



Research Paper

The Role of Reflective Thinking in Strengthening Career Calling Among IT Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling among Indian IT professionals, a population increasingly affected by occupational stress and rapid technological change. Using a cross-sectional, quantitative design, data were collected from 300 IT professionals across various roles and organizations in India. Participants completed the Reflective Thinking Scale and the Brief Calling Scale. Descriptive analysis revealed moderate levels of reflective thinking, with the highest mean score for Understanding ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.57$), and a higher average for Presence of Calling ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.08$) than for Search for Calling ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.19$). Reliability analysis indicated acceptable to excellent internal consistency for most scales (α ranging from 0.58 to 0.88). Correlation analysis demonstrated a small but significant positive association between overall reflective thinking and Presence of Calling ($r = 0.29$, $p = 0.038$), while the relationship with Search for Calling was weaker and non-significant ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.179$). Regression analysis showed that reflective thinking accounted for approximately 1% of the variance in both dimensions of career calling ($R^2 = 0.01$). These findings suggest that reflective thinking plays a modest role in fostering a sense of purpose and calling among IT professionals, with additional personal and organizational factors likely contributing to career calling development. The study highlights the need for holistic strategies that integrate reflective practices with supportive workplace environments to enhance meaningful engagement in IT careers.

KEYWORDS: Reflective Thinking, Career Calling, IT Professionals, Occupational Well-being, Work Meaningfulness

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I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary information technology (IT) sector is defined by its rapid pace of innovation, global competitiveness and continuous technological change. IT professionals are expected to maintain up-to-date skills in an environment characterized by demanding project timelines, complex problem-solving tasks and evolving methodologies, all of which contribute to elevated levels of occupational stress and pressure (Nair, 2024). Surveys indicate that approximately 60% of Indian software professionals have seriously considered leaving their current organizations due to stress and burnout, with turnover rates exceeding 20% annually in some firms. Nearly two-thirds of IT managers report experiencing work overload, role ambiguity and conflict, which are key predictors of burnout (Chalil & Prasad, 2014).

The "always-on" culture prevalent in IT exacerbates work-life balance difficulties, often blurring the lines between personal and professional life and contributing to burnout. In a recent study, work-life balance challenges were found to significantly influence retention, with flexible work policies, childcare support and wellness programs being crucial in reducing turnover. Organizational factors such as excessive workloads, tight deadlines and global collaboration requirements add to the strain, affecting employees' mental well-being and job satisfaction (Onsong, 2025). The cumulative impact of these stressors can lead to decreased productivity, emotional exhaustion and high turnover rates. Importantly, organizational support mechanisms such as flexible work arrangements, mental health initiatives and leadership practices that foster employee well-being are identified as vital strategies for mitigating these challenges (Adiawaty & Cahyono, 2024). Given these workplace

demands, cultivating personal strategies such as reflective thinking may be critical for IT professionals to sustain well-being, navigate challenges and maintain a sense of purpose in their careers.

Career calling refers to a sense of purpose or meaningfulness in one's work, where individuals feel their career is what they are "meant to do." It reflects a subjective experience that integrates personal fulfilment and societal contribution and is not necessarily tied to religious beliefs. Calling is described as "a sense of purpose, that this is the work one was meant to do" and is associated with psychological success when individuals perceive their career as fulfilling their deeper values and goals (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Reflective thinking is the process of active, persistent and careful consideration of beliefs or practices in light of supporting evidence and the consequences they produce. In psychological contexts, reflective thinking enables individuals to critically assess their experiences to promote learning, self-awareness and informed decision-making. It is viewed as central to self-organization, involving self-knowledge, critical analysis and the refinement of thought processes to achieve personal and professional growth.

