Realising Calling through Identity Work. Comparing Themes of Calling in Faith-Based and Religious Organisations

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Abstract

This study explores notions of calling in management careers in faith-based and religious organisations. What are the similarities and differences between managers' understanding of their work as a calling in these two types of organisation? How do they negotiate calling in their work? We use interview data from nine middle managers in a faith-based hospital and nine deans in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Norway. The article builds on cross-disciplinary literature on calling in working life. We theorise, by using comparisons, how notions of calling are resources for managers when they negotiate identity. Our findings show that the hospital managers respond to the modern meaning-making calling as emanating from within and outside, while the deans also experience the traditional religious calling from above. Such notions blend in our conceptualisation of calling as pluralistic, biographical and present-oriented. Both categories of managers report that their transition into management is guided by an orientation to serve and to promote organisational mission and values.

Keywords
Calling, identity work, managers, professionals, faith-based

Introduction

Scholars across disciplines study work as a central source of purpose and identity (Duffy and Dik 2013; Hall and Chandler 2005). Irrespective of sector or occupation, individuals seek meaningful work that transcends production and livelihood (Alvesson 2002; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). Facilitated by technology and the ideal of flexibility, work extends beyond the traditionally demarcated lines of regulated work-hours and specific locations, permeating life in new ways (Sennett 1998). These changes resonate in the plethora of concepts describing work. While *job* focuses on financial rewards and necessities, and *career* implies advancement, *calling* denotes fulfilling work – with or without religious cues (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). Employers and organisations are attracted to workers with a sense of calling because they are intrinsically motivated, creative and engaged (Steger, Dik, and Duffy 2012). Despite

their differing motives, the interests of employees, managers and organisations converge to enhance the meaningfulness of work. Aligning with the notion of lived religion (Ammerman 2016), where religious cues appear outside the traditional religious domain, religion may be *in work* and *at work* in organisations. Since work entails a search for identity, embedded in, yet transcending, mundane tasks and interactions, religion is presumably in some instances reflected in accounts of managerial work that display identity, values and organisational commitments (Farris 2013). This sets the scene for a renewed interest in the interplay of the sacred and secular in working life, here illustrated through the conceptualisations of *calling*. We review two ideal-typical approaches to calling; the classical religious approach referring to a sense of "destiny and pro-social duty", and the modern meaning-making approach concerning "an inner drive toward self-fulfilment or personal happiness" (Duffy and Dik 2013, 429). We then discuss them in relation to identity work as a space for negotiating calling.

We situate our research within management and organisation studies, exploring managers' talk about the dimension of meaning in their work by drawing on interviews with 18 managers. Nine are managers in a faith-based hospital, and nine are deans leading clergy in the Church of Norway. Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are particularly purpose-driven and managers are distinct carriers of values that express organisational mission and self-understanding (Jeavons 1992). Constituting fertile areas for our investigation, their Christian faith-base variously provides the rationale for organisational identity and core activities. Despite historical changes, these contexts assumedly still encompass perceptions of calling and discourses containing religious imagery. However, both organisations experience that their task environment and international reform movements provide reasons for adapting to a more instrumental approach (Askeland and Schmidt 2016). Institutional work related to values in FBOs serves as a stepping-stone between the sacred and secular spheres. Hospitals rooted in the diaconal tradition offer health care like other hospitals. We cannot presuppose that the employees possess religious commitments (Aadland and Skjørshammer 2012). Their status as professionals in FBOs triggers identity work: engagement in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, 1165).

Against this backdrop, we presuppose that the hospital exhibits an array of notions of calling. Similarly, we assume that the modernisation of the church as an organisation extends its repertoire of meaning-making resources into present working life. This development facilitates managers in both organisations in incorporating various sources of motivation. We propose a nuanced conceptualisation of this phenomenon. Thus, this article primarily has a theoretical purpose, which is achieved by the means of an explorative and comparative approach.

We compare a specific phenomenon – themes of calling in managers' talk about their work – and search for similarities and differences. The organisations have undergone similar reforms to strengthen management, and we expect tensions between professionals and organisations to be present in both contexts. This facilitates a similar system design, comparison of two phenomena that assumedly share central characteristics (Felski and Freidman 2013), due to their common Christian faith-base. The organisations differ in terms of technology, number of employees, size and complexity, budget, and the character of their work. The hospital involves many professional specialities, characterised by technological and scientific discoveries. The church organisation is more ideological or idea-driven and has a simpler structure.

