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Just how emotionally intelligent are religious leaders in Britain?

A study among Anglican clergy in Wales

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Abstract

This study explores the profile of 364 Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales (264 clergymen, 93 clergywomen, and 7 who did not disclose their sex) on the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale. The data confirm the findings from three earlier studies of church leaders in Britain, that both male and female clergy in Britain record significantly lower levels of emotional intelligence in comparison with the standardisation data published for this scale. Closer investigation of the scale items, however, questions whether this instrument may offer a fair assessment of the *kind* of emotional intelligence best suited for pastoral ministry.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, clergy, Anglican Church, psychology, religion

Introduction

The notion of emotional intelligence was introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Mayer and Salovey (1993, 1995) and subsequently developed and popularised by Goleman (1995, 1998). Goleman maintains that emotional intelligence comprises two main components, styled as personal competence (how we handle ourselves), and as social competence (how we handle our relationships with others), and that each of these two main components comprises agreed subcomponents. According to Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, personal competence involves self-awareness (knowing one's emotional internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions), self-regulation (managing one's emotional internal states, impulses and resources), and motivation (emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals). Social competence involves empathy (one's awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns) and social skills (one's adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others).

Emotional intelligence is both an illuminating and contested construct. It is illuminating in the sense that it has been employed in research within a range of occupational settings and has been found to predict individual differences in work performance and in occupational health and wellbeing. A useful introduction to innovations in the field has been provided by a special issue of *Personality and Individual Differences* (Austin & Saklofske, 2014). It is contested in the sense that different research traditions have advanced diverging definitions of emotional intelligence to the point that some commentators have argued that the lack of agreed conceptual clarity renders emotional intelligence 'an elusive construct' (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998, p. 989) or even an 'invalid concept' (Locke, 2005, p. 425). It is contested also in the sense that different operationalisations of the construct have produced very different kinds of measures to the point that some commentators have argued that emotional intelligence has 'proven resistant to measurement' (Becker, 2003, p. 194).

Reservations of this nature are not, of course, uncommon in developing fields of psychological conceptualisation and measurement. In spite of such accepted and acceptable limitations with the current state of research in the field of emotional intelligence, insights are being generated of relevance to a range of different occupational spheres, as illustrated by recent studies among a range of diverse groups. For example, research has been reported in relation to nurses (Gerits, Derksen, Verbruggen, & Katzko, 2005; Heffernan, Quinn Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010), teachers (Chan, 2004, 2006; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014), religious professionals (Billard, Greer, Merrick, Sneck, & Scheers, 2005; Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011; Randall, 2015; Francis, Robbins, & Ryland, 2015; Vicente-Galindo *et al*, 2017), and managers (Carmeli, 2003; Downey, Papageorgiou, & Stough, 2006; Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2011; Siegling, Sfeir, & Smyth, 2014).

Given significant divergence among the notions of emotional intelligence accessed by different measures, there are some clear advantages in connected and interrelated research programmes agreeing on using the same measure in order to ensure comparability among different studies. Three recent studies exploring the emotional intelligence of religious leaders in Britain, reported by Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011); Randall (2014); and Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014) have all agreed on employing the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998). The present study is located within that tradition.

The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale set out to operationalise Salovey and Mayer's original construct. It comprises 33 items that load on one principal factor, selected from an original pool of 62 items on data provided by 346 diverse participants recruited from a variety of settings in a metropolitan area in the south eastern United States of America. In the foundation study by Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998) the scale recorded an alpha coefficient of .90 and a two-week test-retest reliability of

.78. The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale offers an attractive option for survey-style research in light of its brevity (33 items) and ease of scoring on a five-point Likert-type scale (agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly).

In their foundation paper, Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998) published a mean scale score for their sample of 346 diverse participants: $M = 126.88$, $SD = 12.18$. They also distinguished between the mean scale scores recorded by men ($M = 124.78$, $SD = 16.52$) and by women ($M = 130.94$, $SD = 15.09$), and between the mean scale scores recorded by psychotherapists ($M = 134.92$, $SD = 20.25$) and by prisoners ($M = 120.08$, $SD = 17.71$). These figures, although not purporting to be normative, offer convenient points of comparison with data reported by subsequent studies. This picture is enriched by Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009) who publish the means and standard deviations from 37 published studies. From these 37 studies, only two fall below a mean score of 120: 117.54 recorded by 223 university students in the United States of America (Pau & Croucher, 2003) and 119.29 recorded by 104 male university students in Canada (Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007). Only one study rose above a mean of 134: 142.51 recorded by 37 teaching interns in the United States of America (Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes, & Wendorf, 2001).