The modern IT workplace is characterized by rapid technological evolution, intense competition and high demands for continuous learning and adaptation. These conditions can cause substantial stress and burnout among IT professionals, potentially diminishing their sense of meaning and satisfaction in their work¹. At the same time, the concept of career calling—a sense that one's work is purposeful and aligned with personal values—has gained attention as a potential buffer against workplace stress and as a driver of job satisfaction and well-being (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

However, despite growing interest in career calling, little empirical research has explored how individuals actively develop or sustain this sense of purpose in challenging work environments like IT. Reflective thinking, a cognitive process of critical self-examination, may be a key mechanism through which IT professionals align their career paths with personal values and develop a stronger sense of calling. This study seeks to address this research gap by investigating the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling among IT professionals. The findings can contribute valuable insights for both individuals and organizations aiming to foster well-being, resilience and purposeful engagement in high-pressure, dynamic workplaces.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mauno, Saija et al. (2025) conducted a conceptual review analysis. The objective was to analyse how career calling functions within the work stress process. The study reviewed 16 quantitative and five qualitative studies exploring calling as a predictor, moderator and mediator of stress-related outcomes. Major findings indicated inconsistent evidence regarding the role of calling in moderating or mediating stress but highlighted its potential influence across different contexts. The authors concluded that while calling may play multiple roles in the work stress process, future research is needed to clarify its mechanisms and effects.

Fu, Jiangtao et al. (2025) conducted a mixed-methods validation study. The objective was to analyse the Reflective Thinking Scale (RTS) among international students in Chinese universities. The study involved surveys from 482 students analysed using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, reliability tests and correlations, along with qualitative data from 26 interviews and 22 reflective journals. Major findings revealed a valid four-factor RTS structure with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$) and significant positive associations between reflective thinking and academic performance. The authors concluded that RTS is a robust cross-cultural measure and emphasized reflective practices' importance for supporting international students' learning, adaptation and personal development.

Mulyana, Olivia Prabandini et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis. The objective was to identify predictors of career calling among university students. The study reviewed 11 relevant articles sourced from major academic databases. Major findings revealed 13 factors influencing career calling, grouped into individual attributes, psychological factors and environmental factors. The authors concluded that understanding these predictors can guide interventions to enhance career calling development among students by addressing both personal and contextual influences.

Anto, Titus et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review. The objective was to analyse intervention studies on reflective thinking in school settings and its relationship with student learning. The study reviewed 19 intervention studies published between 2010 and 2021, covering theories, educational approaches and links to academic performance. Major findings indicated that reflective thinking is widely recognized as a valuable learning strategy and critical to achieving academic excellence, although few universally accepted theories exist. The authors concluded that reflective thinking plays a vital role in education and called for broader future research to integrate more theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Zanotelli, J. et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study. The objective was to examine the impact of career calling on individual, career and work-related outcomes among Brazilian workers. The study surveyed 527 workers aged 21–77 using validated scales to measure self-reflection, insight, life satisfaction, career engagement, adaptability, meaningful work, job satisfaction and work-family conflict. Major findings showed that workers with high career calling reported stronger associations with meaningful work,

adaptability, engagement and both job and life satisfaction, while those with low career calling related primarily to meaningful work, engagement and job satisfaction. The authors concluded that higher career calling significantly enhances adaptability, engagement and overall well-being, providing reference norms for career calling assessments in Brazil.

Mauno, S. et al. (2023) conducted a one-year longitudinal study. The objective was to investigate whether career calling moderates the relationship between intensified job demands and job performance among Finnish teachers. The study followed 507 teachers, assessing task performance and organizational citizenship behaviour under different job demand conditions. Major findings showed that career calling enhanced performance when demands involved planning and decision-making but negatively affected performance under time pressure and multitasking. The authors concluded that career calling can improve performance in structured contexts but may become a liability under excessive workload, emphasizing the need for tailored stress and performance management strategies.

Chen et al., 2023 conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of career calling on learning engagement among higher vocational nursing students, with career adaptability and career commitment as mediators. The study aimed to explore how internal psychological mechanisms influence learning engagement. Data were collected from 388 nursing students at two higher vocational colleges in China and correlation and regression analyses were conducted using a parallel mediation model. Findings indicated that career calling had a significant positive effect on learning engagement, with both career adaptability and career commitment mediating this relationship. The study concluded that fostering career calling can enhance student engagement in nursing education, emphasizing the need for well-designed instructional activities to strengthen adaptability and commitment in the healthcare profession.

Ran, Jingliang et al. (2023) conducted a cross-sectional SEM-based study. The objective was to examine the relationships among career exploration, self-reflection, career calling, career adaptability and subjective well-being in undergraduates. The study used structural equation modeling on data from 1,077 Chinese university students. Major findings showed that career exploration and self-reflection significantly predicted career adaptability and subjective well-being, with career calling mediating these relationships. The authors concluded that encouraging self-reflection and a sense of calling can enhance career adaptability and well-being, offering insights for career education programs.

