how important values were. In the process, I reconnected with my own values.” As a result, she took a job at a different organization where the values more closely aligned with her own. “This was a real turning point in my career that resulted in an expanded view of philanthropy and my role in this sector. It was so exciting!”

Another subject was in seminary training to become a priest when he realized that was not the road he was to travel on. He says, “I misunderstood my vocation for many

years.” Upon leaving the priesthood and wrestling with his religious faith and understanding of vocation, he now experiences vocation as freedom and a call of renewal to personal wholeness. One subject referred to the process as similar to going through the fire, being tested and coming out better as a result.

Second, other subjects referenced upbringing and maturity as the source of discovering their vocation. For one subject, “As a result of my upbringing and personal experiences over the years, I saw how important my vocation and calling were to the work of public good.” One subject shared, “One’s sense of vocation develops over the years and evolves by choice and by care.” Another said, “Vocation has been tied to maturity for me, but the seeds were planted many years ago. The more I realized I was able to do, the more I wanted to do.” Finally, “I always knew what I didn’t want to do and even today my understanding of what I do want to do is always evolving.”

Third, social and civic engagement has led many to discover their vocation. Community engagement links us with others and makes us realize how we are connected and the ways in which we need each other. It is not surprising that such participation has been a harbinger of vocation. “My vocation came out of being involved in community activities.” One subject even referenced the social action work he got involved in during the 1960’s. For him, the intensity of his participation and commitment were intoxicating and encouraged him to think in terms of creating and working towards a grand dream – something he continues to do even today.

Question 6: How does your vocation relate to your work in fundraising?

Questions six and seven about the relation between vocation and fundraising are the heart of the matter and the subjects shared very personally about their experience of

vocation and their work in fundraising. All subjects seemed to feel that their work in fundraising was a direct expression of their vocation. One subject exclaimed that fundraising “fulfills my vocational urges!”

Three important elements emerged from the responses to question 6. In summary, the initial connections made were about helping others through service, doing work that is values based and having the opportunity to share and have meaningful exchanges with others.

Working in fundraising provides ample opportunity for service, community building and for making the world better. “Fundraising is the ultimate expression of what I want to accomplish in the world.” “It is easy for me to find my vocation in fundraising as fundraising is an act of love towards others.” “Vocation inspires service and we become better people within better communities.” Each subject made a very clear distinction between fundraising as a “heart transaction” and fundraising as a financial transaction. This distinction does make fundraising a work of service and compassion.

Subjects referenced how vocation is about values and fundraising is about values, making the two great companions. One subject described it this way, “I am a facilitator in philanthropy, making connections and drawing from my passion and values. My vocation is anchored in values.” “I am less a fundraising technician than an organizational fundraising specialist who does values based work as a result of my personal commitment to philanthropy.” Within her understanding of vocation, one subject said, “fundraising work demonstrates life in a bigger context, a social contract.” This responsibility to the community was a core value for her.

Many subjects cited the opportunity in their work to have meaningful exchanges with others, to be teachers/mentors to others, often feeling that this is in fact a responsibility. “Through my work I serve the public as an educator, mediator and interpreter of societal issues.” “I am able to inspire people, motivate and give them hope by leading them to a larger understanding of philanthropy.” “I see fundraising offices as centres of brokering dreams, where staff, donors and volunteers can be led to their own experience of vocation.”

Question 7: What other connections do you make between vocation and fundraising?

There were three other important connections subjects made between vocation and fundraising: reflection, motivation and accountability.

Reflection and being reflective is important. One subject said, “Vocation helps us connect our work to bigger ideas, being reflective and encouraging others to be reflective as well.” Another subject said, ‘Fundraising is an honourable and noble enterprise when it lives up to its aspirations – vocation is inescapably related.’

Vocation is a perceived source of energy and drive. In the words of one subject, “Fundraising work is stressful and vocation brings with it strength, resilience and drive to exceed requirements, making the job way more than a job.”

Many of the subjects made a strong connection with accountability and responsibility, personally and professionally. On the personal side is the challenge of vocation, “Vocation encourages personal responsibility to not waste one’s talent and to be responsible to and for each other.” It seems that we are each responsible; responsible for our own calling and what we choose to do, or not to do with the gifts, skills, talents and inclinations we are given. As in a community, we are also responsible for others and responsible to others.

On the professional side, there is also a challenge in vocation. One subject put it this way, “I believe there are great implications of vocation for ethics, corporate governance and personal accountability as a fundraiser.” “Vocation can provide a moral framework to critique our work.” In a time of increasing scrutiny of the charitable sector, professionals with a deep sense of personal responsibility and professional accountability ought to be in great demand.

Question 8: What benefits of vocation have you experienced, a) personally and b) professionally?

Few of the subjects could neatly separate what they perceived to be personal benefits of vocation from professional benefits. However, three main elements emerged from their answers including having a life framework, being engaged in community and feeling personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Vocation seemed to provide subjects with a life framework. Best summed up by one subject, “I’m a better person because of my vocation, I have a stronger commitment to my family, resilience to stay the course, personal momentum. Vocation has guided my career path and personal life choices.” “I have experienced the ultimate in life, I’ve selected good jobs and have been able to pay attention to my spiritual self at the same time.” “As a result of my vocation, my life is mission-driven and I’m able to live my values, with a vocabulary for my own experience.” “I know myself and have confidence in my values. Vocation has given me a strong work ethic and an ability to be more effective.”

Community was the second benefit of vocation suggested by the subjects. The theme of community has emerged from the responses to many of the questions and Question 8 is no exception. The value of quality relationships, the importance of building long-term

relationships and cultivating them was not lost on the subjects. And they did not only reference donor and colleague relationships. “I’ve had the satisfaction of seeing my family engaged in philanthropy as a result of my work.”

Finally, vocation brings with it personal satisfaction, fulfillment and purpose. Cited by all of the subjects in different ways, these benefits seemed to carry the greatest meaning. One subject said, “Vocation is a blessing in my life, it makes my life better and links me to a higher purpose.” Another, “My work is rewarding and worthwhile and I have a sense of purpose and joy in being able to make a living this way.” Still another, “I’m in awe of the amazing things people can do, I get enjoyment from making a difference and feel pride and self fulfillment, all while having fun!”

Question 9: Have you experienced work-related challenges because of your sense of vocation?

Not all subjects indicated that they had experienced challenges because of their sense of vocation. However, three themes did emerge including frustration, increased responsibility and the challenge of finding balance.

Some of the subjects indicated that they have at times felt frustrated by the fact that other colleagues have not always understood their passion and motivation and that not everyone else thinks about vocation. For some, this frustration has been a result of experiences within fundraising offices where they felt they were judged purely on financial results and not on other important criteria such as the quality of relationships built with donors or the improvements made within a team. One subject suggested he had less access to the organization “power-structure” as a result of his own sense of vocation and what it meant for his work.

For others, this frustration (and in one case anger!) was directed at the circumstances that require their commitment and hard work i.e. lack of social justice, lack of affordable housing, lack of a cure for cancer.

The second theme was responsibility. All the subjects felt that as a result of their sense of vocation, they faced a greater personal and professional responsibility in the work place. One subject provided an example of when he felt he had to say no to a gift even though his superior felt it was fine to accept it. This was deeply troubling to the subject and related to his personal values and those of the organization. Another subject referenced the “burden of leadership” in this context, when difficult decisions have to be made.

The final theme was balance. Most of the subjects referenced how challenging it was to balance their vocational aspirations and the bottom line needs of their organization. Others felt they struggled at times with the balance between the passion they have for their work and their need to take care of themselves and make time for their families and friends outside of work.

Question 10: Does vocation impact your management style? If so, how?

All the subjects felt that their sense of vocation had an impact on their management style. Their responses can be summarized as three levels of commitment: commitment to accountability, commitment to others and commitment to leadership.

Accountability emerged once again as an important aspect of vocation in the workplace. Commitment to accountability was cited as it relates to larger issues of corporate governance, gift acceptance practices and use of funds. One subject said, “As a result of my vocation I have a strong sense of accountability and transparency.” Another

made a related observation about the importance of stewardship saying that it extends to quality of human resources, “Hire well and expect, and support, high performance.”