Researchers have primarily studied calling as a spiritual dimension of professionalism, different from professional evidence-based knowledge and practice (Tveit 2008; Felter 2010;

Christensen 2013). There exists little research on managers and calling, even within FBOs and religious organisations. Religious leadership is studied from various perspectives; not, however, in relation to calling and identity. Sociological studies of organisations in the Norwegian folk-church context have mainly focused on managerial roles and functions (Askeland and Schmidt 2016). This role perspective highlights external expectations, whereas an identity perspective emphasises self-understanding. Huse (1998) studied deans using economic organisation theory and the principal-agent approach. Hernes (2007) compared church members' and employees' perceptions of and expectations towards management, which aligned to those found in schools and hospitals. Askeland (2015) also discovered profound similarities between daily managerial behaviour in FBOs compared with others. Hansson and Andersen (2008) characterised the leadership style of Swedish vicars as relation-oriented. Sirris (2018) explored Norwegian clergy's dual expectations towards deans in terms of managerial and professional competencies. The priests emphasised professional identification with their deans based on the commitment of ordination.

Scandinavian studies of religious managers have prioritised roles and found basic similarities with those in others contexts. This research tradition has mainly neglected managers' personal convictions and identities. There is a need for research exploring how managers conceptualise and value their work in FBOs and religious organisations. Several of the above-mentioned studies are surveys. Qualitative descriptions offer supplementary interpretations and contributions. The questions guiding this study are: What are the similarities and differences between managers' understanding of their work as a calling in faith-based and religious organisations? How do they negotiate calling in their work? We aim to investigate and compare the notions of calling in managers' identity work in two different organisations, and propose a renewed conceptualisation of calling in modern organisations.

The theoretical section discusses the interrelation between the key concepts of calling and identity. We argue that managers' perception of work is best understood in the plural, coined as *themes of calling*, rather than the established dichotomy of classical and modern calling. Next, we describe the methodology followed by the main findings. The discussion based on interviews and a literature review suggests a novel classification of calling.

Theoretical Perspectives on Calling and Identity

Calling is an archaic concept that originated in a religious context and has recently regained relevance and attention. Calling was discredited and left behind as a reminiscence of the past, yet scholars are re-establishing calling as a pathway for meaning-making in working life (Hall and Chandler 2005). It has seen a resurgence in multiple disciplines, including psychology (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997), organisation and management studies (Duffy and Blustein 2005), literature (Frey 2008), and the sociology of religion (Davidson and Caddell 1994).

Classical calling and its development

Calling and its cognate, vocation, are rooted in medieval Christian traditions and denote a call away from the world into monastic life or priesthood. The Protestant reformation profoundly affected the perception of work and calling. Contradicting both the Greek-Roman perception of work as toil and medieval calling as a property of monastic life, Protestant work ethics viewed all mundane work as a calling from God (Wingren 2004). Max Weber related calling to profession and identity. He claimed calling ("berufung") turns a profession ("beruf") into a vocation (Farris 2013, 79), connecting religious callings to all types

of work. Whereas Luther emphasised loyalty to one's given station in life, Calvin underlined each person's responsibility to discover talents and use them. The Calvinist calling is a command by God to work for his glory, not a fate as in Lutheranism. Central in Weber's scholarship is the restless entrepreneur, fully preoccupied with fulfilling his predestined calling and demonstrating that he is among "the selected". Puritans develop a "personality" that is a more stable identity type associated with the strong self, which Sennett (1998) terms as *character*. Having a personality implies a strong inner core not easily adaptive to changing external circumstances, unlike the modern knowledge worker in the post-bureaucratic organisation (Webb 2004).

Modern calling and the turn towards identity

Weber's approach and the link between calling, identity and work reflect a major trend in organisation and management studies since the 1980s, emphasising the role of organisational culture, employee motivation, commitment and professional and managerial identity (Alvesson 2002). The religious connotations of the current managerialist discourse are widely noted. Management scholars and consultants are often assigned the status of gurus or evangelists, and organisations develop strategies guided by their vision, mission and values (Pattison 1997).

Whereas the classical view of calling emphasised differences between the duties of work and private life, the modern version views work as inseparable from life, transcending a mere job. Work may be enjoyable, yet since something crucial is at stake, demands effort and even sacrifice (Bunderson and Thompson 2009). Work becomes an expression of one's purpose and identity. Sennett (1998) underlines the potentially damaging effects of the modern calling. It correlates with burnout, manipulation and "mind control" and is linked with the ideologies of flexibility and individualism. In contrast, Giddens (1984) identifies the possibility of creating a meaningful working life in the same flexible capitalism based on the "reflexive self". The modern negotiable self-identity, contrary to the Puritan strong self, refers to the idea of continuous interaction between "I," "me" and "others" (Webb 2004). If identity is conceptualised as processual construction, it demands efforts from the individual. Managers may perform identity work when constructing identifications by negotiating the central, enduring and distinctive properties of the organisation (Pratt and Ravasi 2016).