It is against this background that the mean scale scores recorded by religious leaders in Britain can be assessed. In the first of the three studies already published, Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011) reported on the scores recorded by a sample of 154 individuals serving in leadership roles within local churches associated with the Newfrontiers network in England, including elders, staff, volunteer leaders, and highly committed members sharing in leadership. The participants comprised 68 men, 84 women and two who failed to disclose their sex; 15 were under the age of thirty, 27 were in their thirties, 49 were in their forties, 37 were in their fifties, 17 were in their sixties, 7 were seventy or over, and two failed to disclose

their age. In this study, the male leaders recorded a mean score of 116.62 (SD = 10.65) and

the female leaders recorded a mean score of 120.41 (SD = 10.56), both lower than the mean

scores recorded on the foundation study by Schutte *et al* (1998).

In the second of the three studies of religious leaders in Britain already published,

Randall (2014) reported on the scores recorded by a sample of 156 Anglican clergy serving

mainly in England in their fourteenth year of ministry. The participants comprised 117 men

and 39 women; 10 were in their thirties, 66 were in their forties, 57 were in their fifties, and

23 were in their sixties. In this study, the clergymen recorded a mean score of 112.11 (SD =

7.67) and the clergywomen recorded a mean score of 113.77 (SD = 8.92), both lower than the

mean scores recorded in the foundation study.

In the third of the three studies of religious leaders in Britain already published,

Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014) reported on the scores recorded by a sample of 226

clergy serving within one of the four main denominations based in Northern Ireland and in

the Republic of Ireland that accepted both men and women into ministry. The participants

comprised 181 men and 45 women. In this study the clergymen recorded a mean score of

119.01 (SD = 13.24) and the clergywomen recorded a mean score of 124.91 (SD = 10.26),

again both lower than the mean scores recorded in the foundation study.

Research question

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to replicate and to extend the

research reported by Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011) among church leaders within the

Newfrontiers network of churches, by Randall (2014) among Anglican clergy serving mainly

in England, and by Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014) among clergy serving in Northern

Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. This new study will focus specifically on Anglican

clergymen and clergywomen serving in the Church in Wales.

Method

Procedure

      A questionnaire was posted to all licensed Anglican clergy serving in parochial ministry in the Church in Wales. Participation was entirely voluntary and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. A response rate of 54% produced 364 replies from clergy who had completed the relevant measures that form the basis for the present analyses.

Participants

      The 364 participants comprised 264 clergymen, 93 clergywomen, and 7 clergy who did not disclose their sex; 4 clergy under the age of thirty, 23 in their thirties, 59 in their forties, 168 in their fifties, 102 in their sixties, 7 in their seventies, and 1 who did not disclose his or her age. The majority (261) of the participants were married, 60 were single, 17 were divorced, 11 were divorced and remarried, 11 were widowed, 2 were separated, and 2 did not disclose their marital status.

Measures

      Emotional intelligence was assessed by the 33-item Emotional Intelligence Scale proposed by Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998). Each item was assessed on a five-point scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly. Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011) reported an alpha reliability coefficient of .81.

Analysis

      The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package drawing on the frequencies, t-test, and ANOVA routines.

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Results and discussion

- insert table 1 about here -

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      The first step in analysing the new data provided by 364 Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales involves exploring the psychometric properties of the Schutte Emotional

Intelligence Scale within this particular context. Table 1 presents the item rest-of-test

correlations (the correlations between each item and the sum of the remaining items),

together with the alpha co-efficient (Cronbach, 1951), and the item endorsement (the sum of

the agree and agree strongly responses). The first conclusion to be drawn from these data is

that the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency

reliability among this group of clergy with an alpha coefficient of .90. Each of the 33 items

contribute well to the homogenous scale with item rest-of-test correlations ranging between

.30 and .63. The item with the highest item rest-of-test correlation (.63) captures the essence

of the scale: By looking at their facial expressions, I recognise the emotions people are

experiencing. The variations in the levels of item endorsement, ranging from 10% to 96%,

demonstrate that a wide range of different aspects of the underlying construct is being

investigated. Overall, the instrument seems well suited for application among Anglican

clergy in the Church in Wales.

