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Psychological type profile of a church: a case study¹

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Abstract

This study responds to the challenge offered by Meunier (2012) to explore how psychological type theory and measurement may assist churches in the search for an appropriate leader (rector) by taking into account the psychological type characteristics of the church. A case study is provided from one Anglican congregation in England ($N = 76$), the members of which completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales during the course of a normal Sunday service. The overall profile of these 76 individuals demonstrated preferences for extraversion, sensing, feeling, and judging (ESFJ). The implications of this ESFJ profile are discussed for leadership expectations.

In his recent paper, "Case study of psychological type: a church," Meunier (2012) suggested that psychological type theory may be useful in profiling churches and providing relevant information within a formal search process for a new rector. While endorsing Meunier's general thesis, the present paper critiques his proposed method for establishing the psychological type profile of a church, questions the validity of the instrument he proposes to establish the psychological type profile of a church, proposes an alternative method for establishing the psychological type profile of a church, and discusses the way in which such information may be used in a search process. This alternative method is illustrated by reporting one new case study.

Psychological Type Theory

Psychological type theory, as currently located within the scientific discussion of personality and individual differences, has its roots in the work of Jung (1971) and its subsequent development in a series of psychometric tools, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey, 1998) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). In essence, psychological type theory identifies four key areas of individual difference, and maintains that each of these four areas can be expressed in contrasting ways. The theory distinguishes bipolar preferences among four constructs: two orientations, two perceiving functions, two judging functions, and two attitudes toward the outer world. These four sets of bipolar preferences lead to the generation of 16 discrete psychological types.

The two orientations are defined as introversion (I) and extraversion (E). Introverts draw their energy from the inner world of ideas, while extraverts draw their energy from the outer world of people and things. Extraverts are energised by people and drained by too much solitude, while introverts are energised by solitude and drained by too many people.

The two perceiving functions are defined as sensing (S) and intuition (N). Sensing types perceive their environment through their senses and focus on the details of the here and now, while intuitive types perceive their environment by making use of the imagination and inspiration. Sensing types are distrustful of jumping to conclusions and of envisioning the future, while intuitive types are overloaded by too many details and long to try out new approaches.

The two judging functions are defined as thinking (T) and feeling (F). Thinking types reach their judgements by relying on objective logic, while feeling types reach their judgements by relying on subjective appreciation of the personal and interpersonal factors involved. Thinking types strive for truth, fairness, and justice, while feeling types strive for harmony, peace, and reconciliation.

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The two attitudes toward the outer world are defined as judging (J) and perceiving (P). Judging types use their preferred judging function (either thinking or feeling) to deal with the outside world. Their outside world is organized, scheduled, and planned. Perceiving types use their preferred perceiving function (either sensing or intuition) to deal with the outside world. Their outside world is flexible, spontaneous, and unplanned.

Meunier's Thesis

Meunier (2012) makes the helpful and insightful suggestion that churches may be characterized within the psychological space proposed by psychological type theory. On this account, extravert congregations may be distinguished from introvert congregations; sensing congregations from intuitive congregations; thinking congregations from feeling congregations; and judging congregations from perceiving congregations. The point of contention, however, is whether the unit of greatest relevance for the search committee is the institution itself or the collective profile of the congregation. Institutions by their very nature may err toward the STJ profile, since institutions need to be predictable and stable (the sensing preference), coherent and accountable (the thinking preference), and structured and managed (the judging preference). The individuals who inhabit and bring life to these institutions may, however, long to give expression to an alternative view; they may long to bring about change and test new ideas (the intuitive preference), to give more priority to the people than to the systems (the feeling preference), and to allow greater opportunities for flexibility and spontaneity, overriding structures and traditions (the perceiving preference).

Meunier (2012) makes some helpful applications of psychological type theory to the institutions, exemplified within the items of his Parish Personality Index. In his paper, however, Meunier neither identifies nor justifies the characteristics he associates with each of the eight component parts of type theory, and the connection is by no means transparent. For example, the very first item in Meunier's Parish Personality Index invites respondents to choose whether the main focus of their church is: (a) the needs and concerns of parishioners; (b) outreach to unchurched and the problems of the community and the world. While the main intention of this item may have been to distinguish between the feeling preference (a) and the thinking preference (b), the items confuse this distinction with introverted (a) and extraverted (b) orientations.

While Meunier describes his method for identifying the psychological type profile of a church, he does not proceed to discuss precisely how such data could inform the search process. Should churches seek rectors who conform with the psychological type profile of churches or who will challenge and expand that profile?

Profiling Church Congregations

A somewhat different and now established research tradition has concentrated on identifying the psychological type profile of congregations by inviting all members to complete a measure of psychological type. This approach was tested in North America by Gerhardt (1983), Delis-Bulhoes (1990), and Ross (1993, 1995). Subsequently a series of studies has begun to construct a consistent profile of Anglican congregations in England and Wales, including work reported by Craig, Francis, Bailey, and Robbins (2003), Francis, Duncan, Craig, and Luffman (2004), and Francis, Robbins, Williams, and Williams (2007). In the most recent study in this series, Francis, Robbins, and Craig (2011) reported on the aggregated profile of 3,304 individuals attending 140 Anglican congregations in England, including some very small churches. These data reported overall preferences for introversion, sensing, feeling and judging, suggesting that that ISFJ profile characterises the Church of England. In a separate study, Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley, and Slater (2007) reported on the profile of 626 Church of England clergymen and 237 Church of England clergywomen. Both clergymen and clergywomen reported preferences for introversion, intuition, feeling, and judging. These data suggest that sensing congregations (who prefer stability and tradition) are likely to be led by intuitive clergy (who prefer change and innovation).