Commitment to others was a strong theme from the subjects. “I try to help other people to grow with authority to act and make decisions.” “I have an inclusive and collegial style to help others feel part of the larger picture, and it is balanced with feedback and discipline.” “Respect for people and things is important.” “My sense of vocation makes me more compassionate, passionate and committed. I enjoy being a mentor to others, engaging them with energy.” “I draw on a teaching approach with patience and interest in other people’s vocation and how to support them.”

Finally, a commitment to leadership was also deemed to be a way vocation impacts their management style. “I try to move the organization, and my team, towards a sense of purpose.” “Vocation influences my leadership with honesty and integrity.” “I can recognize the difference between leadership and management and be focussed on the bigger picture.” “I want to mature as I expose others to what philanthropy can be in their lives.”

Question 11: Do you think there is such a thing as a “culture of vocation”?

This question was provided with no further elaboration to encourage creative thinking among the subjects. A significant 80% of the subjects said yes, followed by 20% who said they would like to think there could be.

Question 12: If you think there is such thing as a “culture of vocation”, how would you describe it?

All the subjects felt that a workplace with such a culture would be a great place to work, indeed. Some subjects felt that their current place of work had such a culture, others provided their descriptions as a desired future state for all fundraising offices.

There are four key elements that summarize how the subjects described a “culture of vocation”. There was consensus that a culture of vocation would build a sense of community based on respect for individuals, would enable employees to have a broader view of their work and would continually draw the organizational focus back to its mission, vision and values. Each of these elements would be articulated and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure accountability.

First are community and a focus on people. Many subjects referred to how teams would function where there was a culture of vocation, “Team work is critical...This reflects the reality that we are all interconnected and live in community.”

For one subject, his best example of a culture of vocation was traditional vocational communities where, “vocations are shared or overlap and there is an emphasis on community and common work.” Particularly interesting within an organizational context was the remark from one subject about culture “as a web of values, relationships, shared history and commitment”.

For another subject, a culture of vocation would dramatically influence how employees are viewed and treated in the workplace. “Employers would need to understand what is important to employees, there would be strong mentoring programs, a sense of equality and fairness, and there would be low turnover.” The subject further stated, “Each employee is a whole universe” with emotional, physical and spiritual needs to be met. Another subject suggested that a culture of vocation would ensure such needs were addressed and that people would be emotionally engaged and would encourage each other to discover and express their vocations. This would require individual and collective reflection.

The second element is having a broader view of work. Many of the subjects felt this was critical within a culture of vocation. In such a culture “there would be commitment to reflection and seeing work in a larger context.” “Most work places have cultures of management that are smaller, lesser and with a more narrow view of work. Employees should be encouraged to think about the philosophical context of their work and their obligations to the greater community.” Another subject suggested that a culture of vocation would allow and help people think across borders, both within an organization and across organizations.

One subject expressed deep concern about professional fundraising becoming more about closing the deal and less about high aspirations of building communities and making change in the world. He felt that a culture of vocation would encourage employees to think while they worked, reduce their focus on a short-term bottom line and be energized by the opportunity for service. That is a much broader view of work.

The third element identified when describing a culture of vocation is an emphasis on mission, vision and values. One subject described a culture of vocation as “where organizational mission and values dominate over organizational issues, and the vision shifts from the organization onto the community it serves.” This would facilitate, “day to day awareness of the need, enabling me to live the passion.”

The fourth and final element is accountability. Accountability was referenced in answers to previous questions, but it emerged differently in the context of this question. A need was identified to establish benchmarks or key indicators to make such a culture “livable”, then ensuring ongoing monitoring, evaluation and assessment; regular check-ups

to determine “how we are doing”. One subject said, “I can see there being a very savvy business case for integrating such a culture within and across an organization.”

Survey of Fundraising Professionals

The purpose of this survey was to test the findings of the literature review and key informant interviews across a broad sample of fundraising professionals to determine whether the findings resonated on a larger scale. The survey identified some intriguing findings that shed light on fundraisers and what they think about vocation and their experience of it.

The following is a list of the survey questions with a summary of the responses.

Question One - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

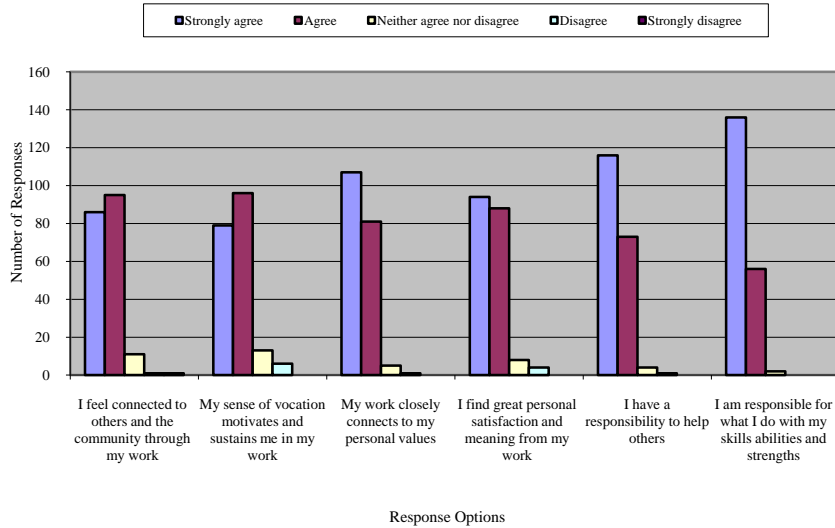


Figure 5

These statements were intended to immediately frame the context of the survey and the striking majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with them. The

respondents most strongly agreed with the two statements related to personal and social responsibility.

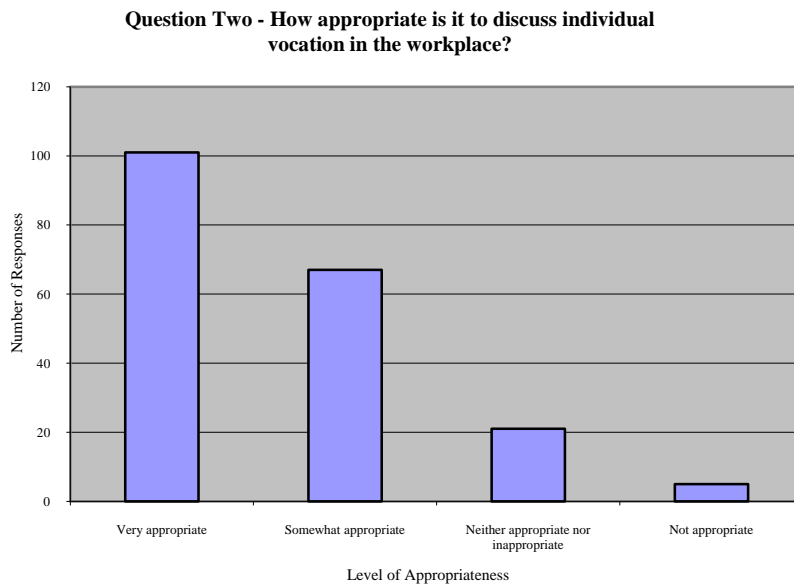


Figure 6

More than 86% of the respondents believe it is appropriate to discuss vocation in the workplace. This statistic indicates fundraising professionals are receptive to such exploration, although no definition of vocation was provided in the question.

Question Three: How well do the following statements fulfill your understanding of vocation?