In sum, calling is variously conceptualised, aligning with two main perceptions of identity: as character and reflexive self. First, Sennett's understanding of identity as a stable character corroded by capitalism aligns with the classical concept of calling, capturing both a continuity of the older idea of duty, and the more flexible type of identity associated with the term commitment. Like calling, commitment is a force that binds an individual to a target and a course of action related to the target. Second, Giddens emphasises identity as negotiated and reflexive, as is modern calling. As organisational life and work relations become more complex, employees have to relate to several targets simultaneously. There is a pressure on professionals to perform identity work and increasingly so when moving into management (Alvesson 2002). Professional identity is the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experience in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role (Ibarra 1999, 765). It is assumed that managerial identity constitutes the negotiation of professional and organisational identities. Managerial identity is assumedly more modern and flexible, emphasising serving the shifting needs of an organisation, whereas professionals display more stable identities in service of a common good (Pratt and Ravasi 2016).

Calling related to professional and managerial work and identity

In the early sociology of professions, professions were viewed as stewards of the common good in society, entrusted expertise, and guided by ethical codes (Brint 2015). Upon failure, they risked losing their licence. Health workers are still associated with ethical guidelines and the Hippocratic Oath. The clergy in our research context are called into the Lutheran church as the ordination into priesthood is stated "rite vocare"; to be rightly called (Wingren 2004). Yet, theology does not explicate calling, which Christensen (2013) interprets in three distinctive ways: a call from above, from God; a call from outside, meaning the specific need of a parish for a priest and the approval of the bishop; and third, a call from within, referring to being convinced about entering priesthood or management. We find that the first two cohere with the classical notion of calling, whereas the third aligns with the modern perception of calling (Duffy and Dik 2013; Bunderson and Thompson 2009).

Thus, both clergy and health workers are expected to serve the needs of others, which resonates with the nature of professionalism. According to central Anglo-American research on professions (Brint 2015), modern professions have lost their soul and traditional identity and become largely oriented towards market-centred and organisational ideas. Healthcare and religious organisations are undergoing reforms that increase the power of managers and the carriers and providers of managerial identities (Pratt and Ravasi 2016). Some studies examine how church employees and health workers relate calling to their work under these circumstances (Felter 2010; Tveit 2008; Christensen 2013), arguing that workers have dropped the classical discourse of calling and substituted it with a discourse of professional expertise, seeking to build managerial legitimacy and enhance individual status. A debated question is to what extent religion constitutes part of calling and the current identity work in these organisations. Focusing on a variety of themes of calling, we include calling in both a classical religious and a modern meaning-seeking sense. Our objective is to nuance this dichotomy, moving beyond the ideal-types by exploring and comparing how managers in FBOs and in religious organisations integrate themes of calling in their identity. We summarise key features in the classical and modern calling as ideal-types:

Table 1. The ideal-typical dichotomy of calling

Characteristics	Classical calling	Modern calling
Framing	Collective religious traditions	Individual secular meaning-making
Motivation	Destiny and duty	Self-fulfilment and personal happiness
Source	Emanating from above and outside (transcendent)	Emanating from within (immanent)
Temporality	Fixed and stabile	Fluid and changing
Identity	Character (Sennett)	Self-reflexive (Giddens)
Arena	Work and life divided	Work and life inseparable
Domain	Professional	Managerial

Methodology

Research context and data collection

Our target group is managers at middle managerial levels in FBOs and religious organisations, which are at the nexus of organisational actions, close to operational and strategic levels, and responsible for shouldering the organisational values and ethos (Floyd and Wooldridge 1997). Qualitative research may illuminate poorly understood phenomena such as the role of calling in contemporary work settings. The HR department in both organisations helped with compiling the sample, which comprised interviewees who agreed to partake.

The diaconal hospital, located in a large Norwegian city, has a catchment area of 170,000 inhabitants, 1,700 employees and three managerial levels. The informants are four department managers (three men and one woman), five unit managers (two men and three women). The participants are aged between 42 and 67 years and have held their positions for 4–16 years. Even if such positions are neutral of profession, the interviewees are nurses and doctors. At both levels, management is a full-time job with scarcely any clinical work. The three departments are surgery, medicine and psychiatry.

The Church of Norway was a state church until 2012. Comprising 71 per cent of the population in 2017, it is the oldest and largest nationwide member organisation (Church of Norway 2017). The 12 dioceses cover every region of the country. The bishop leads the diocese, and the deans perform employers' liability on behalf of the bishop in their deanery, which typically consists of 15–25 priests. Several reforms have brought about changes, especially the Deanery reform in 2004 (Askeland and Schmidt 2016), which made the deans distinct middle managers, diminishing the traditional autonomy of the clergy. This position is not neutral to profession. Ordination is a formal qualification, and deans work as part-time parish priests. We chose one diocese, here granted anonymity, because it is centrally located and has no recruitment problem, thus allowing the deans to spend their time on leadership rather than clergy work. The material includes interviews with all deans in this diocese; three are women, and six are men. They had held their current positions for 2–24 years and were aged 50–69 years.

