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Experiencing and reflecting on thinking and feeling in pastoral care: Deploying theology of individual differences and psychological type theory in continuing ministerial formation

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Abstract

Psychological type theory suggests that the two contrasting judging functions of thinking and feeling may be reflected in different approaches to and different practices of pastoral care.

The present study describes an exercise designed to help clergy experience and explore these differences and observes and analyses the responses of two groups of clergy (curates and training incumbents) who participated in the exercise (N = 27, 15). The data commend the experience for wider application.

Keywords: Psychological type, pastoral care, clergy continuing ministerial formation.

Introduction

Psychological type theory comprises four core psychological constructs, described in the theory as two orientations, two perceiving functions, two judging functions, and two attitudes. The two orientations, introversion (I) and extraversion (E), are concerned with different sources for gaining energy. The two perceiving functions, sensing (S) and intuition (N), are concerned with different ways of perceiving or taking in information. The two judging functions, thinking (T) and feeling (F), are concerned with different ways of judging or evaluating information. The two attitudes, judging (J) and perceiving (P), are concerned with different ways of approaching the outside world. In psychological type theory the profile of an individual (or group of individuals) is expressed as a function of the four preferences: I or E, S or N, T or F, J or P. For example, the first author of this paper has preference for introversion (I) over extraversion, for intuition (N) over sensing, for feeling (F) over thinking, and for judging (J) over perceiving. His profile, therefore is expressed as INFJ.

Psychological type theory has been employed to illuminate approaches to Christian ministry in a variety of ways. For example, Oswald and Kroeger (1988) offer a clear conceptual analysis of the implications of psychological type preferences for individual approaches to ministry in their book *Personality type and religious leadership*. More recently carefully framed and detailed extrapolations from theory have been offered to illuminate the specific approaches to ministry associated with preferences for extaversion, intuition, feeling and perceiving (ENFP) by Ross (2011) and associated with preferences for introversion, intuition, thinking and judging (INTJ) by Osborne (2012). Beginning from a somewhat different, empirically-based, starting point Francis and Payne (2002) developed the Payne Index of Ministry Styles (PIMS), an instrument designed to characterise eight preferred ministry styles based on the constructs of extraversion, introversion, sensing, intuition,

feeling, thinking, judging, and perceiving. This approach was developed further by Fawcett, Francis, and Robbins (2011) through the Revised Payne Index of Ministry Styles (PIMS2).

Each of the four core constructs of psychological type theory (the two orientations, the two perceiving functions, the two judging functions, and the two attitudes) may carry implications for different aspects of ministry. The present study is concerned specifically with the judging functions (thinking and feeling) and complements two other studies, one of which is concerned with the two orientations (Francis & Smith, in press a) and the other with the two attitudes (Francis & Smith, in press b). According to psychological type theory, the judging process, as reflected in the two judging functions, is concerned with evaluation, with assessment, with formulating decisions or judgements. It is the judging process that may be central in shaping approaches to pastoral care.

Thinking and feeling

Thinking and feeling describe the two preferences associated with the *judging process*. They describe different preferences by which decisions are reached. Individuals who prefer thinking make decisions based on objective, logical analysis. Individuals who prefer feeling make decisions by subjective values based on how people will be affected.

Individuals who prefer *thinking* develop clear powers of logical analysis. They develop the ability to weigh facts objectively and to predict consequences, both intended and unintended. They develop a stance of impartiality. They are characterized by a sense of fairness and justice. Individuals with a preference for thinking are good at putting things in logical order. They are able to put people in their place when they consider it necessary. They are able to take tough decisions and to reprimand others. They are also able to be firm and toughminded about themselves.

Thinking types need to be treated fairly and to see that other people are treated fairly as well. They are inclined to respond more to other people's ideas than to other people's

feelings. They may inadvertently hurt other people's feelings without recognizing that they are doing so. Thinking types are able to anticipate and predict the logical outcomes of other people's choices. They can see the humour rather than the human pain in bad choices and wrong decisions taken by others. Thinking types prefer to look at life from the outside as a spectator. Thinking types are able to develop good powers of critical analysis. They use objective and impersonal criteria in reaching decisions. They follow logically the relationships between cause and effect. They develop characteristics of being firm-minded and prizing logical order. They may appear sceptical.