                                                    - insert table 2 about here -

        The second step in analysing the new data involves exploring the mean scale scores of

emotional intelligence recorded by clergymen and clergywomen considered separately,

alongside the mean scores recorded for men and for women in the foundation study reported

by Schutte *et al* (1998). The data presented in table 2 demonstrate that both clergymen and

clergywomen serving in the Church in Wales recorded significantly lower mean scores of

emotional intelligence than the men and women reported in the foundation study. Given the

finding that Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales may not be displaying high

levels of emotional intelligence, as revealed by the mean scale scores, it is constructive now

to return to table 1 in order to chart the profile of these clergy against their responses to the

individual items comprising the scale. Close analysis of the individual items makes it clear

that the clergy profile is far from bad.

First, over three-quarters of the clergy say that they compliment others when they have done something well (96%), that some of the major events in their life have led them to re-evaluate what is important and not important (87%), that they are aware of their emotions as they experience them (79%), that when they are in a positive mood they are able to come up with new ideas (77%), and that other people find it easy to confide in them (77%). On these criteria four out of every five clergy seem to be functioning well as emotionally aware pastors, at least on a superficial level.

Second, the three reverse-coded items in the scale point to fewer than a quarter of the clergy who say that it is difficult for them to understand why people feel the way they do (10%), that when they are faced with a challenge, they give up because they believe they will fail (14%), and that they find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people (19%). On these criteria, one out of every five clergy seem to be really struggling with the emotional demands of pastoral ministry.

Third, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the clergy say that when they are faced with obstacles, they remember times they faced similar obstacles and overcame them (74%), that they help other people feel better when they are down (73%), that when they are in a positive mood solving problems is easy for them (71%), that by looking at their facial expressions they recognise the emotions people are experiencing (68%), that they know when to speak about their personal problems to others (67%), that they expect good things to happen (67%), and that they can tell how people are feeling by listening to their tone of voice (67%). On these criteria two out of every three clergy are projecting an emotionally mature profile.

Fourth, between half and two thirds of the clergy say that they arrange events others enjoy (66%), that they easily recognise their emotions as they experience them (66%), that they seek out activities that make them happy (63%), that they are aware of the non-verbal

messages other people send (61%), that they know why their emotions change (59%), that

they have control over their emotions (56%), that they expect to do well on most things they

try (55%), that they motivate themselves by imagining a good outcome to tasks they take on

(55%), that they present themselves in a way that makes a good impression on others (53%),

and that emotions are one of the things that make life worth living (50%). Read carefully

these items may seem less central to exercising an emotionally intelligent ministry than the

items endorsed by over two-thirds of the clergy.

Fifth, the eight remaining items that are endorsed by fewer than half the clergy, may

contain a mixture of insights into the state of the emotional intelligence of clergy. Some may

be irrelevant or even counter-productive qualities. For example, the item 'When another

person tells me about an important event in his or her life I almost feel as though I have

experienced the event myself' (endorsed by 39% of the clergy) may indicate a level of

emotional involvement that debilitates effective pastoral ministry. The item 'I like to share

my emotions with others' (endorsed by 40% of the clergy) may indicate an inappropriate lack

of professional boundaries. The items 'I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the

face of obstacles' (endorsed by 48% of the clergy), 'When my mood changes I see new

possibilities' (endorsed by 49% of the clergy), 'When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to

come up with new ideas' (endorsed by 26% of the clergy), and 'When I experience a positive

emotion, I know how to make it last' (endorsed by 27% of the clergy) may indicate unhelpful

dependency on mood changes.

Low endorsement of two other items may have some detrimental implications for

effective pastoral ministry. These items are 'I know what other people are feeling just by

looking at them' (endorsed by 30% of the clergy) and 'I am aware of non-verbal messages I

send to others' (endorsed by 41% of the clergy).

Conclusion

This study set out to replicate and to extend the research employing the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale among church leaders within the Newfrontiers network of churches reported by Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011), among Anglican clergy serving mainly in England reported by Randall (2014), and among clergy serving in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland reported by Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014). New data were provided for this study by 364 Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales, 266 clergymen and 91 clergywomen. Five main conclusions emerge from these findings.