In the semi-structured interviews, we explore how the 18 managers understand their work as a calling. The objective was to allow the interviewees to elaborate salient work-related issues. Our questions were open-ended and addressed the contents of their job, leadership, relations to employees and top management, commitments, fulfilments, challenges, and characteristics of their work, organisations and identity. The first author conducted all interviews in Norwegian, lasting on average 75 minutes, and transcribed them verbatim.

Research ethics and analysis

Participants gave their informed consent, and ethical concerns were safeguarded by granting them anonymity. They openly and freely discussed the issues and we did not encounter any controversial issues.

Our approach to the data is interpretative, giving priority to an exploration and analysis of individual-level experiences. The thematic analysis was an abductive open-ended iterative analytic approach to building theory that moved between data and tentative theories (Eisenhardt 1989). The preliminary analysis included a reading of the material, guided by a thematic search for similarities and differences in what we considered relevant data given the research question. To get an overview of the large material, we applied NVIVO in a systematic process of inductive thematic content analysis in addition to manual coding. Both processes assisted in identifying the prevalence of emergent analytical themes. We then

systematically compared data using matrixes to find and show patterns between the data (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). The aim of the data coding and categorisation was to capture how managers perceived themes of calling – that is, how they integrated the classical and modern notions of calling in their identity work. From this inductive open-coding process, two major categories emerged within the themes of calling: biographical calling themes, and present-oriented and relational calling themes.

Findings

Biographical calling themes in the hospital and church

The first theme includes convictions responding to certain summons, here analysed in a tripartite direction; *from above*, *from inside*, *from outside*. These personal calling experiences focused on identity, being biographical due to their historical and enduring nature.

Few health managers referred to a *calling from above*, implying an experience of external intervention aligning with the classical calling. "I was saved immediately," one male department manager (67) exclaimed metaphorically, "this was what I was supposed to do. It was obvious for me, for the first time in my life!" This theme downplayed the agency of the called. A male unit manager, aged 45, referred to a specific event as "lightning from a clear sky, a lifelong conviction about my direction in life." The managers who referred to a call from above, ascribed it to "the greater good." Explicit religious calling narratives were rare.

Calling from within among hospital managers referred to inner commitments associated with romantic notions known to especially gifted persons, pursuing their talents by a course of life: "Here I can make a difference for those in need," a male department manager in his 50s said, "you take pride in your work, when going to bed at night and when resting in your grave." We deemed this as a type of inner validation after entering a given role. However, some managers also described themselves as drawn to a specific kind of work, even before entering it, and eventually achieving a validation. Such ideas were articulated by a female unit manager aged 54: "a discovery or coming home." The imagery of discovery implied an open-ended quest rather than a rational search among these research participants.

All hospital managers reported a *calling from outside*. This was a mundane dimension of calling, mediated through others, accidentally or through recruitment. A female unit manager, 45, said: "I was asked to apply for the position. I didn't want to resist. My heart has gone more to the managerial part of my job, leaving the professional realm. I find a synergy. I started working there by chance. No ambitions to become a manager." These managers discussed incidental situations that eventually led them into their work.

Turning to the church, most deans explicitly described being *called from above*, by God, in the context of role transitions; entering priesthood or leadership. A female dean in her 60s said about the transition from profession into becoming a dean: "I'm raised in a Christian family. Wanted to work as a priest. An inner life-long surrendering, a calling, not outgrown. When asked to apply for the position as a dean, I first resisted. I prayed, it matured. Felt it as a calling." This historical dimension in statements referring to childhood underlines their perception of calling as integrated and enduring in their identities. The same life-long awareness about a specific mission that had brought them into priesthood continued to nurture their calling as they moved into leadership.

Most deans experienced a *calling from within*. They had a life-long familiarity with the church. They referenced biographical accounts of careers in Christian youth work to gain encouragement and responsibility. One male dean aged 50 combined metaphors with

prosaic reasons for being a manager: "This is where my heart resides. After pastoring for years, I felt like becoming a dean with managerial challenges and still being a priest."

The *calling from outside* shows that calling was not exclusively about inner emotions, but lifted from an individual level onto a systemic level. A dean in his 60s underlined that "the position itself, be it professional work as a priest or the formal role as a dean, is the calling." This sense of calling was collective and collegial rather than individualistic. Deans' consciousness related to their ordination, where they by making promises responded to tripartite summons from above, within and outside.

Overall, the findings reflect similarities. Managers in both organisations talked about their inner convictions of being in the right place and doing what they ought to do. Both categories of managers described calling as indicating necessary functions that needed to be filled, being faithful to their station depending on their abilities. This finding is explained by their professional ethics and commitments. The organisations called for identification and loyalty, often expressed as a sense of duty.

There are also clear differences in the data. The hospital calling accounts were linked to the managers' backgrounds as health workers. Some were drawn to the faith-based hospital because of its Christian identity. However, they emphasised their path into management, which resulted from recruitment and the willingness to take on responsibilities and challenges. These are indicators of a calling from outside and inside. In contrast, the deans appeared to take calling for granted as they primarily identified as professionals with additional leadership functions. The deans emphasised calling from above and within, and primarily into priesthood, not leadership.