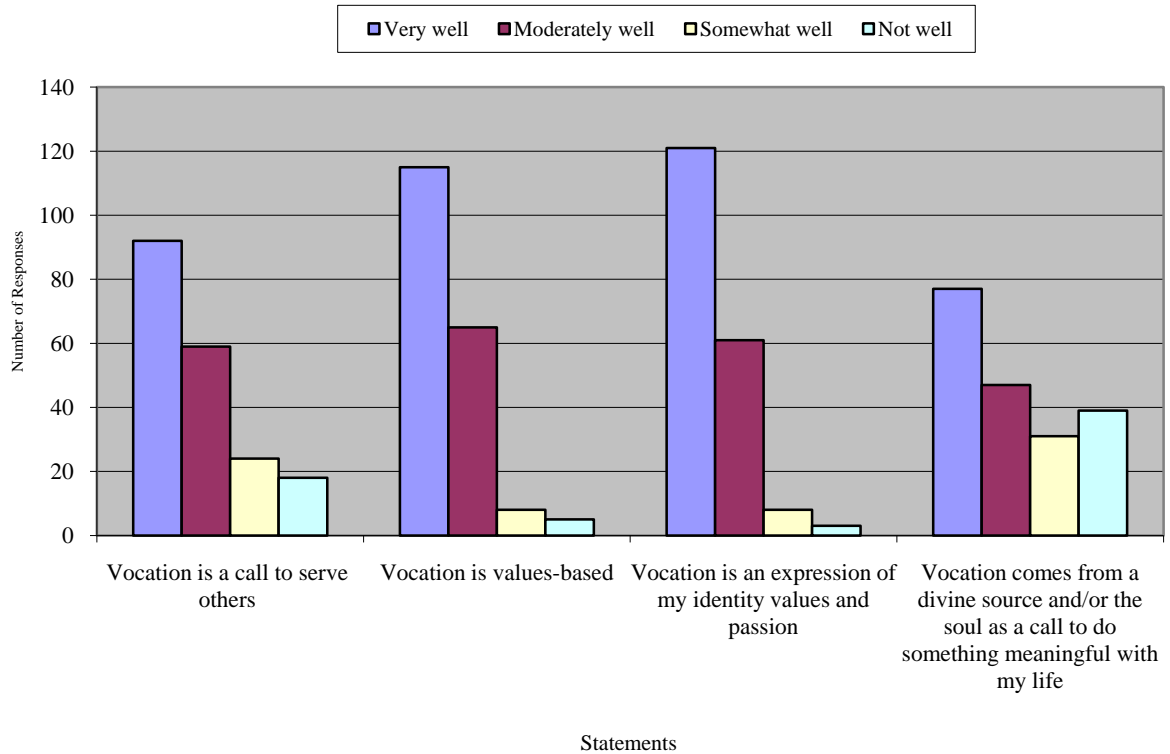


Figure 7

These statements were drawn from the research as key defining elements of vocation. Respondents most closely identified vocation as being values based and an expression of ones identity. Interestingly, vocation viewed as a call to service or to do something meaningful were less embraced.

Question Four - How or where did you learn about the concept of vocation?

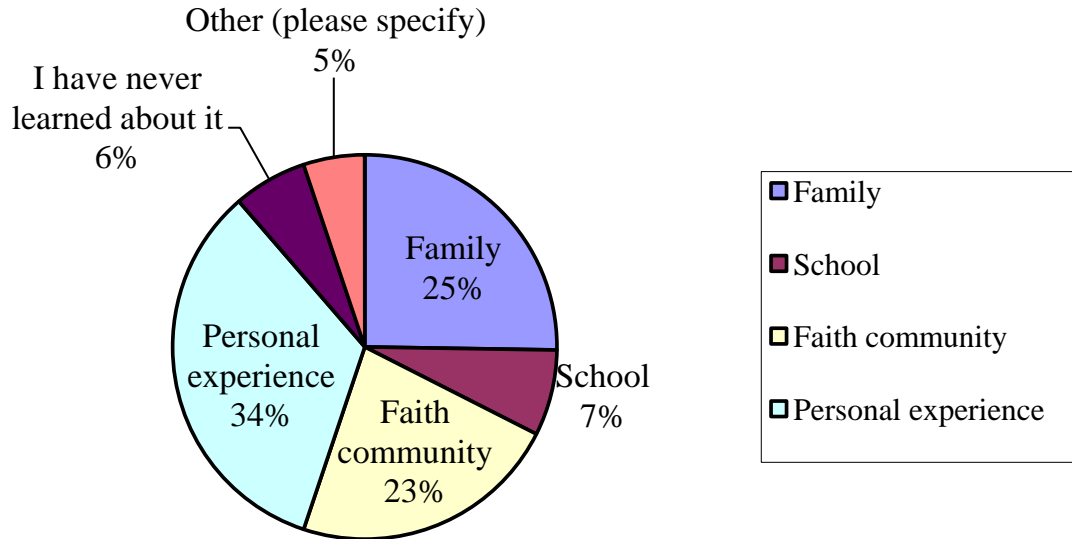


Figure 8

Family and personal experience top the scale for this question, and combined are significantly ahead of faith community. This reflects the findings from the other research methods and also gives perspective to vocation being understood outside of an exclusively religious context. Interesting to note is that those who indicated that they had never learned about vocation were most likely to say they did not have a vocation.

Question Five - Do you believe that you have a vocation?

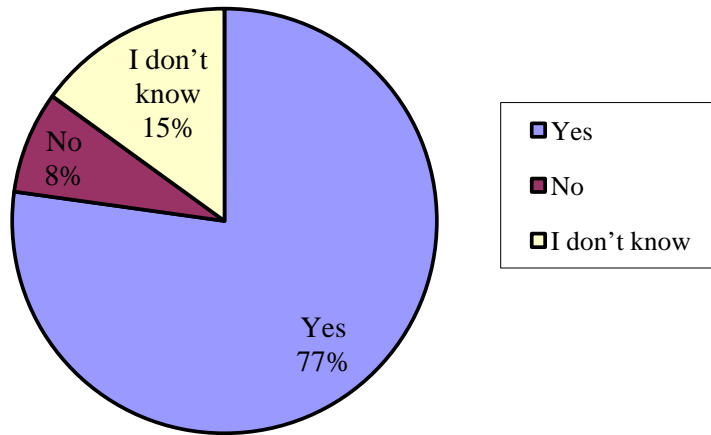


Figure 9

The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that yes, they have a vocation. While the question does not provide for what connections, if any, they make between vocation and fundraising it speaks to a general awareness of the concept. Not to be overlooked, close to 23% of respondents either do not have or do not know whether they have a vocation.

A look at the data filtered between those who said they have a vocation and those who said they did not have a vocation is striking. The findings show those with vocation:

- Are more supportive of discussing vocation in the workplace (92% versus 53%)
- More closely identify with the statements about vocation in question 3

- Are more likely to have learned about vocation, and most often from family and personal experience. Those who said they did not have a vocation were more likely to never have learned about it, or learned about it from a faith community.
- More closely identify with the statements about fundraising in question 6
- Rate themselves as very passionate (62%) about their work compared to 40%
- Are more likely to feel supported in the workplace and report a greater sense of meaning and satisfaction (54%) from their work (versus 20%)
- Are more likely to volunteer for other organizations
- Are more likely to work and reside in the United States

Interesting to note, the answers from the respondents who indicated that they did not know whether they had a vocation or not more closely aligned with the answers of those who said they had a vocation.

Question Six - How well do the following statements reflect your thoughts about your work in fundraising: Fundraising...

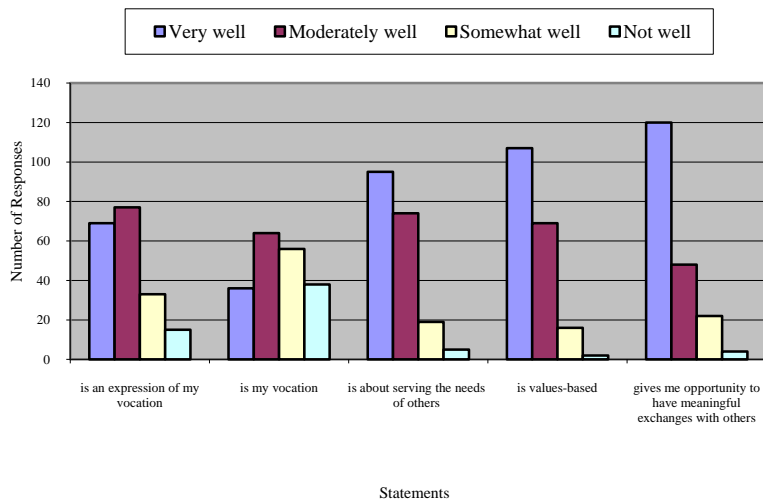


Figure 10

This question tests the ways fundraising and vocation may connect, as brought forward by the Key Informant Interviews. More fundraisers surveyed viewed fundraising as an expression of their vocation than being their vocation. Respondents most agreed with the statement about having meaningful exchanges with others (61%) and that fundraising is about serving the needs of others (49%). There was also strong support for viewing fundraising as values-based (55%).