What is not visible from the aggregated congregational profile published by Francis, *et al.*, (2011) is the extent to which the profile of one congregation may differ from another. The challenge offered by Meunier's study is to select a congregation as a case study to explore distinctive emphases. This paper responds to that challenge by profiling St. Andrew's evangelical Anglican congregation. The hypothesis tested is that the evangelical Anglican tradition places greater emphasis on the social and corporate aspects of church life, thereby attracting more extraverts than suggested by the Anglican norm published by Francis, *et al.*, (2011).

Method

At one morning service the members of the congregation at St. Andrew's Church were invited to complete the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005), a 40-item forced-choice instrument that distinguishes between extraversion and introversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving. Assurances were given of anonymity and confidentiality, and the majority of those present freely agreed to participate, generating 76 completed surveys (38 men, 38 women). The participants comprised 13 individuals under the age of forty, 21 in their forties, 18 in their fifties, 11 in their sixties, 8 in their seventies, and 5 ages 80 years or over. The majority of participants (70)

attended church at least once a week; 4 attended twice month and 2 attended once a month.

Results and Discussion

The congregation reported preferences for extraversion (56%) over introversion (44%), for sensing (70%) over intuition (30%), for feeling (56%) over thinking (44%), and for judging (94%) over perceiving (6%).

This study set out to explore the psychological type profile of St. Andrew's evangelical Anglican congregation and to set this profile alongside the normative profile for Anglican congregations provided by Francis, *et al.*, (2011). Each of the four components of psychological type theory offers useful information in situating this specific congregation. On three of these components, St. Andrew's emerges as fairly typical of Anglican congregations: 70% preferred sensing (compared with 74%); 56% preferred feeling (compared with 60%); 94% preferred judging (compared with 86%).

A newly appointed rector to this church would know what to expect from this profile, since it is what most churches display. The usual high proportion of sensing types points to a congregation that is resistant to change; sensing types prefer to keep things as they have been in the past and to respect tradition. A leader who prefers intuition and who grasps a vision for changing too much too quickly will unsettle this congregation and in turn find their resistance to change unsettling. The extraordinarily high concentration of judging types points to a congregation that may almost be obsessed with order and organisation; judging types prefer to have everything organised well in advance, matters planned in detail, and schedules strictly kept. A leader who prefers perceiving, and who wishes to experiment with new forms of worship, who acts on the spur of the moment and who leaves things to chance will unsettle this congregation and in turn find hostility toward the leadership style disquieting. The weighting towards feeling types indicates a congregation in which the God of mercy may be prized more highly than the God of justice; feeling types are more concerned with maintaining good relationships than with dealing with issues of principle. A leader who prefers thinking and who challenges those who hold 'wrong' beliefs or who espouse 'wrong' moral values will unsettle this congregation and in turn be puzzled by the hurt he or she generates.

In terms of the other component of psychological type theory, St. Andrew's is far from typical of Anglican churches. While the balance of preference is normally for introversion (54%), within St. Andrew's it is for extraversion (56%). It is on this criterion that the search committee may need to pay special attention. An extraverted congregation may be more concerned with the social side of church life than is typical of Anglican churches. This congregation may wish to be more

actively involved in the local community, more highly visible within local community activities, and more active in engaging newcomers into the local life of the church. An extravert congregation may be puzzled by the arrival of an introvert leader who fails to maintain the expected level of social engagement. An introvert rector may be emotionally drained by the social expectations and demands of an extravert congregation.

Conclusion

The key and important question now concerns the way in which the search committee employs these data in the selection process. The first point is that psychological type profiling is only one of the tools in the hands of the research committee and addresses only one of the criteria. Other criteria will address issues of theological competence, spiritual maturity, previous experience, continuing professional development, and many others. The second point is that the search committee needs to have formulated its own vision for the future life and development of the church and to be able to test that vision within the context of psychological type theory.

St. Andrew's, like many other congregations, is a community in which the sensing preference is strong. Is the search committee seeking a rector who will respect and feel comfortable with a ministry supporting the stable life of this church? Or has the committee identified a need for change, development, and transformation? A rector who prefers sensing may be content to work within the expectations and patterns already set. A rector who prefers intuition may quickly initiate changes and introduce new ideas.

St. Andrew's is a community in which the judging preference is even more strongly pronounced than in many other churches. Is the search committee seeking a rector who will work effectively within such a tightly managed structure? Or has the committee identified the need to create an environment in which the sense of control is relaxed? A rector who prefers judging may keep the control mechanisms in place. A rector who prefers perceiving may initiate a very different model of congregational life.

St. Andrew's is a community in which there is a balance between thinking types and feeling types, less weighted in favour of feeling than is the case in many Anglican congregations. Is the search committee seeking a rector who will give priority to the role of pastor and who will display a caring heart? Or is the search committee seeking a rector who will give priority to the role of teacher and prophet and who will display a decisive mind? A rector who prefers feeling may keep the congregation in good heart, but fail to deal with deep-seated issues that need resolution. A rector who prefers thinking may sort out long-standing structural issues in the life of the church (removing a dysfunctional caretaker or an uncooperative director of music) at the cost of some disrupted relationships.

St. Andrew's is a community in which there is a higher proportion of extraverts than introverts, an unusual situation for Anglican congregations in England. Is the search committee seeking to maintain the distinctive extraverted personality of this congregation? Or is the search committee seeking to bring this church in line with the majority Anglican profile in England? A rector who prefers extraversion is likely to help the congregation maintain current focus. A rector who prefers introversion may begin to attract more introverted members and see some of the current extraverted members transfer their allegiance to those non-Anglican evangelical churches in England where extraverts generally feel more at home.

Having made the decision on these key issues, the search committee has also to take responsibility for the choices made and to support the new rector to see through the kind of ministry the search committee has sanctioned.

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