The Work-Related Psychological Health of Introverts and extraverts in Ministry: Exploring the Balanced Affect Model

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Abstract

A series of quantitative studies has drawn attention to poorer levels of work-related psychological health among introverted clergy compared with extraverted clergy, in terms of introverts reporting both higher emotional exhaustion (negative affect) and lower satisfaction in ministry (positive affect). The present study employs a qualitative approach among 24 Anglican clergy to explore the differences in the accounts offered by introverts and by extraverts regarding the aspects of life and ministry that they found stressful (generating negative affect) and that they found energizing (generating positive affect). The data demonstrated important differences between the accounts given by the two groups.

Keywords

Burnout – clergy – emotional exhaustion – psychological type – satisfaction in ministry

Poor work-related psychological health, or burnout, is a matter of concern within the caring professions in general, and the clerical profession is no exception. Within the Church of England over the past two decades two models of work-related psychological health have informed a series of empirical enquiries. The first model, proposed by Christina Maslach and operationalized in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) offers a sequential model of poor work-related psychological health. Burnout begins with emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion leads to depersonalization (treating people with decreasing care and sensitivity), and depersonalization leads to lack of personal accomplishment (people no longer affirm the ministry that is offered with decreasing care and sensitivity). The second model,
proposed by Leslie J. Francis and operationalized by the Francis Burnout Inventory (Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, & Castle, 2005) offers a balanced affect model of poor work-related psychological health. Burnout is the consequence of the simultaneous presence of negative affect (emotional exhaustion) and the absence of positive affect (satisfaction in ministry). The two attractions of the balanced affect model are that it can be empirically tested and that it proposes a strategy for rehabilitation. When positive affect can be enhanced, it acts as a counter balance to the effects of negative affect.

Maslach’s model of burnout has been employed in recent studies among Church of England clergy by Francis and Rutledge (2000), Francis and Turton (2004a, 2004b), Randall (2004, 2007), Rutledge (2006) and Turton and Francis (2007). Francis’ model of burnout has been employed in recent studies using Church of England clergy by Robbins and Francis (2010), Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) and Randall (2013a, 2013b). These empirical enquiries concerned with the work-related psychological health of Church of England clergy have been particularly concerned with identifying the factors than can predict vulnerability to burnout. The factors considered have included personal factors (like age and sex), contextual factors (like rurality and multi-church benefices), theological factors (like evangelical, catholic and charismatic orientations), and psychological factors (like personality).

One of the most secure findings to emerge from this body of research concerns the importance of personality in predicting vulnerability to burnout. In particular, introverted clergy are more vulnerable to burnout than extraverted clergy. This finding has emerged consistently across studies employing two different models of personality. Some studies have employed Eysenck’s three dimensional model of personality as operationalized by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) or the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). Other studies have employed the model of psychological type, inspired by Jung (1971) and modified as operationalized by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). Although introversion and extraversion are conceptualized somewhat differently by these two models of personality, studies that have used the two models side-by-side have reported high correlations between the two measures (Francis & Jones, 2000).

Understanding Introversion and Extraversion

It is the definition of introversion and extraversion established within the context of psychological type theory that is the better known within the context of empirical theology and pastoral psychology (see, Francis, 2005). In