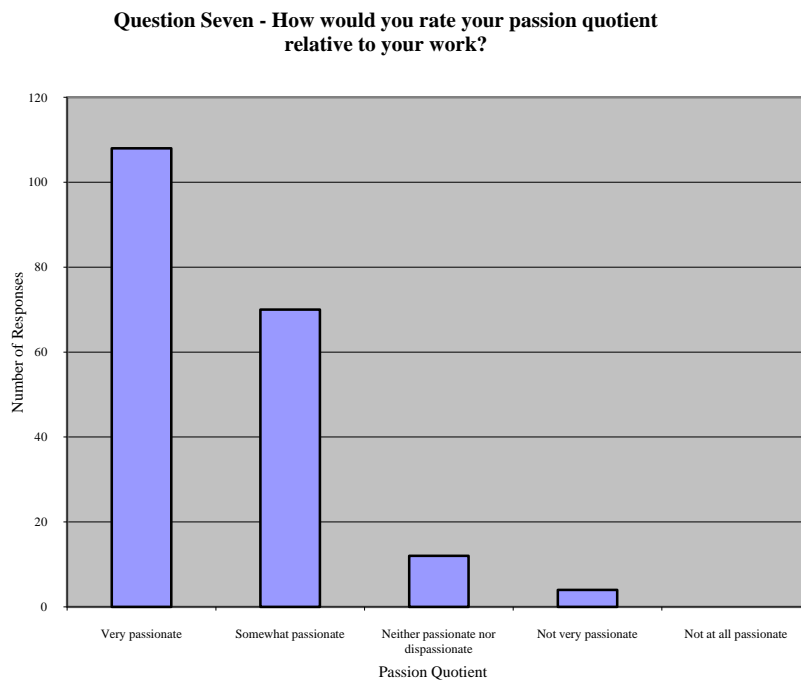


Figure 11

Overall, respondents surveyed rated themselves as very passionate (55%) or somewhat passionate (36%) about their work with only 2% saying they were not very passionate.

Question Eight - To what extent is your organization focused on and directed by its mission, vision and values?

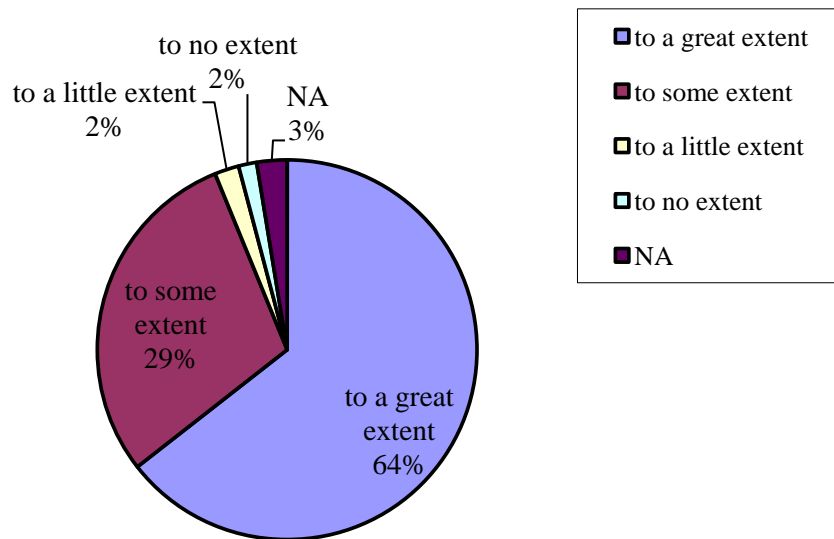


Figure 12

This question relates to a culture of vocation and how it is manifested in the workplace. The fundraisers surveyed were rather positive (64%) about the focus of their organization on its mission, vision and values. In question thirteen, 75% of respondents said that this mission-focus described a culture of vocation to a great extent. Alternately, there is the balance of 36% who are not fully convinced. This gap suggests there is a need, and opportunity, for organizations to take time to clarify and articulate their mission, vision and values.

Further, of the respondents who said they had a vocation, 67% answered this question “to a great extent”. Comparatively, 73% of respondents who said they did not

have a vocation answered this question “to a great extent”. Perhaps this suggests that fundraisers with vocation are more attuned to such disparities or have different expectations as to how organizations fulfill their missions.

Question Nine - To what extent does your organization enable you to identify and utilize your best strenghts in your job?

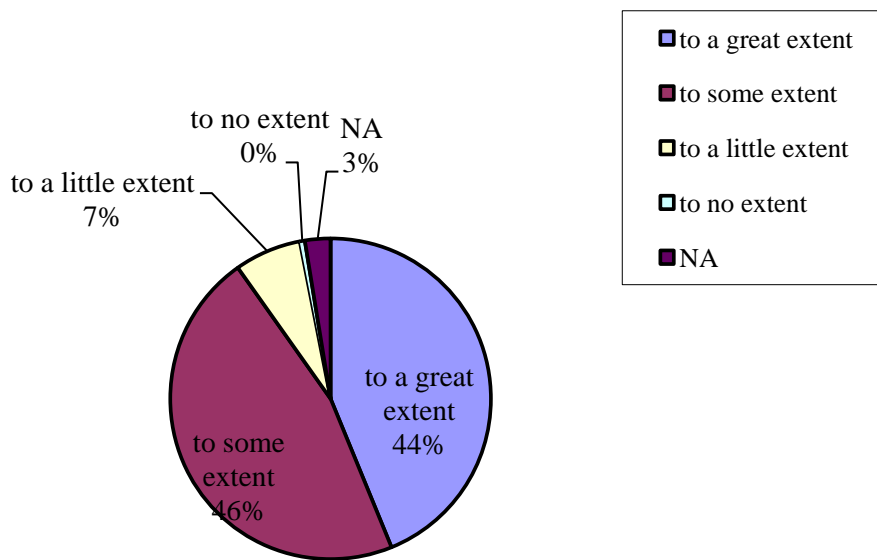


Figure 13

Respondents generally felt their organization enabled them to identify and utilize their best strengths, what varied was the degree.

Question Ten - How often does your organization provide opportunities for personal and collective reflection about the value and nature of your work?

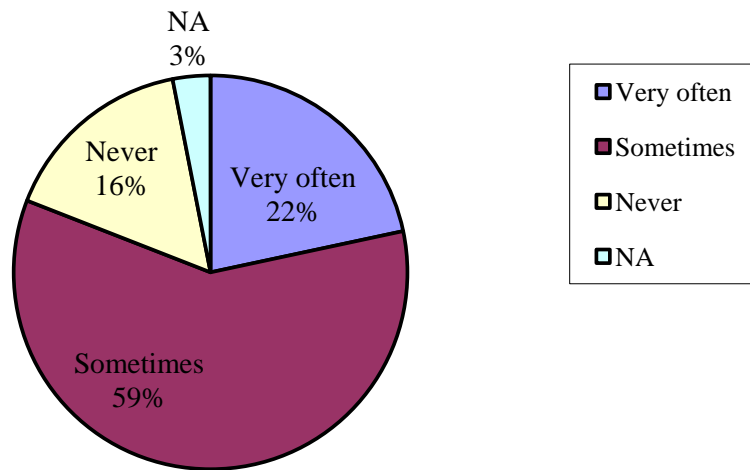


Figure 14

This question provides an interesting snapshot of the role of reflection in philanthropic organizations. Only 21% of fundraisers surveyed said they are often provided with the opportunity for such reflection at work. 15% said they never are provided the opportunity. The 60% who indicated they were provided such opportunity “sometimes” suggests there is opportunity for organizations to such forums more often. Interestingly, respondents who said they had a vocation indicated that their organization provided more opportunities (by 14%) than their counterparts. This could be that those respondents create such opportunities as people in leadership roles or that vocation-supportive organizations hire vocation sensitive individuals.