Individuals who prefer *feeling* develop a personal emphasis on values and standards. They appreciate what matters most to themselves and what matters most to other people. They develop an understanding of people, a wish to affiliate with people and a desire for harmony. They are characterized by their capacity for warmth, and by qualities of empathy and compassion. Individuals with a preference for feeling like harmony and will work hard to bring about harmony between other people. They dislike telling other people unpleasant things or reprimanding other people. They take into account other people's feelings. Feeling types need to have their own feelings recognised as well. They need praise and affirmation. They are good at seeing the personal effects of choices on their own lives and on other people's lives as well.

Feeling types are sympathetic individuals. They take a great interest in the people behind the job and respond to other people's values as much as to their ideas. They enjoy pleasing people. Feeling types look at life from the inside. They live life as committed participants and find it less easy to stand back and to form an objective view of what is taking place. Feeling types develop good skills at applying personal priorities. They are good at weighing human values and motives, both their own and other people's. They are characterized by qualities of empathy and sympathy. They prize harmony and trust.

For thinking types it is the less preferred function of feeling which lets them down when they are tired. When tired, thinking types fail to take into account other people's feelings, fail to predict other people's emotional reactions, and can really hurt other people without intending to do so. A good example is how thinking types may analyse out the issues behind a conflict and then expect the people involved in the conflict to agree with and be helped by the analysis. The analysis may well be true and fair, but nonetheless deeply hurtful and capable of provoking anger.

For feeling types it is the less preferred function of thinking which lets them down when they are tired. When tired, feeling types fail to be able to analyse out what is actually going on in a situation. They get drawn into the situation, and they find it very difficult to stand back and to be objective. They can themselves become quite easily hurt. A good example is how feeling types may try all too hard to empathize with both sides of a quarrel, or with both parties in a conflict. Feeling types may long so much to bring comfort to those who are distressed and to introduce harmony to where there is conflict that they end up being torn apart themselves by the situation they want to resolve.

Given such a fundamental difference between thinking and feeling types, it is not surprising that they can sometimes and so easily misunderstand each other. On the one hand, feeling types may experience thinking types as people who are cold and sometimes even irritatingly condescending. On the other hand, thinking types may experience feeling types as people who are overly emotional and sometimes even sentimental and irrational. The truth of the matter is that feeling and thinking types deal with the world in very different ways.

Ministerial formation

Psychological type theory appears to be playing a part in initial and continuing ministerial formation and may be used in a variety of ways in these contexts. As theological educators, operating in the mode of research-based reflective practitioners, Francis and his

colleagues have been concerned to employ psychological type theory within the context of experimental learning workshops and within the frame of action research (see Francis & Smith, 2012). In this way the experimental workshops are evolving and developing in the light of systematically gathered and assessed evidence. The design of workshops to facilitate experience of and reflection on the distinctive perspectives of thinking and feeling in pastoral care initially proved to be problematic and led to the following processes of development.

The context is provided by an annual residential programme working with training incumbents and their curates. The first two attempts to structure workshops exploring the distinctive perspectives of thinking and feeling in pastoral care failed to engage the participants as fully as anticipated. On the first occasion, a fictitious scenario was constructed drawn from extensive experience of one of the trainers as a parish priest. In type-alike groups, participants were asked to respond to this constructed pastoral scenario and report back on how they would recommend responding. Thinking types responded as might be predicted by the theory, analyzing facts, using logic, noting but not giving weight to the emotions involved. However, the feeling response was very muted, with some hesitant obedience to type, contending that that feeling perspective should be given due weight, but with little passion or conviction. What seems to have happened is that, while the strength of the thinking perspective is in no way undermined by the fictitious nature of the scenario, the feeling perspective is not ready to attach weight to the needs of imaginary people. Hence, the exercise foundered.