Present-oriented calling and relations in hospital and church

This theme exhibits a dual pattern: role modelling that serves employees, and alignment with organisational mission and values.

The hospital managers talked of challenges related to the budget. They felt pressured by tight budgets and cuts threatening their work of serving patients. The managers experienced success when their co-workers thrived. The managerial program and the CEO's intentions to serve as a role model was inspiring to them. Conflicts and lack of quality and commitment were cited as challenges, particularly related to patient care. Employees performing poor quality work threatened patients' lives and health. A female unit manager in her 50s said: "Neighbourly love is a value of this hospital, but it should be directed towards patients, not making excuses for not dealing with inadequate employees. Inadequate professional standards challenge us; employees who are not engaged don't really care about their work."

A male department manager, aged 56, underlined: "I used to work in a commercial hospital, which didn't have the higher purpose I sought. It was not right working to increase the wealth of the owners. My main challenge is focusing on the central stuff, not drowning in administration." The managers, despite the administrative workload, were conscious of the overall mission of the hospital: treating patients and providing the best possible care. Some mentioned that many were attracted to the hospital because of its diaconal values and Christian tradition. They claimed that the expectations from this hospital differed slightly from those of public and commercial hospitals given its tradition and pride in history. Occasionally, they used religious language. The classical content of calling was largely replaced with awareness about the mission of the hospital and its values. They highlighted serving patients and society by being good stewards of tax money, quality and safety. Fulfilment had its contradiction in specific challenges. One male unit manager in his 40s, who identified as a "personal and active Christian," was recruited from a major hospital, but was "disap-

pointed by the absence of the Christian tradition." The hospital's values constituted a recurrent theme, and the managers used these as resources to address and sustain the mission they identified with. Other aspects of fulfilment are responsibility and freedom.

Turning to the church, the deans elaborated different sets of challenges. They clearly distinguished the core tasks and mission of the church from what they viewed as a growing bureaucracy. A female dean (52) emphasised: "I must be a professional role model, showing through actions and priorities what is important, walking the front line and pulling. I am a co-player. I am happy seeing thriving priests. They are dedicated and committed in their hearts. Ordination is fundamental for us all." The deans talked about their efforts to improve work conditions and enhance quality, as articulated by a male dean aged 61: "Essentially, management is about facilitating and ought to be focused on establishing good relationships among employees, and maintaining focus on core tasks." If these criteria were achieved, they believed that they had fulfilled their role. The deans did not elaborate on their own successes, rather on successful employees. They were satisfied when enabling good relationships and communication among actors.

In the dispersed church organisation, the deans lacked detailed knowledge about their employees and avoided administrative control. There seemed to be a balancing act between posing and claiming to be a role model: "The core values are interwoven in our practices. Christian values are important to me. Because I am like that myself. I want to be a pastoral manager, safeguarding the distinction of the church, see that we follow our Shepard" (male dean, 57). For instance, priests and parishes were responsible for their own development. They created theological arguments for their leadership and the function of role modelling, which they bestowed upon themselves. The deans discussed how they were constantly aware of role modelling and instances in which their actions and words were deliberate. They shared an ideal of "burning, dedicated employees" as phrased by a male dean aged 56, which might be a projection of how they want to identify themselves.

The deans also extensively discussed the positive aspects of work. They experienced manoeuvring space, although one female dean, aged 60, underlined: "I haven't gotten a recipe for being a dean. Our vision is making disciples of all nations." She emphasised the overall mission: "Addressing the core in our ministry and in the mission of the church, priests are inspired and motivated." The deans highlighted the higher objective of their work; serving others.

In sum, there were clear similarities between hospital and church managers in the present-oriented dimension of calling. Managers in both organisations performed role modelling. They referred to their professional identity and strong identification with fellow professionals. Key differences concern how hospital managers primarily served the patients rather than employees. The deans, in contrast, hardly addressed individual parishioners; rather they enabled local priests and parishes to find their own direction. This can be explained by the fact that all managers perform employer's liability in their mundane and hectic everyday working lives. Management consists of generic tasks shared across contexts. Their middle managerial position places them close to the employees and the top management since these organisations are not very large. Whereas hospital managers saw challenges related to budgets, the deans expressed frustrations over increasing bureaucracy.

Overall, the two categories of managers differ somewhat on the biographical dimension of calling, yet are rather alike on the present-oriented dimension Table 2 illustrates how the classical and modern notions of calling blend differently in managers' identity work.