Question Eleven - To what extent are you supported at work to discover and fulfill your personal dreams and aspirations?

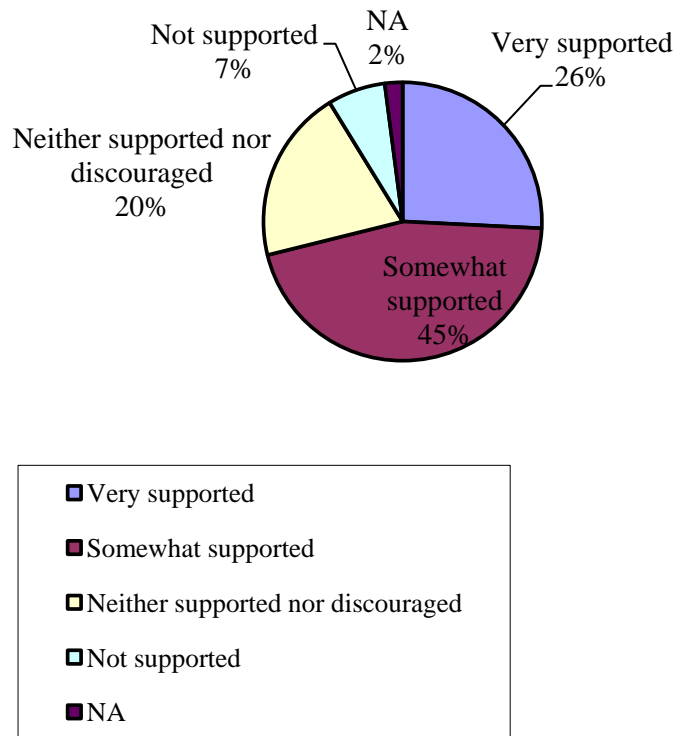


Figure 15

Almost 27% of respondents said they are not supported at work to discover and fulfill their dreams and aspirations. This represents close to one third of participating fundraisers. Perhaps some of the respondents do not help create such opportunities to be supported.

Question Twelve - To what extent does your work provide you or not provide you with a sense of personal meaning and satisfaction?

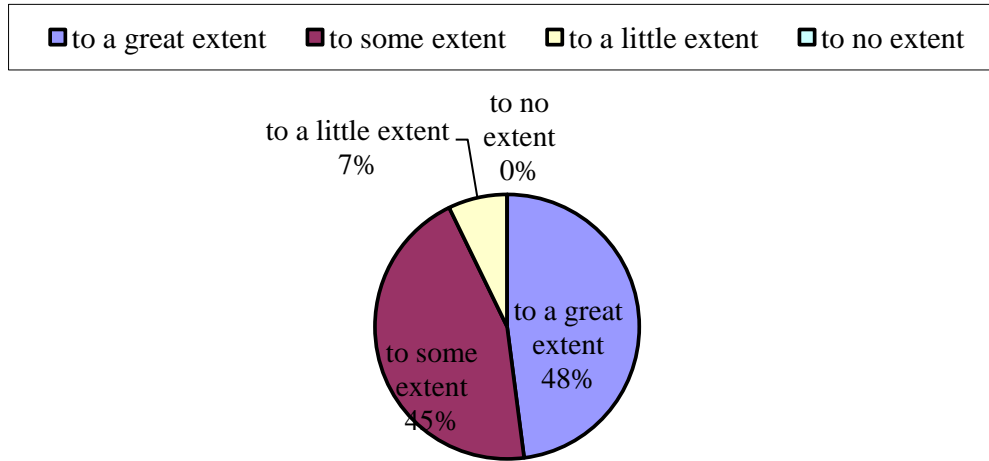


Figure 16

Generally speaking, the fundraisers surveyed indicated their work gives them a sense of meaning and satisfaction, but only 47% said to a great extent.

Question Thirteen - If you heard about a fundraising workplace that demonstrated a "culture of vocation", to what extent would the following statements describe it?

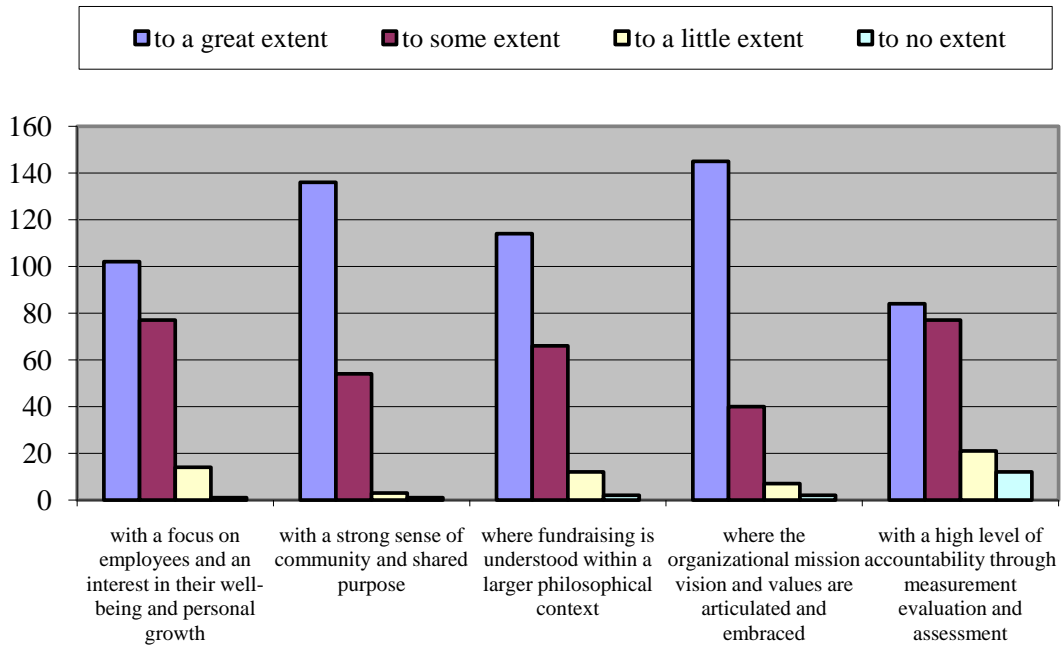


Figure 17

In describing a culture of vocation, the greatest percentage of respondents rated each statement as “to a great extent”, but felt most strongly about the need for a sense of community and purpose and for an organization to articulate and embrace its mission and values. The link between vocational culture and accountability was also identified as significant. As seen in questions 8 through 12, there is tremendous opportunity for leaders in organizations to consider how well they are addressing the vocational needs of their people.

Question 14: If you were to choose a word or phrase other than “vocation” that would mean the same to you, what would it be?

Of the 51 responses to this question, the most popular alternatives given were calling (23), passion (6) and personal mission (5). Interestingly, the statements about vocation in question 3 that included the word “call” were not rated as highly as the other statements. Other alternates included: commitment, purpose, self-fulfillment, destiny, practice and drive. It seems that vocation is not the only, nor perhaps the best, word that professional fundraisers use to describe their experience and understanding of vocation.

Question Fifteen - Do you currently volunteer for organizations other than the one you work for?

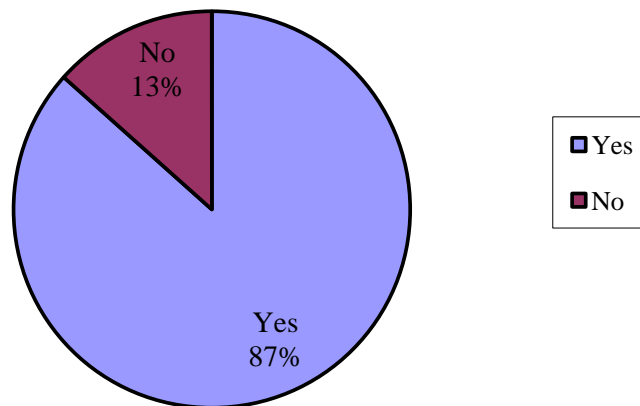


Figure 18

This question assesses the general commitment of fundraisers to philanthropy and service, outside of their paid job. With 87% of the fundraisers surveyed who volunteer outside their organization, it seems that such commitment is extensive.