On the second occasion, a modified version of the exercise was employed. On this occasion, a real life scenario was posited to which the participants were invited to respond, organized in type-alike groups. The scenario was drawn from the real life parish ministry of one of the trainers, was current and was in genuine need of resolution or progress. Again, the thinking types dissected the problem with a forensic analysis, while the feeling types

shrugged in near indifference, suggesting that their preferred feeling side is no more accessed in dealing with real people they have neither met nor expect to meet than when dealing with entirely imaginary persons.

In view of the foregoing, the practitioners designed an exercise that would genuinely engage the feeling types of the group as well as the thinking types so that both voices could be heard at equal volume in the pastoral setting. On the third occasion, volunteers from within the group were sought who would be prepared to explore in a small group, in which confidentiality would be privileged, a current real life ongoing situation from their parish ministry; a problem that involved people in some way – e.g. not building or financial issues – and was in genuine need of resolution. Care was taken to forewarn prospective volunteers of the task so that there would be a reasonable mix of extraverts and introverts. Each volunteer was placed in a group with four others; three work consultants and one observer. The volunteers were tasked with sharing their situation, taking up to fifteen minutes to describe the difficulties and challenges they faced; the other members of the group were instructed not to interrupt the speaker during this period. Each work consultant, in turn, was then provided with the opportunity to assist the volunteer in taking forward the situation, with questions and advice. Work consultants were explicitly asked neither to attempt a therapeutic intervention nor to interrupt each other, with each input also lasting fifteen minutes. The role of the observer was to keep time and provide feedback in plenary, ensuring that confidentiality was preserved in that feedback. While the structure and content of the course to that moment would have prompted the observer to see distinctive approaches to the role of the work consultants' intervention, they were given no further steer to look for specifically feeling or thinking approaches nor were they sufficiently literate in type language to be preconditioned to report in line with the theory.

Study one

Participants

Six months after their ordination to the diaconate, 15 curates accepted the invitation to attend a training conference, as did 12 of their training incumbents. There were 6 women and 21 men. Profiles provided by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) identified preference for feeling (17) over thinking (10). The 16 complete types show that the most frequently represented types were ISFJ (5), ISTJ (4) and INFJ (4).

Procedure

Five volunteers came forward. Consultants were selected to ensure that each group had one individual with a high feeling score (35, 31, 29, 27 and 23); one with a high thinking score (45, 41, 35, 27 and 19) and one with a low score (7, 1, 1 and 1 feeling and 7 thinking). The observer was also selected from the pool of those with low scores. Training incumbents and curate pairs were separated. The order in which work consultants were asked to intervene was not stipulated. This had two clear advantages, ensuring that the process remained as uncontrived as practicable and allowing some insight into how one approach to consultancy might subsequently influence another.

Results

The volunteers in the first group professed to having enjoyed the experience and found it beneficial. The observer reported that each work consultant had a different way of approaching the task. The first intervention (by a low scoring feeling type) was characterized by an initial enquiry about the emotional well being of the person who had shared, followed by lots of affirmation, suggestions and reflecting back. The second intervention was provided by a high scoring feeling type, who summarized the situation (an open approach, as it was described) and then examined choices and opened up possibilities. Out of care for the volunteer and focusing on her need to care for herself, boundaries were introduced as a significant factor. The final intervention was made by a high scoring thinking type, who

asked questions by way of clarification, affirmed the sharer before proffering practical advice.

The volunteer in the second group found the process beneficial, liberated by the opportunity to express how she felt about the situation. The first intervention was made by a low scoring feeling type, who reflected back what he had heard before providing examples from his own experience. He referenced his 'gut feeling', with the observer considering his approach person centred. The second intervention was provided by a high scoring feeling type, who encouraged the volunteer to follow his dream, while validating the fears he had expressed. The high scoring thinking type contributed last, focusing on the object (a youth) of the scenario, wondering about the effect on him/her. He reported himself to be conscious of the variety of questions and approaches that might be available to him.