Table 2. Comparing managers' themes of calling

	Aspects of calling	Hospital (managers)	Church (deans)
Biographical dimension	Direction of calling	From within and outside	From above, within and outside
	Approach	Discovery	Taken for granted
	Professional calling	Weak	Emphasised
	Managerial calling	Emphasised	Weak
	Religious imagery	Rare Personal	Implicit Institutionalised
Present-oriented dimension	Challenges	Economy, conflicts	Bureaucracy, conflicts
	Fulfilments	Successful employees Focusing core work	
	Commitment	Organisational mission Orientation to serve	
	Ideal-types	Classical Modern	

Discussion

Our aim is to theorise by comparing how two groups of managers understand their work as a calling, which, like identity, is central to the issues of meaning, motivation and commitment. By comparing, our aim is to show that notions of calling are flexible and differently constructed by actors, yet common patterns emerge. Based on the findings, we characterise themes of calling as *pluralistic, historical* and *present-oriented*. We now discuss how managers' identity work reflects these properties.

Calling as a pluralistic phenomenon

Themes of calling reflect pluralism, given the tripartite direction of calling, and various ways of realising calling. The hallmark of calling is *plurality* as it is no singular phenomenon. The managers considered their path into professionalism and management, which although diverse, essentially foregrounded identity. The accounts underlined that calling is situated and essentially contextual. All managers expressed feelings of commitment towards their employees, their organisation, and most importantly, their patients or parishes. Quality in treatment was prioritised among health managers. They confronted both professionals and the top management if they feared for patient safety. The hospital's values provided the language with which to express commitment. By offering their undivided attention, they fulfilled their duty and calling. This means that certain tasks seemed more coherent with their calling. They drew on the values of the hospital when discussing organisational identity and their own commitment. This finding aligns with Askeland's (2015) study on faith-based hospital managers being carriers of values. A value-discourse seems to have replaced the traditional religious discourse (Pattison 1997). Additionally, some hospital managers connected to the Christian tradition, which is not a precondition to work as a doctor or nurse.

   In contrast, the deans in Church of Norway articulated the classical calling from God. This is not surprising, due to ordination that presupposes faith. In addition to expressing the traditional calling explicitly, their talk shared many of the characteristics as that of the hospital managers. Both manager categories essentially participated in the same discourse on meaningful work, how to establish good relations and being caring employers. This finding aligns

with previous studies underlining similarities between managers in religious organisations and those in other sectors (Hernes 2007; Askeland 2015).

Both the stable classical and modern fluid calling is present and intertwine with identity narratives in both organisations (Webb 2004). Contradicting Duffy and Dik (2013) and the associated assumptions that church managers align more with the classical calling, whereas hospitals are more aligned with the modern calling, we challenge the established dichotomy of classical and modern calling ascribed to different organisations and professions.

Calling as a historical phenomenon

Calling has a *historical* dimension, by nature diachronic and integrated into biographical accounts serving as orienting devices, explicitly drawing on religion, as in the church context, or implicitly, as in the hospital. Like professionals, our data show how managers use themes of calling to accomplish their identity work. Successful stories generate feelings of authenticity and are validated by audience. Calling is not understood as a fixed characteristic, rather as a cultural resource in identity construction (Swidler 1986). Managers construct meaning from experiences by forging their understandings of calling to their own history and motivation.

Our interviews indicate that calling is understood as an orientating device by providing direction that alters their course of life. The ideal-typical classical calling and modern calling coexist in both contexts, as indicated by the threefold direction of calling and a certain level of religious underpinning to the meaning-making dimension. These life-changing experiences may be reflected in the three analytical classifications from above, within and outside. These are not mutually exclusive, but may appear simultaneously and if so, reinforce the institution of calling, experienced as a transition, if not transformation. Calling concerns resonance. The call as summons echoes in the called and is enduring. The interrelation to everyday life is evident in fulfilment and challenges. The implications of the same calling may differ during life. In addition, these themes of calling possess traits of lived religion by explicitly or implicitly drawing on religion as a resource for managers (Ammerman 2016). Conventional Christian imagery appears in materialised forms, such as deans quoting Scripture. They may attend to mundane duties and then rapidly switch from the secular to the sacred. They did not mention returning to the life of a parish priest. They were motivated by the overall mission of the church and their commitment to help the clergy. Our data show that calling from above is institutionalised in the church context. Some hospital managers use this specific notion of calling, but on a personal level. This reflects a development in FBOs, contrary to religious organisations, where religious commitment is institutionalised rather than individually based (Aadland and Skjørshammer 2012).