Question Sixteen - What is your gender?

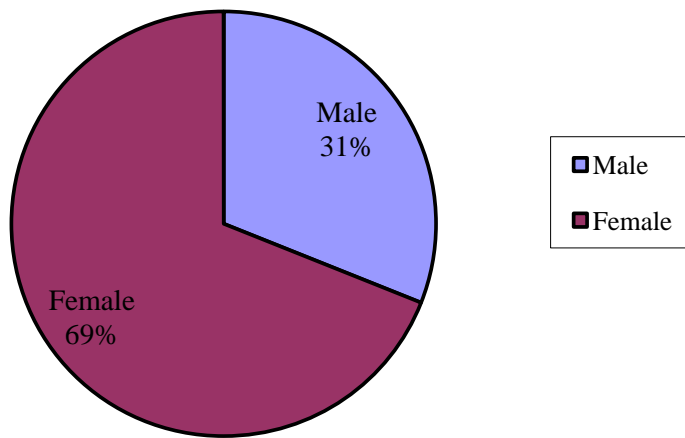


Figure 19

Reflective of many surveys of professional fundraisers there was a 70/30 split between women and men. There were some differences between the responses from women as compared to men and the following observations were made:

- Men more strongly agreed with the general statements in question 1 than women – including the statements “I find great satisfaction and meaning from my work” (53% versus 46%) and “I have a responsibility to help others” (69% versus 56%).
- More men felt that discussion of vocation was very appropriate in the workplace than women (58% versus 49%)
- Men more closely identified with the statements about vocation in question three such as vocation is a call to serve others, vocation is values-based and an expression of identity and values.
- A greater percentage of men compared to women reported that they had a vocation (81% versus 74%)
- Men more closely identified with the statements about fundraising in question six including that fundraising is about serving the needs of others and is values based.
- Women felt the statements describing a culture of vocation did so to a great extent, more often than men
- Women more strongly agreed that their work closely connects to their values (56% versus 52%)
- Women were less likely to describe their organizations as being focused and directed by its mission and values (92% versus 96%)

Question Seventeen - What is your age range?

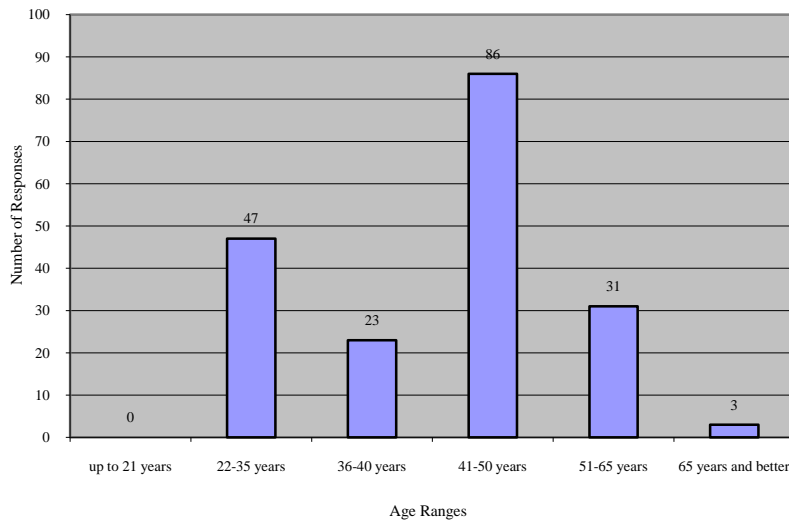


Figure 20

There was a fairly broad age distribution of the respondents with 45% of respondents in the 41-50 year range. In comparing respondents 40 years and under with those 41 years and older some interesting findings were identified. There were many similarities. A high percentage of both age groups agreed that their work connects to their personal values. Both felt it was appropriate to discuss vocation in the workplace, although respondents over 41 years more often said it was “very appropriate”. There was little difference between the two age groups in terms of the percentage of those who had never learned about vocation, 11% for the younger respondents and 8% of the older respondents. Both age groups all felt that the statements about a “culture of vocation” described such a workplace to a great extent.

Yet, there were also many differences. Of the respondents 40 years and younger:

- 66% said that yes, they had a vocation, compared to 80% of those over 41 years.
Those under 41 years more often indicated that they did not know whether they had a vocation or not, 23% versus 12% for those over 41 years
- 14% did not concur that vocation was a call to service, compared to 9% of those over 40
- 52% rated themselves as very passionate about their work versus 61% of those over 40
- 38% felt their organizations enabled them to utilize their best strengths in their work, compared to 51% of those over 40.
- 54% have worked in fundraising for 10 years or less.

Of the respondents 41 years and older:

- More said their organizations were directed by its mission, vision and values “to a great extent”, than the younger respondents
- 55% said their work gave them a sense of personal meaning and satisfaction versus 40% of those 40 and under
- 72% strongly agreed they were responsible for what they did with their skills, abilities and strengths, compared to 63%
- 67% described vocation as values based, versus 52%
- 74% have worked in fundraising for 10 years or more

Some of these differences could be accounted for understanding that younger people often prioritize income and stability earlier in their career over personal interest and passion. Older individuals have had more time to develop their sense of self and be able to create greater personal and professional alignment.

Question Eighteen - How many years have you worked in fundraising?

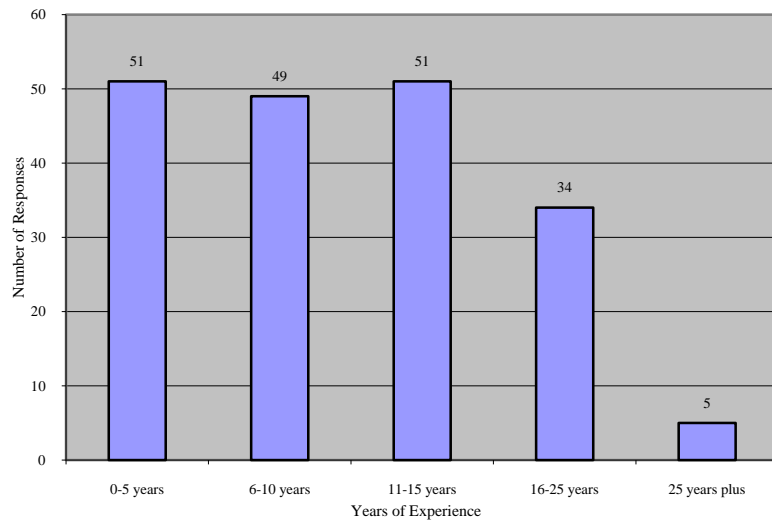


Figure 21

There was a fairly even distribution of experience levels under 10 years and over 10 years.

Question Nineteen - In which sector do you currently work?

