Clergy Effectiveness: National Survey Results Summary

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Overview

Clergy effectiveness is an important topic receiving a great deal of attention in virtually all Christian denominations. This report summarizes the results of over a decade of clergy effectiveness research commissioned by and in collaboration with Advisory Committee on Psychological Assessment to the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry (GBHEM) in The United Methodist Church. A detailed report describing this research effort is available at: www.gbhem.org/bom.

Research Methods

The research results summarized here are based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The initial effectiveness research was conducted using qualitative focus group interviews with local church pastors identified as highly effective by District Superintendents and Conference Bishops. The results of this qualitative research were then translated into a web-based survey to obtain quantitative information from a representative sample of local church pastors. The results reported here are primarily quantitative but the underlying content is strongly rooted in the qualitative research findings.

Highly effective local church pastors reported performing 13 distinct clusters of tasks. These focus group participants further identified 65 distinct knowledge, skill, ability and personal characteristic (KSAPs) domains that enabled effective task performance. To quantify these findings, a survey was constructed by translating each of the task clusters, knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics identified in the focus group interviews into survey questions using a Likert response format. Questions were written for each of the 13 task clusters that assessed the importance of the task cluster, the frequency of performing activities in the task

cluster, and a competency self-assessment. Similarly, questions representing the importance, frequency of use, and self-assessments of competency were developed for each of the 65 knowledge, skill, ability, and personal characteristic domains.

To maximize the representativeness of the survey respondents, a stratified sampling plan was developed where 15 local church pastors were randomly selected with replacement within each of the 63 annual conferences in The United Methodist Church. Ten of the pastors were sampled twice using this strategy and so the final sample contained 935 local church pastors. 341 local church pastors provided survey responses resulting in a 37% response rate. This compares favorably with recent reviews of web-based survey response rates indicating a median response rate of 29%.

Key Findings

Qualitative Clergy Effectiveness Conceptualizations

Highly effective local church pastors identified the following four dimensions of effectiveness. Survey respondents strongly endorsed this conceptualization of local church pastor effectiveness.

Calling

Effective pastors possess a profound inner sense of being called by God and called to ministry. This calling is manifested as a deep trust in God and the willingness to act boldly and to take risks as part of that called ministry.

Leadership

Effective pastors have the ability to cast a vision and mobilize and empower people to work toward it. Effective pastors influence people in ways that will help them achieve their goals.

Transforming lives

Effective pastors are able to transform lives. People with transformed lives experience spirituality as part of their identity; that is, they incorporate spirituality into their everyday lives. People with transformed lives experience God in their lives every day of the week, not just on Sundays. Transforming lives involves helping people grow in their love for God and develop a deeper relationship with God. People with transformed lives also have a genuine desire for spiritual growth.

Helping others

Effective pastors help people discover and utilize their gifts for the good of their communities. They help people grow personally as well as spiritually. They help people become better, more spiritual people who make better decisions and have stronger, healthier relationships with God and others.

Quantitative Survey Results

The quantitative survey results are presented using a common format where statistics describing the relative importance and frequency ratings of the task clusters and the KSAPs are presented. Then a frequency weighted importance value is formed as the product of the frequency and importance ratings. The logic underlying this index is that given two tasks judged to be similarly important, then the task performed more frequently contributes more to effective performance. Importance and competency ratings were obtained using a six point Likert scale and frequency ratings were obtained using a seven point Likert scale. Since the importance and frequency ratings used six and seven point Likert scales, respectively, the computed frequency weighted importance index has a possible range of 1-42. The reported means are directly interpretable with respect to their measurement scales such that, for instance, an average importance ratings between five and six represents a task cluster that is judged to be highly important. Conversely, an average importance rating between one and three represents a task cluster that is judged to be of low importance. The standard deviation is an index of heterogeneity and can be used to examine agreement or disagreement among the survey respondents. There is no absolute interpretation of the standard deviation. However, a standard deviation of 1.00 to 1.20 is typical for the Likert response scales used in this survey. Standard deviations larger than 1.20 indicate potential differences of opinion and standard deviations smaller than 1.00 (e.g., 0.80) indicate homogeneity of opinion. The standard deviation of the frequency weighted importance index is much larger than 1.00 due to forming a product term and cannot be interpreted using this guideline.