Calling may also be researched on a psychological basis, emphasising the individual as an agent and focusing on personal choices, or in the frames of organisational ethos. In a modern society, one should expect a calling from within as individuals are given a role as actors that seek to develop their "reflexive self-identity" (Giddens 1994). Interviewees predominantly emphasised the calling from outside; the organisation and its hierarchy and society. This was the arena for launching commitments. The managers differed between professionalism and managerialism in emphasis of calling. The hospital managers have more distinctive callings into management, whereas the deans discussed their calling into priesthood, not management. The deans downplayed their own hierarchical position. This we explain by their strong professional identity and partly due to unease with exercising authority. This might be a characteristic of FBOs and religious organisations idealising the paradox of leadership as serving (Felter 2010), simultaneously showing that professions still have

a thriving discourse of calling. This is a finding that clearly nuances previous studies that portray calling as a reminiscence (Tveit 2008; Christensen 2013), based on a singular classical definition of the construct. Our study contradicts the assumption that professions have "lost their soul" (Brint 2015), and instead underlines the need for professionals to articulate meaning in ongoing identity work.

Calling as a present-oriented phenomenon

We understand our data on calling as *present-oriented*, emphasising everyday work through relations and aiming at the greater good. The most salient feature in the interviews is the extent to which managers discuss relations. All managers engage in role modelling and the fundamental orientation to serve their employees and organisations. This reflects the context of FBOs and religious organisations that exist to serve the greater good and frequently embody the values of their founders (Jeavons 1992). This finding coheres with previous studies in Scandinavian folk-church contexts where managers' work is portrayed as handling an array of mundane tasks and articulating values (Sirris 2018; Askeland 2015). Managers face a range of expectations, and their role is predominantly relation-oriented (Hansson and Andersen 2008; Hernes 2007). This points towards motivating leadership, which places management close to the professionals, to maintain dyadic relations and provide constructive feedback. This is a key feature of managers in general working life (Alvesson 2002). There are various explanations for why role modelling, which is part of relation-orientation, is crucial in our two organisations. The deans had a background as professionals and had not left this identity; rather, they were hybrids – organisational managers still identifying with their professional training and experience (Sirris 2018). As described, hospital managers focused more on the patients since they were at close encounters with patients and there were advanced systems to supervise core work. In contrast, the dispersed church organisation and lack of insight into the clergy's work performance resulted in deans ignoring the parishioners.
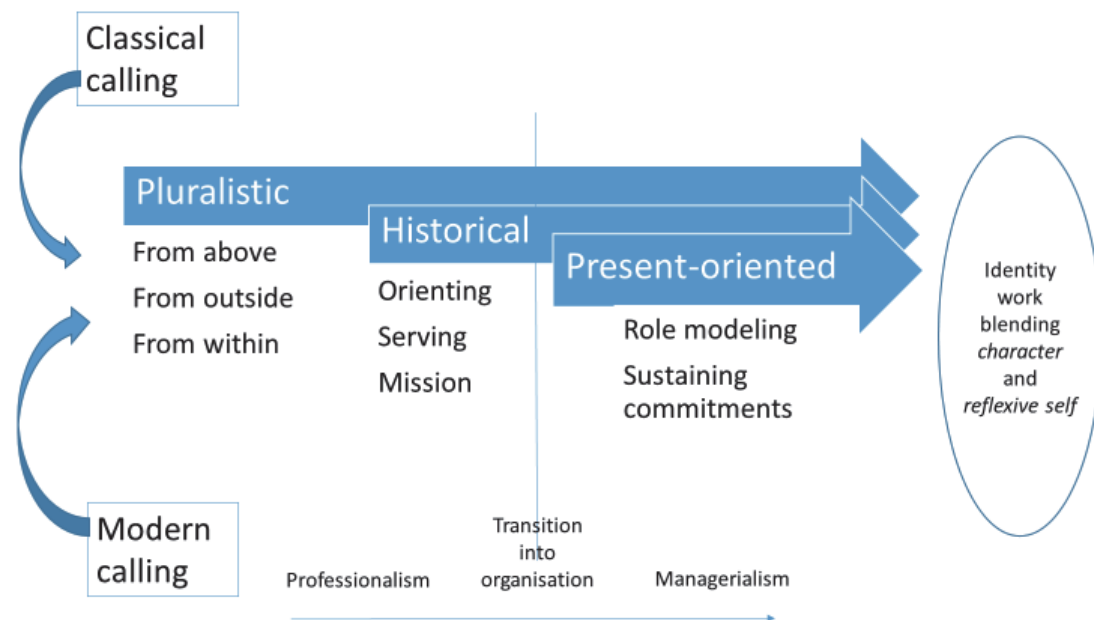
Themes of calling as site of identity work

We have discussed themes of calling as resources for managers helping them crafting work and constructing identity. They reframe challenges and interpret their work as a calling. The challenges faced by managers prompted identity work, which is key to managing strain (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003). These situations enable identities to surface. When hospital managers were pressured by economic factors, their sense of mission seemed to emerge. The deans felt that the growing bureaucracy potentially threatened their mission. Our study illuminates managers' perception of their identity as a continuous process of role modelling, thus linking identity to role.