The third group was attempting to assist a volunteer who had found it difficult to share and had experienced the process as uncomfortable and beneficial in equal measure. The initial response was from the high scoring feeling type in the group, who evidenced compassion, beginning questions with the phrase: do you feel that... A second response was made by a low scoring feeling type who was observed to be more analytical, phrasing his questions: is there evidence that... The final response was given by a high scoring thinking type who was dogmatic in her prescription: this is what needs to be done, referencing the law in her insistence that the situation needed to be sorted out.

The volunteer in the fourth group said that he felt it had been good to talk about his situation. The observer noted there were distinctive approaches from the three work consultants. A low scoring thinking type spoke first, asking questions, developing concern for the sharer, bringing encouragement and affirmation to bear on the exchange. Surprisingly, the high scoring feeling type, who contributed next, confessed to demonstrating the least empathy, confirmed by the observer, focusing in on solutions to the problem. As

one of the most literate of the group in the theory of psychological type, he may have consciously attempted to compensate for his feeling ‘bias’ in his intervention. The high scoring thinking type offered clarification, reflecting back but no direct solution.

The volunteer in the fifth group found the exercise very positive, discovering that it challenged some of the assumptions he held. The first intervention was provided by a low scoring feeling type who began by saying ‘thank you’ and enquiring how the volunteer felt. Then, using a full set of notes, he reflected back in great detail what had been heard. The high scoring feeling type who spoke next sympathized with the situation, empathically identified a similar situation in his own ministry, using this as a basis for offering a practical solution. The high scoring thinking type, who provided the final intervention, confessed to not understanding why the issue was a problem, and reflected on some of the societal issues in play.

Study two

Participants

On the second occasion, the invitation was accepted by six sets of training incumbents and their curates, together with three curates unaccompanied by their training incumbents. The curates, in this instance, had been ordained just over 18 months and the group consisted of 8 women and 7 men. The MBTI scores on this second occasion identified a similar preference for feeling (10) over thinking (5). Overall, the most frequently represented types were ENFP (3) and ISFJ (2).

Procedure

On the second occasion, some modifications were made to the exercise, in part learning from experience and in part attempting to accommodate a lower numbers of participants. Each of three volunteers was paired with two work consultants, one with a higher feeling score (31, 25, 25) and the other with a higher thinking score (33, 23, 7). One

of the groups was appointed an additional observer. The rules concerning speaking and avoiding interruption were implemented as before, but on this occasion speakers were confined to ten minute contributions.

Results

First, the volunteers were invited to feedback. The first considered that each consultant had been helpful in different ways, using different approaches. The second testified to having received insightful input from different perspectives, recognizing that her own strong preference for feeling affected how she received these inputs, especially valuing the 'strategic' contribution of the thinking type consultant. The third person assessed the exercise as having been 'extremely useful'.

The observers were invited to report next. The first observer reported that the first intervention in her group had been made by a high scoring feeling type, who had reflected back what he had heard, provided lots of space and had been affirming in his own contribution. His approach was seen to be non-directive, setting out options and empathetic. Only in the final minute did he proffer a firm suggestion. The second work consultant, a high scoring thinking type, was observed to ask more direct questions, employing the phrase, "you feel like this". She both explored and suggested ways forward.

The second observer related how the problem had been described in an analytical way. The first intervention had been provided by a high scoring thinking type who asked questions about authority, about the wider context and about devising strategy. He was described by the observer as approaching the problem from a 'T angle' both seeking clarity and attempting to devise a step-by-step solution. The subsequent intervention was made by a high scoring feeling type, who started in a 'very different place'. She identified with the problem and aspired to make her intervention one of 'standing alongside' her colleague. Her contribution was summarized as being affirming.

The final observer considered that the first intervention made by a high scoring thinking type demonstrated sympathy, but sought the facts and demanded clarification. He ‘drilled down’ into the detail, pushing a little in an attempt to conduct a systematic analysis of the problem. The high scoring feeling type who intervened next built on that analysis, but facilitated some sharing of feelings, recognizing that the problem was ‘something to do with relationship’. It was suggested that the ‘F side’ of her personality was evident.