Kasalak, Gamze et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative case study. The objective was to examine reflective thinking skills and practices among academic administrators in higher education. The study involved interviews with 12 deans and assistant deans from 10 faculties at a Turkish public university, analysed using content analysis. Major findings showed that administrators develop their skills primarily through experience and self-evaluation, actively reflecting on education, student services, problem-solving and communication. The authors concluded that reflective thinking enhances faculty management and individual growth, emphasizing that reflective academic leadership requires fairness, adaptability and continuous development.

Objectives

- To analyse the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling among IT professionals.
- To determine whether reflective thinking serves as a significant predictor of career calling.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant positive correlation between reflective thinking and career calling among IT professionals.

H₂: Reflective thinking significantly predict career calling.

III. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design.

Participants

The sample consisted of 300 IT professionals working in various organizations across India. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 45 years. Participants were selected using convenience sampling and included software developers, project managers, systems analysts and IT support staff.

Tools Used

- Reflective Thinking Scale (RTS): Developed by Kember et al. (2000), this 16-item scale measures levels of reflective thinking across four dimensions: habitual action, understanding, reflection and critical reflection. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

- Brief Calling Scale (BCS): Developed by Dik et al. (2012), this 4-item scale assesses the degree to which individuals perceive their work as a calling. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true of me to 5 = completely true of me).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted via an online survey platform. Prior to participation, respondents were presented with an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality assurances and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All responses were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Only participants who provided informed consent proceeded to the survey.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant characteristics and mean scores on the reflective thinking and career calling scales. Reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) were performed to assess the internal consistency of the scales. Pearson's correlation analysis examined the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling. Linear regression analysis tested the predictive power of reflective thinking on career calling. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

IV. Results

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	151	50.30%
Female	149	49.70%

The sample comprised a nearly equal gender distribution, with 151 male participants (50.3%) and 149 female participants (49.7%). This balanced representation ensures that the findings reflect the perspectives of both male and female IT professionals, allowing for gender-neutral insights into reflective thinking and career calling in the sector.

Figure 1: Pie Chart showing percentage distribution of participants regarding gender

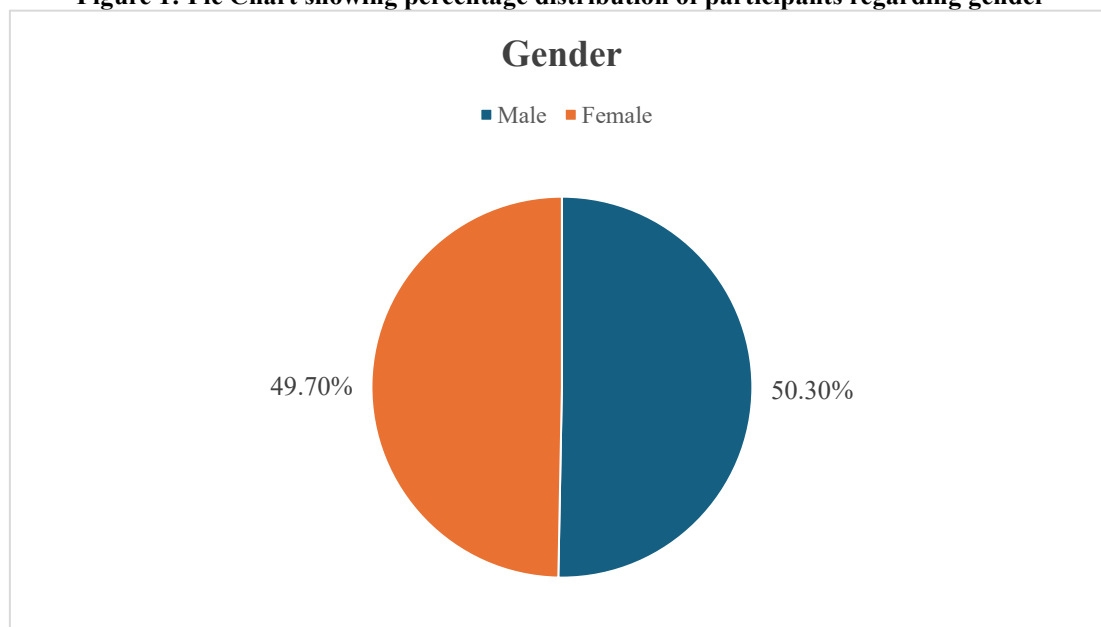


Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Reflective Thinking Subscales