The theory section addressed the assumed orientation to serve expected of professionals that had moved into management in a diaconal and church context (Jeavons 1992). These managers' calling encompasses encouraging others to experience and follow their own calling. This theme centres on their commitment and alignment to organisational missions and values, towards which they have a strong sense of identification. Self-understandings ranged from mundane tasks as facilitators needed to sort out technicalities, to relieving others' jobs and talking about the mission, God and society. The values of the ordination served as a glue that connected everyday practicalities with the mission. Finding meaning, or making sense of work, drew heavily on articulations of how they entered the profession; however, they did not consider the transition into management as a similarly important move. The themes differ among managers and deans in accounts about issues perceived as

the core objective of commitment and service. The managers considered the hospital as a unity related to society and its inhabitants, whereas the deans identified with the church as the body of Christ and a community serving the world. Sense of duty built on organisational identity and not personal achievements, outcomes or success.

The distinction between character and reflexive self captures the duality of classical and modern calling. The data contradict the notion that managers experience a "corrosion of character"; nor are they solely obsessed with career and self-identity. This implies that the classical identities related to calling thrive with the managers in our research contexts. Hybrid identities are not necessarily self-reflexive or corrosive; rather, they balance between serving the profession, organisation, society – and in some cases, God.

From this discussion, we visualise themes of calling into a model integrating key insights and emphasising how the themes hybridise in manager's identity work (Figure 1). The arrows signify the managers' transition from professionalism into organisational management, between which they iterated due to their hybrid identity. Their personal calling narrative served as a resource and gave direction to their commitments of mission and serving. This dimension highlights the study's title, *realising calling*, which is the process of recognising and accepting one's calling and if possible, enacting it. Professionals becoming managers enter an arena to embody and practice their commitments, but they may soon discover that their freedom of action is limited. Managers nonetheless consider identifications central to their work (Ibarra 1999). All managers in the present study perform role modelling to sustain professional commitments. The historical dimension entails how themes of calling are used as central, distinctive and enduring identity resources (Pratt and Ravasi 2016). The present-oriented dimension is the site where themes of calling are contextualised in leadership practices and surface in fulfilments and challenges. Based on calling, the model shows mechanisms in the process of hybridising identities.

Figure 1. Themes of calling hybridising in managerial identity work

Conclusions

This study explores how managers in faith-based hospitals and the church understand their work as a calling and its intractable connections to their identity. First, our findings show similarities between the two categories of managers. This implies that both the deans and the hospital managers are adopting the managerial discourse of general and secular work-life. Calling is experienced not as static, rather as identity work, an evolving process of constructing meaning in work-life. It connects activities to God or the greater good and is oriented beyond the individual. Calling elevates work beyond rational utility and economic rewards to others-oriented or pro-social purposes. Second, we have analysed how the dichotomy of classical and modern calling blend differently in managers' identity work. It provides opportunities for maintaining and negotiating identities among professionals and managers in two kinds of organisations. Themes of calling reflect organisational ethos, values and identities in different ways. The main difference we find between deans and hospital managers is how deans, as expected, explicitly draw on religion. The church context displays the traditional notion of calling as the deans perceive themselves called by God into professions and some into management. Resonating with healthcare's values discourse (Aadland and Skjørshammer 2012), the motivation of most hospital managers is instead to serve society. They conceive of organisations as arenas for professionals and managers where they can enact and realise their calling. By asking about and exploring their transitions into profession or management, we exposed calling as pluralistic, historical and present-oriented. In these dimensions, the established dichotomy of classical and modern calling blurs as managers combine elements. Ideal-types are analytically useful; they make us aware of how managers' identity work is of a hybrid character.

This study bridges calling and identity in a new conceptualisation. We have demonstrated that calling themes are not only personal in the individualistic sense, but reflect institutionalised practices in organisations and draw from cultural norms and scripts. The people we interviewed had not given up their commitment to professional ideals and "the common good" when they became managers. Such accounts function as sources of legitimation and motivation in the everyday life of managers, offering fulfilment and challenges. We have shown how themes of calling reflect commitments towards local organisational purposes as well as cosmopolitan ideals of professionalism.

We suggest that further research on calling would benefit from in-depth, context-sensitive studies. Our research design compares highly professionalised faith-based and religious organisations. This conceptualisation of the connections between themes of calling and identity ought to have relevance for professionals and managers in other contexts, especially those historically committed to the public ethos, since they have traditionally incorporated notions of calling. The study of calling could be extended to more dissimilar organisational contexts where organisational reforms challenge established identities and roles. Organisations with a high versus low degree of professionalisation, or public versus private organisations, could be investigated. Organisations relying on economic rationality (for-profit) opposed to value-oriented rationality and voluntarism make interesting comparisons. A key insight from our study is that confessional and religious human-service organisations may vary on a set of dimensions, such as the degree to which they rely on professional versus managerial values, or to what extent calling from above is adopted as legitimation. Researching other contexts, we could find that calling plays a larger role in non-professional, less values-based organisations than has been proposed in current literature on organisational and management reforms.

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