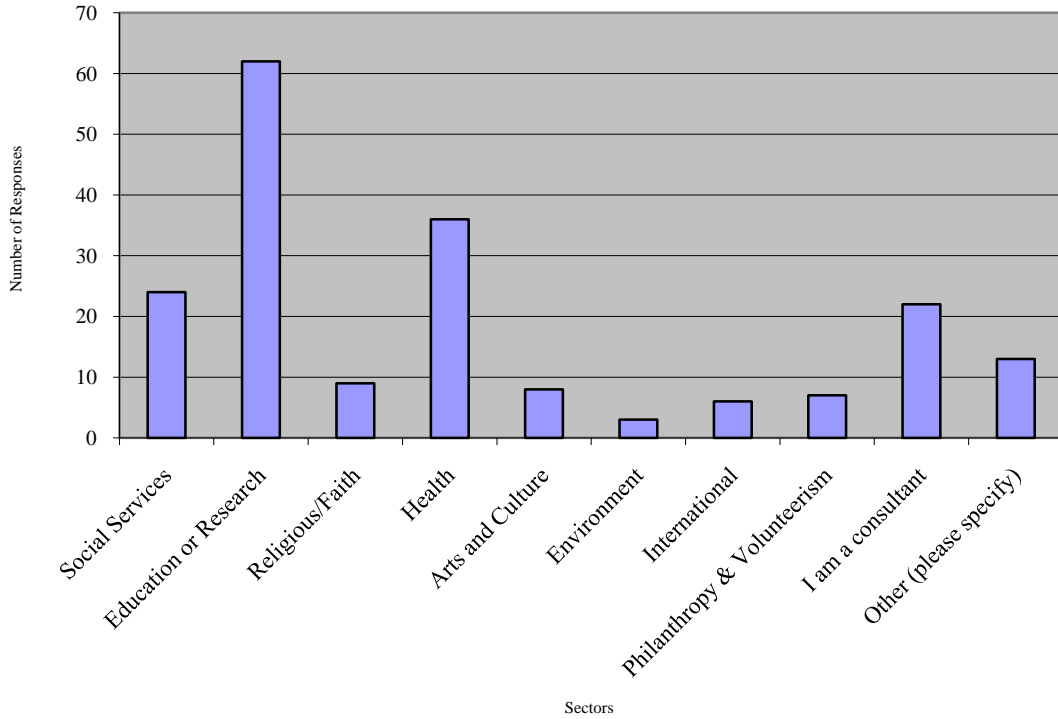


Figure 22

Question Twenty - What is the range of your annual income?

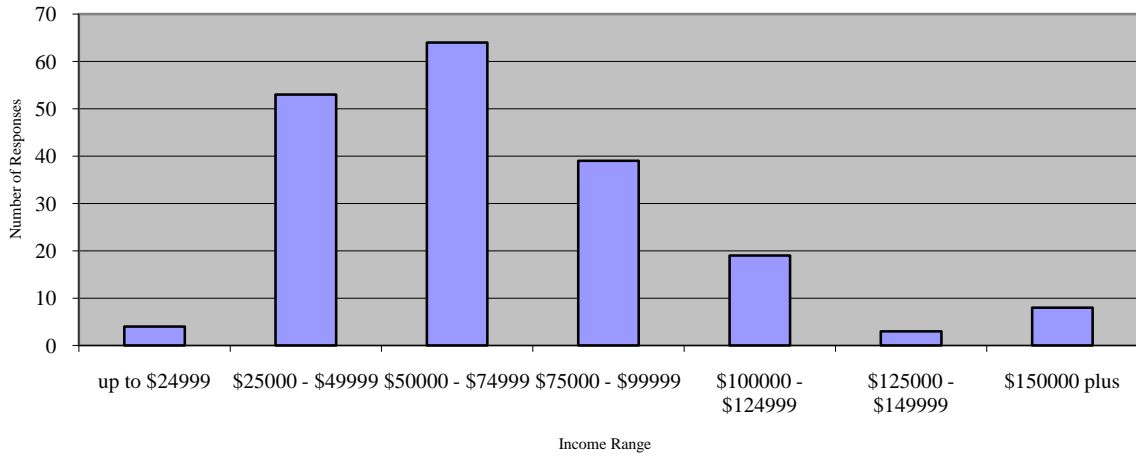


Figure 23

The greatest percentage of respondents (34%) earn between \$50,000 and \$74,999. This is slightly lower than the average from the key informants who were interviewed, but reflects the broad distribution of the survey.

Question Twenty One - In which country do you reside and work?

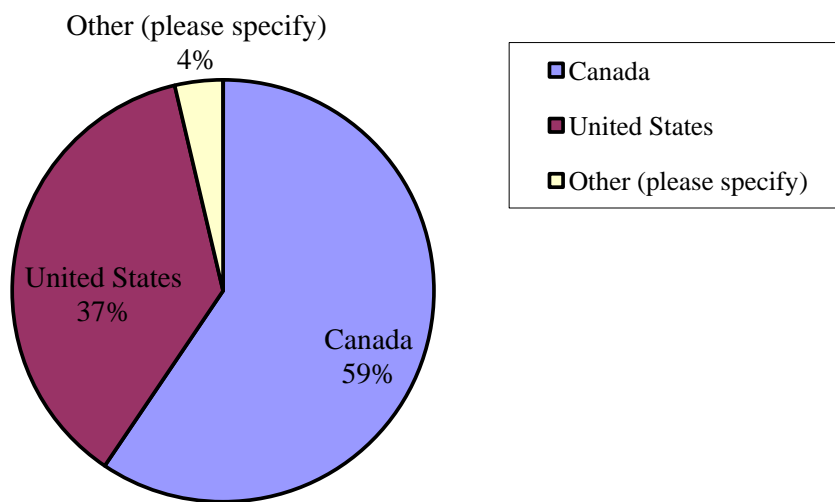


Figure 24

Of the respondents to the survey, 58% were from Canada, 36% from the United States with the remaining 6% representing England, Japan and Australia. A comparison between the Canadian and American responses was quite striking.

Compared to Canadians, Americans were more likely to strongly agree that they felt connected to others through their work, that their work connects to their personal values and

that they find satisfaction and meaning from their work. Americans were slightly more comfortable discussing vocation in the workplace and none felt it was “not appropriate” compared to 5% of Canadians who gave this answer.

Both Canadians and Americans said that the statements about vocation in question three fulfilled their understanding of vocation either very well or moderately well, however Americans more often answered “very well”. Americans were more likely to learn about vocation from a faith community (34%) than Canadians (16%), who rated personal experience (38%) and family (29%) the highest. 83% of Americans said that they had a vocation, compared to 76% of Canadians, they were also more likely to indicate that fundraising either was their vocation or an expression of it than Canadians. More Canadians said they did not know if they did have a vocation (15% versus 13%).

Americans rated themselves as very passionate about their work more than Canadians (60% versus 55%) and were more likely to say they were supported at work and that their organizations were directed by the mission, vision and values “to a great extent” (73% versus 61%). However, more Canadians indicated they were given opportunities for reflection at work very often or sometimes than Americans.

These disparities may suggest fundamental social and cultural differences between Canada and the United States, often not considered or reflected in fundraising related dialogue and scholarship.

Question 22: Additional comments from respondents...

The comments provided by the participating fundraisers were enlightening and varied but demonstrated some polarization. Of the 51 comments submitted, most were positive reflections related to the questions answered. Some expressed great interest in the

topic, as well as thanks for being given the opportunity to view their work in a different light. One indicated they found the survey personally challenging giving them pause to reflect. Still others said they had never thought about vocation as related to their own personal experience. Some respondents related personal experiences of when their values either aligned or clashed with those of their organization and what impact that had.

Two fundraisers expressed concern about the word 'vocation' itself, that it was old fashioned, pejorative and too connected to organized religion to be useful. Another contributor said he would not hire a fundraiser who expressed thoughts of vocation. He felt that vocation did not belong in the workplace as it would hamper competitive performance and a focus on financial results. The link between vocation and fundraising was not clear for this respondent.

Summary

The key informant interviews and survey of fundraising professionals give insight into what fundraisers think about vocation and its role in the fundraising workplace. Fundraising, it seems, is fertile ground for the expression and experience of vocation.

Generally speaking, fundraisers make a strong connection between vocation and the work they do; connections of service, community and personal fulfillment.

A striking feature emerging from these research methodologies was an expressed desire for the forum to think about and discuss the topic. Many interview and survey participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to view their work in a broader context and through the filter of vocation. Others wondered why there was so little discussion about the value and nature of the work of fundraisers.

Interesting to note however, both methodologies allude to some polarity and conflict within the fundraising community. The survey results indicate a strong support for a vocational approach to fundraising and the workplace. This is contrasted by the isolated suggestion that vocation is not a desirable quality in a fundraiser as it may take away their edge. There were other references made by interview subjects in the context of vocation about the lack of access to organizational power structures and the perceived growing emphasis on competition and measuring fundraising success by numbers only. Together, these subtle elements suggest an increasing crisis of identity within professional fundraising. Discussion about philanthropy, values, meaning and vocation bring to light differences of opinion, sector and organizational priorities and of what may have thought to be the “fundamentals”.

