

Grow where you are re-planted: Recovering meaning when callings are displaced

Using a multi-method longitudinal analysis of seventeen social entrepreneurs as they respond to repeated spatial restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, we induce the concept of *displaced calling*.

The extant literature widely recognizes calling as one aspect of meaningful work (e.g. Cinque et al., 2020; Dobrow and Kharas, 2011). Callings can emerge from an external impetus of serving societal needs (e.g. Held, 2006; Oates et al., 2005; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017) or from an internal impetus of self-fulfillment (e.g. Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Novak, 1996). Callings can be identity based (e.g. Maitlis, 2020) or passion-based (e.g. Dobrow and Khalas, 2011; Dobrow, 2013). We draw on the literature on dynamic, and especially disrupted callings, to focus on the role of spaces, and spatial mechanisms in redefining social entrepreneurship as calling.

The first author begun with a netnography (Kozinets, 2002; 2010) to better appreciate the digital dimension (e.g. Archibald et al., 2019), particularly given the physical spatial constraints imposed by the global COVID-19 lockdowns. He participated on a new digital platform specifically designed to promote youth impact entrepreneurship. The first author participated in online events held through this shared digital space as well as those held by individual social entrepreneurs. As he became more familiar with the callings of social entrepreneurs, he sampled callings explicitly anchored in social needs and fuelled by passion.

The first author maintained periodic email correspondence with consented participants to check-in and receive bi-weekly updates. He conducted comprehensive entry interviews. Participants agreed to log at least one diary entry a month during the duration of the study (Wickham and Knee, 2013; Ohly et al., 2010). Exit interviews were held at the end of the study, to collaboratively verify the key turning points in emergence and convergence of meaning. Combining netnographies with diaries and in-depth entry and exit interviews afforded real-time attention to socio-material aspects of space as they became relevant for social entrepreneurs during the global pandemic.

We induced the spatial mechanisms influencing the evolution of callings during COVID-19 using a practice-tracing methodology over a 10-month period (February–December 2020). Tracing practices within and between multiple spaces (Adler and Pouliot, 2011) helped us reveal the role of spaces. *We contribute to literature on disrupted callings by highlighting the spatial mechanisms by which social entrepreneurs repeatedly revise and reclaim their displaced callings.* We extend the intersection of callings and prosociality as an inherently spatial interface for studying work as meaning in post-pandemic organizing.