Discussion and conclusion

Psychological type theory suggests that decisions are made based on either subjective strongly held values or hard logic. Thinking types (Ts) prefer to make their judgments in light of a systematic analysis of the principles involved, while feeling types (Fs) prefer to make judgments in light of a consideration of how interpersonal relationships and values may be affected. In real life, pastoral situations, as constructed and illuminated by this workshop, this study hypothesised that such distinctions would be evident to careful observation. The data generally supported this hypothesis. On balance, participants performed to type. High scoring feeling interventions were characterized by empathy, affirmation, encouragement and compassion. High scoring thinking interventions are marked by a preference for clarification, analysis of the facts and a desire to proceed to a logical practical solution. Low scorers were relatively evenly distributed in using both approaches.

This exercise proved to be useful in the context of continuing ministerial formation in that it facilitates the articulation of both voices, enabling those voices to be heard through a process of careful observation and intelligent feedback. Three benefits of the approach may be identified. First, this exercise is a valid and useful training method that affirms feeling types, giving them a voice in the training environment where other methods have failed. The additional benefit is that it affirms feeling types in their wider ministry, while also encouraging thinking types to value this perspective.

Second, this exercise demonstrated some of the strengths and virtues of collaborative ministry. Those who approach the helping professions in the context of pastoral care may well need to be affirmed, encouraged, and indeed to ‘feel loved’; but they may also need to be challenged and to analyse clearly the situation in which they are placed and to identify the options open to them. Counselling models often seek to do one or the other, without offering sufficient synthesis. Feeling types and thinking types recognized genuine value in each other, confessing their inability to minister like the other type, but nonetheless wanting to explore how they might still embrace the insights of the other type.

Third, this exercise enabled a vocabulary to emerge from a group of clergy who did not possess high literacy in the language of psychological type, and where there was only a moderate willingness to suspend disbelief that type theory might be useful in the realm of practical ministry. Direct quotations have been used liberally to indicate how closely the descriptors match what might be expected from type theory despite neither observers nor consultants being forewarned what to expect or look for. The emergence of this vocabulary assists in affirming the validity of type theory in practical theology; imparts confidence to and energizes practitioners; and enables the trainer to evidence the theory from a group’s immediate subjective empirical experience.

More broadly these findings contribute to the debate regarding how psychological type differences may inform decisions about complementarity and collaboration in Christian ministry. Psychological type differences may be less visible to the Church than some other clearly visible physical differences, like sex and ethnicity, but hidden psychological differences may be of no less significance. Historically the Anglican Church has favoured male priesthood, but now explores the complementarity and collaboration of men and women in ministry. Differences of sex can be easily observed and the criteria for selecting into and developing within ministry men and women can be fairly openly monitored. Historically the

Anglican Church has been built on white leadership, but now explores the complementarity and collaboration of men and women embracing ethnic diversity. Differences of ethnicity can be easily observed and the criteria for selecting into and developing within ministry men and women from different ethnic backgrounds can be fairly and openly monitored.

Psychological differences are much more hidden than sex differences or ethnic differences. The two groups of clergy reported in the present study showed a clear preference for feeling over thinking and this emphasis is found in many studies of Anglican clergy. The imbalance is particularly pronounced among male clergy. In the British population as a whole, just 35% of men prefer feeling (Kendal, 1998). In their study of 626 Anglican clergymen, Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley and Slater (2007) found that 54% preferred feeling. In their study of 622 Anglican clergymen, Francis, Robbins, Duncan, and Whinney (2010) found that 56% preferred feeling. These statistics suggest that the pastoral culture of the Anglican Church is one that may not be as open and welcoming to thinking types as to feeling types. Given, however, the important contribution that thinking types (working collaboratively with feeling types) may make to pastoral ministry, this apparent bias against thinking types may warrant further scrutiny. The fact that psychological differences may be less easy to observe than sex differences or ethnic differences may offer no justifiable reason for ignoring such differences in the life of the Church and in the call to and formation in Christian ministry. Empirical studies in psychological type differences may at least challenge the Church to reflect on such matters from a different perspective.

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