More optimistically, the results of the research also indicate a receptiveness to the idea of vocational culture. While there is a gap between aspiration and reality, there is also evidence of commitment to developing stronger cultures of vocation within philanthropic organizations and belief that such a culture is a desirable state.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

The intent of this research was to explore the concept of vocation, what fundraising professionals think about it and what value it may bring to them personally and to the organizations they work for. The research considered the larger philosophical context of

fundraising and issues that fall well outside technique. The project speaks to values, aspiration, commitment, mission and community.

Conclusions

The Oxford Dictionary defines philanthropy as love of humankind or practical benevolence. Robert Payton, one of the key informants for this study, defines philanthropy as voluntary action for the common good. Philanthropic organizations therefore, by their very nature, can be viewed as centres of vocation embraced and expressed. And those who work in these organizations may be participating in vocation.

First, fundraising engages people in the purpose and practice of philanthropy, affirming a link between fundraising and vocation - where fundraising professionals may rightly view their work as a call to serve others. This vocational view can engage people in a process of personal and collective reflection to discover how best they can be of service to others with the best of who they are.

Vocation can help fundraising professionals understand the value of their work to the world as well as the value of their work to themselves. Based on the research, fundraising professionals with a vocational approach to their work are emotionally engaged and aligned with the mission and values of the organizations they represent. These professionals make connections between their values, passions and identity and understand how their call impacts those around them. They claim to be part of something bigger than themselves (perhaps achieving the mission or vision?) yet embrace their call with humility and grace. Through organizations, they engage donors, colleagues and others with a sense of community and connected-ness. Their vocation sustains them in times of difficulty, and

challenges them when facing tough ethical dilemmas and incidences where organizational values are not prioritized.

Second, fundraising workplaces within philanthropic organizations would benefit from being supportive of vocation. A strong culture of philanthropy in an organization can prepare the way for a culture of vocation. Such a culture would provide a forum for colleagues to reflect and question each other on the role of fundraising in the community, both within and outside of the organization, and the meaning behind the work.

This same vocational culture would ensure that organizational values, mission and vision are clear and evident in day to day practices; evaluated, questioned and altered as needed. A culture of vocation would help employees to discover their “signature strengths” and their unique call to serve the world. Flexibility would enable people to explore their interests and talents in ways that may fall outside of their job description. Teams would be strengthened as a result of shared values and aspirations, with members drawing together for a common purpose.

Constituents such as donors, members and volunteers may even be encouraged to see the meaning of their own engagement in philanthropy through vocation and its embracing within organizations.

Finally, professional fundraising organizations have a critical role in encouraging members to consider and then promote a vocational understanding of the work. This would provide support to new professionals in the field, encourage professional fundraisers (especially those from organizations with no culture of vocation), and impact professional mentoring programs and educational curriculum, often based solely on fundraising technique. The role of professional associations is particularly critical considering the

sentiments from the survey of fundraisers under 40 years of age with less than 10 years of experience. It seems that they need to be engaged in ways that they are not being engaged currently.

A contemporary understanding of vocation encourages reflection among fundraising professionals about the meaning of their work and provides a filter through which to view their work and the world. A vocational approach can enrich the lives of fundraising professionals, deepen their commitment to philanthropy and develop cultures of vocation in their organizations for the betterment of all.

Future Considerations

A number of recommendations emerge from this study of vocation, for consideration and for action. First, it is critical that fundraisers remain inclusive and grounded. The contents of this project are meant to inform fundraisers about what is possible and to initiate further dialogue. Increasing diversity of culture, faith and opinion should be viewed as a source of wealth as the conversation continues. Further, balance must be achieved between the ideals and aspiration of vocation in the workplace and the realities of day-to-day experience. Being grounded in mission and calling requires grace and integrity.

Vocation provides a framework for a commitment to organizational development and ongoing evaluation. For example, a thorough evaluation of recruitment strategies for fundraising professionals could lead to hiring decisions being informed by insight into candidate's signature strengths and personal values. Simultaneously, assessing administrative and management practices through the lens of vocation will move the

organization closer to fulfilling its mission, developing a culture of vocation and realizing the benefits that come as a result.

Philanthropic organizations and professional fundraising organizations need to create opportunities for discussion and reflection about the nature of philanthropy and the work of fundraising. Talking and sharing about what fundraising is about, necessarily leads to what vocation is about. Leaders of these organizations need to realize the receptiveness and desire of professionals to be engaged at this level.

Finally, fundraisers with a vocational approach to their work have a responsibility to be a mentor to others. This can be accomplished through formal mentorship programs but more often than not, comes as a result of genuine interest in the vocation of others.

Study Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors. One, the sources related to the overlap of vocation and fundraising are limited requiring broader sources on vocation to be reviewed and then applied. More specific sources would have allowed for greater analysis and comparison among authors.

Two, a more comprehensive interview process would have further developed the research with input from more fundraising practitioners about their understanding and experience of vocation. By way of example, broad-based focus groups would have engaged professionals in a way that the survey could not.

And finally, a sense of limitation was experienced as a struggle to articulate and effectively express ideas and experiences related to vocation – a concept that is deeply personal and challenging to explain, even for those who claim to have discovered theirs.

Further, the language of vocation is narrow and seems to be closely tied with organized religion and this seems to be a hindrance to many.

It is hoped that in spite of these limitations the value inherent in the concept of vocation was accessible to bring value to the life and experience of the reader.

Suggestions for Further Study

The topic of vocation is so textured and multi-dimensional that there are many unexplored avenues for further research. While various faith traditions were briefly considered, a more in depth analysis of vocation across religions and cultures could be helpful to a profession that is currently predominantly Caucasian and Protestant. Such an exploration would broaden the understanding of current practitioners but also make a place for new practitioners that may embrace other belief systems. It would build greater consensus about the collective meaning and value of fundraising work.

Another interesting direction would be a more detailed gender analysis approach that compared the understanding and experience of vocation among men and women. Some differences were identified in the survey but greater focus could lead to theories about differing societal expectations and how these expectations may influence views on vocation, and vocation in the workplace.

The differences exposed between Canadians and Americans through the survey are worthy of further exploration, as it relates to vocation but even more as it relates to philanthropic culture and practice. A deeper understanding of these cultural and social differences may have implications for future philanthropic research and the development of professional best-practices on both sides of the border.

It would be interesting to explore vocation among fundraisers from various sectors to see if there is a higher percentage of individuals who view their work as vocation in certain sectors e.g. social justice or health. Insightful parallels could perhaps be identified among donors who view philanthropy as their vocation and where they choose to direct their resources.

Further, a deeper exploration into how people discover their vocation could be helpful in developing programs and curriculum for new fundraising professionals. Mentoring and professional fundraising programs could take on a new dimension that would benefit the field of fundraising and the philanthropic organizations served by fundraising professionals. This dimension would allow for fundraising to be considered within a broader philosophical context and generate dialogue about organizational values and culture, and the implications of a culture of vocation.

Additionally, there is much discussion about fundraising and fundraising as a profession. Research about what it is to be a profession, and a professional, and how current professions view vocation (e.g. nursing, social work, medicine) may also inform the contemporary discussion about vocation and fundraising.

Finally, while this study has focused on vocation, there may be some interesting connections made with a parallel study of avocation and the fundraising professional.

It is hoped that interested practitioners will expand on this study of vocation and fundraising with a desire to encourage more fundraising professionals to understand how a vocational approach to their work can provide greater meaning to their work and life experience.

Summary

The concept of vocation is valuable to the understanding of how professional fundraisers view their work and the nature of philanthropy. Vocation resonates with professional fundraisers and provides a filter through which to view oneself and the world. There is a strong connection between vocation and fundraising within the context of philanthropy and this is enhanced by developing cultures of vocation within philanthropic organizations.

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Appendix A – List of Key Informant Interview Subjects

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Indiana, USA

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Rhode Island, USA

Paul Pribbenow, CFRE
President
Rockford College
Illinois, USA

Neville Kirchmann
President & CEO
Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation
Toronto, Canada

Kay Sprinkel Grace, CFRE
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Dianne Lister, CFRE
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Guy Mallabone, CFRE
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