The first conclusion is that the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale recorded a high level of internal consistency reliability among the sample of clergy (α = .90). This compares with the foundation study (α = .90) reported by Schutte *et al* (1998), with the study of Newfrontiers leaders (α = 81) reported by Francis, Ryland, and Robbins (2011), and with the study of Anglican clergy (α = .76) reported by Randall (2014). Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014) did not report reliability statistics for their study. Those data support the use of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale among clergy in Britain. The advantage of using this instrument in studies among clergy is that it enables the profile of clergy to be set alongside other professional groups for which comparable data are available.

The second conclusion is that, according to the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, the mean scores of all four groups of clergy studied in Britain (in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales) fall below the scores reported in the foundation study by Schutte *et al* (1998). The use of mean scale scores in this way draws attention to a potential vulnerability within church leaders in Britain, given that the pastoral nature of their work may require (or at least benefit from) developed skills within those areas of personal competence (how we handle ourselves) and social competence (how we handle our relationships with other people) that characterise emotional intelligence as defined by Goleman (1995, 1998). According to Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, personal competence involves self-awareness, self-regulation, and

motivation, and social competence involves empathy, and social skills. Each of these

components may be core to effective pastoral ministry.

The third conclusion is that, in spite of the low mean scale scores the responses to key

individual items in the instrument suggest that four out of five of the clergy serving in the

Church in Wales may be adequately equipped in terms of emotional intelligence for the

particular ministry that they are called to undertake. The real concern, however, that may

need to be discussed is the other 20% (one in five) who seem to be struggling to muster the

levels of emotional intelligence that may be required (and indeed expected by others) within

their professional field.

The fourth conclusion is that, in spite of the good properties of internal construct

validity among clergy, the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale may contain some items that

possess questionable face validity in terms of their appropriateness for accessing the kind of

emotional intelligence tightly focused on the professional skills and needs of leadership

within religious communities. It is this conclusion that poses a research agenda for the future.

On the one hand, there is value in further replication studies using the Schutte Emotional

Intelligence Scale to be conducted among different groups of religious leaders in order to

build up a fuller composite picture of the situation using a common and established

instrument. On the other hand, there is a need for some qualitative research interrogating the

ways in which clergy understand and interpret the individual items of the Schutte Emotional

Intelligence Scale exploring the kind of items that clergy themselves might propose to

develop a measure of emotional intelligence specifically shaped for religious leaders.

The fifth conclusion returns to the finding that one in five clergy seem to be

struggling to muster the levels of emotional intelligence that may be required within their

professional field. A range of recent studies has suggested that emotional intelligence can be

enhanced by educational interventions (see Schutte & Malouff, 2002; Slaski & Cartwright,

2003; Gardner, 2006; Boyatzis, 2007; Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014). It may well be sensible for those with oversight of the continuing professional education and development of religious leaders to consider incorporating well-structured courses within their programmes on emotional intelligence enhancement.

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Table 1

The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale: Item endorsement and item rest-of-test correlations

	r	agree %
I know when to speak about my personal problems to others	.45	67
When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them	.47	74
I expect that I will do well on most things I try	.42	55
Other people find it easy to confide in me	.38	77
I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people*	.37	19
Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important	.37	87
When my mood changes, I see new possibilities	.32	49
Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living	.41	50
I am aware of my emotions as I experience them	.49	79
I expect good things to happen	.40	67
I like to share my emotions with others	.30	40
When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last	.57	27
I arrange events others enjoy	.50	66
I seek out activities that make me happy	.36	63
I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others	.47	41
I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others	.37	53
When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me	.44	71
By looking at their facial expressions, I recognise the emotions people are experiencing	.63	68
I know why my emotions change	.54	59
When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas	.46	77
I have control over my emotions	.32	56
I easily recognise my emotions as I experience them	.52	66
I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on	.42	55
I compliment others when they have done something well	.40	96
I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send	.55	61
When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself	.34	39
When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas	.43	26
When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail*	.41	14
I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them	.48	30
I help other people feel better when they are down	.52	73
I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	.43	48
I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice	.48	67
It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do*	.56	10
alpha	.90	

Note: * These items were reverse coded to generate the item rest-of-scale correlations.
   r = correlations between individual items and the sum of the remaining items
   agree % = sum of agree and agree strongly responses

Table 2

Mean scores of emotional intelligence for clergymen and clergywomen compared with Schutte's standardisation data

	Clergy			Standardisation				
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t	p <
clergymen	266	116.33	12.51	111	124.78	16.52	4.8	.001
clergywomen	91	121.79	10.55	218	130.94	15.09	6.3	.001