Subscale	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Habitual Action	3.43	0.91	1	5
Understanding	4.21	0.57	1	5

Reflection	4.18	0.66	1	5
Critical Reflection	4.01	0.84	1	5

The descriptive analysis reveals that among IT professionals, the highest mean score was observed for the Understanding subscale (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.57), indicating a strong tendency toward grasping concepts and content in their work. The Reflection subscale also showed a relatively high mean (Mean = 4.18, SD = 0.66), suggesting that participants frequently reflect on their actions and decisions. Critical Reflection had a moderately high mean (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.84), implying that many participants reappraise and question their existing assumptions. The lowest mean was observed for Habitual Action (Mean = 3.43, SD = 0.91), indicating relatively less reliance on routine behaviours compared to other reflective dimensions. Overall, the scores reflect a generally reflective mindset among the respondents, particularly in terms of understanding and reflecting on their work processes.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Career Calling Scores

Scale	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Presence of Calling	3.45	1.08	1	5
Search for Calling	2.59	1.19	1	5

The analysis of career calling dimensions among IT professionals indicates that the Presence of Calling had a higher mean score (Mean = 3.45, SD = 1.08) compared to the Search for Calling (Mean = 2.59, SD = 1.19). This suggests that, on average, participants were more likely to perceive themselves as already having a sense of calling in their careers rather than actively searching for one. The range for both dimensions spanned from 1 to 5, reflecting diverse individual differences in career calling experiences within the sample.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale/Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha
Habitual Action	0.72
Understanding	0.58
Reflection	0.8
Critical Reflection	0.84
Presence of Calling	0.87
Search for Calling	0.88

The reliability analysis shows acceptable to excellent internal consistency across most scales. The Presence of Calling ($\alpha = 0.87$) and Search for Calling ($\alpha = 0.88$) demonstrated excellent reliability, indicating that these scales consistently measure the intended constructs. Among the reflective thinking subscales, Critical Reflection ($\alpha = 0.84$) and Reflection ($\alpha = 0.80$) exhibited good reliability, while Habitual Action ($\alpha = 0.72$) showed acceptable reliability. However, Understanding had a lower Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.58$), suggesting moderate internal consistency and that this subscale may contain items with relatively less coherence compared to the other reflective thinking dimensions. Overall, most scales demonstrate sufficient reliability for use in the present study.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Presence of Calling (r)	Presence p-value	Search for Calling (r)	Search p-value
Habitual Action	0.07	0.255	0.13	0.022
Understanding	0.16	0.007	-0.03	0.585
Reflection	-0.02	0.789	0.07	0.231
Critical Reflection	0.09	0.105	-0.01	0.891

The correlation analysis indicates a small but significant positive relationship between Understanding and Presence of Calling ($r = 0.16$, $p = 0.007$), suggesting that greater understanding in reflective thinking is associated with a stronger sense of career calling among IT professionals. Additionally, Habitual Action showed

a modest positive correlation with Search for Calling ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.022$), implying that those who rely on habitual processes may be more actively exploring their career calling. Other correlations between reflective thinking subscales and career calling dimensions were weak and statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that overall associations between these constructs were generally low in magnitude.

Table 6: Regression Analysis Predicting Career Calling from Reflective Thinking

Predictor	R ²	B	t	p-value
Presence of Calling	Overall Reflective Thinking	0.01	0.29	2.09
Search for Calling	Overall Reflective Thinking	0.01	0.2	1.35

The regression analysis revealed that Overall Reflective Thinking was a significant predictor of Presence of Calling ($R^2 = 0.01$, $\beta = 0.29$, $t = 2.09$, $p = 0.038$), indicating that higher levels of reflective thinking modestly contribute to a stronger sense of having a career calling. However, Overall Reflective Thinking did not significantly predict Search for Calling ($R^2 = 0.01$, $\beta = 0.20$, $t = 1.35$, $p = 0.179$), suggesting that reflective thinking has a weaker and statistically non-significant influence on participants' active search for a calling.

V. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling among Indian IT professionals. We found moderate levels of reflective thinking, with mean scores ranging from 3.43 (Habitual Action) to 4.21 (Understanding), and a higher average for the Presence of Calling ($M = 3.45$) than for Search for Calling ($M = 2.59$). Correlation analysis revealed a small but statistically significant positive association between overall reflective thinking and Presence of Calling ($r = 0.29$, $p = 0.038$), while the association with Search for Calling was weaker and non-significant ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.179$). Regression analysis indicated that reflective thinking explained about 1% of the variance in both dimensions of career calling ($R^2 = 0.01$), suggesting that reflective thinking has a minor yet significant role in contributing to a sense of career purpose, with additional factors likely influencing career calling in this professional context.

The findings provided partial support for both hypotheses. For Hypothesis 1, a significant correlation was observed between reflective thinking and Presence of Calling but not for Search for Calling. Similarly, for Hypothesis 2, reflective thinking significantly predicted Presence of Calling but did not significantly predict Search for Calling.

The results of our study are similar but weaker compared to the findings of Zanotelli and Andrade (2024), who examined Brazilian workers and reported that individuals with a high level of career calling showed strong positive associations with self-reflection, adaptability, meaningful work, career engagement, life satisfaction and job satisfaction. In contrast, workers with low career calling had only limited associations with these variables. Thus, while both studies confirm a positive link between reflective thinking and career calling, the relationship observed in the Brazilian context was stronger than in our IT sample.

Ran et al. (2023) studied Chinese undergraduates and found that self-reflection and career exploration significantly predicted career adaptability and subjective well-being, with career calling mediating these relationships. Their findings suggest a stronger and more integrated relationship between reflective thinking and career calling than in our study, possibly due to developmental differences, as students may rely more heavily on reflection to form career identities compared to professionals already immersed in demanding work environments.

In the study by Su, Ahmad and Alias (2024), career exploration positively influenced career calling among Malaysian university students, with decision-making self-efficacy as a mediator and openness as a moderator. The relationship they reported was stronger and more complex than in our study, which did not assess mediators or moderators. Therefore, their results indicate a similar direction of association but with greater explanatory power.

Kang, Cain and Busser (2021) explored the relationship between “living a calling” and employee well-being among hospitality workers, finding that career calling was strongly associated with psychological well-being through perceived insider status and psychological empowerment. This is similar in direction but stronger in effect than our finding, suggesting that workplace context (hospitality versus IT) and mediating variables may enhance the calling–outcome relationship.

Ma, Wang, Sun and Lu (2025) examined the role of inclusive leadership and belongingness in fostering career calling in China, finding a strong positive relationship between inclusive leadership and career calling, mediated by belongingness and moderated by organization-based self-esteem. While their results support the importance of contextual and relational factors in promoting career calling, the strength of associations was greater than in our study, indicating that reflective thinking alone explains less variance in calling without these organizational factors.

In the study by Xu, Liu, Chen and Feng (2023) person-organization fit and person-job fit were found to be positively related to career calling, with psychological contracts mediating this relationship and organizational career management moderating it. Their findings revealed a stronger association than in our study, suggesting that environmental alignment and perceived organizational support amplify career calling more effectively than reflective thinking in isolation.

Reid (2011) emphasized the value of reflective practice in career counselling, arguing that reflection contributes meaningfully to career decision-making and personal development when embedded in a supportive framework. This conceptual position is consistent with our finding of a positive relationship, although her work also suggests that structured environments for reflection may enhance its impact on calling, potentially explaining why the effect size in our study was relatively modest.

Overall, these studies reveal that while our findings support the general conclusion that reflective thinking contributes to career calling, the strength of this relationship was consistently stronger. This suggests that reflective thinking is important but interacts with multiple contextual and psychological factors that were not captured in our study of Indian IT professionals.

VI. Conclusion:

This study explored the relationship between reflective thinking and career calling among Indian IT professionals, revealing moderate levels of reflective thinking and a higher inclination toward the presence of career calling than active search for it. The findings indicate that while reflective thinking contributes positively to career calling, the strength of this relationship is modest, suggesting that reflective thinking alone does not fully explain how IT professionals develop a sense of purpose in their work. Additional personal and organizational factors likely play an important role in shaping career calling. These results underscore the importance of integrating reflective practices with organizational interventions—such as supportive leadership, opportunities for meaningful work, and well-being initiatives—to foster a stronger sense of calling and engagement among IT professionals working in high-pressure environments.

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