Task Cluster Ratings

Table 1 presents the 13 task clusters and the importance and frequency descriptive statistics. The types of tasks contained in each task cluster are fairly self-evident but definitions and extensive examples of each task cluster may be found in the full report. A number of interesting patterns emerged among the task cluster ratings. Clearly, there is substantial differentiation among the task clusters with Communication and Preaching activities rated as both highly important and frequent. On the other hand, UMC connection and facility construction activities were rated as much lower in both importance and frequency. From a developmental perspective, the advice is clear. Efforts should first be directed at improving performance on the more highly ranked task performance domains such as communication, preaching, self-development, and care-giving before investing effort into the less highly ranked performance domains such as Administration, Relationship building, and UMC connection. Care must be taken however, when examining these rankings. For example, the performance of rituals and sacraments is judged to be important but because they are performed less frequently than many of the other activities, the associated rank is low. It is also interesting to see that the standard deviations

for the frequency ratings are generally high indicating substantial heterogeneity in the frequency ratings provided by different local church pastors for these task clusters. This heterogeneity may provide useful information for placements if the local church pastor and congregation can be matched on these task dimensions. Finally, it is interesting to compare the self-assessed competency ratings with the importance ratings and the frequency weighted importance ratings. Management, self-development, relationship building, and evangelism tended to receive lower ratings of self-assessed competency than one might expect given the judged importance of these tasks. These performance domains may be fruitful targets for performance improvement interventions.

KSAPs: Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Personal Characteristic Ratings

The full set of results for the 65 identified performance enabling KSAPs are interesting and highly informative. However, for the sake of brevity, a condensed set of results are presented here consisting of the top three rated components from each KSAP domain plus the sense of calling that was judged to be domain independent. A more detailed picture of the KSAP results, along with definitions and examples of each KSAP, can be found in the full report.

Table 2 presents a list of of the 13 top rated KSAPs in the survey responses. These KSAPs are the top rated components in each domain and so it is not surprising to find that they are all rated as highly important contributors to local church pastor effectiveness. In addition, the standard deviations for all 13 of the KSAPs in this table are relatively small indicating substantial agreement about their importance among the survey respondents. Following each KSAP component in Table 2 is an indicator of whether the component represents knowledge (K), skill (S), ability (A), or a personal characteristic (PC). This is useful because personal characteristics and abilities are relatively stable and hard to change whereas knowledge is readily improved and skill is, by definition, changeable with practice. This suggests that ordination and placement efforts should focus on those aspects of the individual that are difficult to change whereas training and development efforts should be directed at the aspects of the individual that are readily improved. This is not to say that efforts should not be undertaken to modify abilities and personal characteristics when so desired but these efforts should be undertaken with a long-term perspective and realistic expectations.

Usage Recommendations

The data reported here summarize the rich quantitative picture of the tasks performed by local church pastors and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that enable the effective performance of these tasks. The 13 task clusters explored in this research overlap substantially with existing research focused on the roles filled by local church pastors in The United Methodist Church. However, the current results expand on the prior research by providing a more comprehensive set of tasks or roles than currently exists and by focusing on the specific behaviors or

Table 1: Task Cluster Descriptive Statistics.

Task Cluster	Rank	Importance[a]		Frequency[b]		Imp x Freq[c]		Competence[d]	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Communication	1	5.04	0.86	5.50	1.48	28.29	10.15	4.34	0.93
Preaching & Public Worship	2	5.62	0.62	5.02	1.05	28.27	6.93	4.77	0.85
Self Development	3	5.04	0.89	5.15	1.78	26.59	11.24	3.92	1.09
Care Giving	4	5.13	0.89	4.77	1.54	24.90	9.91	4.47	0.93
Management	5	4.73	1.04	4.68	1.90	23.15	11.96	4.09	0.99
Other Development	6	4.82	0.99	4.38	1.57	21.80	9.92	4.26	1.01
Evangelism	7	4.87	1.05	4.22	1.62	21.17	10.14	3.53	1.07
Fellowship	8	4.61	1.08	4.15	1.47	19.62	9.05	4.32	0.97
Administrative	9	3.93	1.22	4.60	1.86	19.29	11.01	4.12	0.97
Relationship Building	10	4.45	1.06	3.77	1.79	17.74	10.69	4.05	1.06
Rituals & Sacraments	11	5.04	0.97	2.92	1.13	14.77	6.76	4.77	0.83
UMC Connection	12	3.54	1.25	2.21	1.38	8.35	6.91	3.70	1.09
Facility Construction	13	2.77	1.33	2.01	1.52	7.00	7.57	3.53	1.14

[a] 6-point scale (1=Not at all Important; 6=Extremely Important)
[b] 7-point scale (1=Multiple times a year; 7=Multiple times a Day)
[c] Formed as the product of the respondents importance and frequency ratings yielding a scale range of 1-42
[d] 6-point scale (1=Ineffective; 5=Extremely Effective)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the highest rated KSAPs.

KSAP	Rank	Importance[a]		Frequency[b]		Imp x Freq[c]		Competence[d]	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Trust in God (A)	1	5.81	0.53	6.63	1.04	38.75	7.23	4.00	0.93
Integrity (PC)	2	5.67	0.54	6.44	1.04	36.60	7.24	4.13	0.73
Authenticity (PC)	3	5.57	0.64	6.38	1.19	35.75	8.20	4.02	0.77
Oral Communication (S)	4	5.40	0.64	6.14	1.27	33.32	8.39	3.72	0.85
Theology & Scripture (K)	5	5.51	0.65	5.97	1.19	33.17	8.55	3.57	0.83
Dependability (PC)	6	5.35	0.66	6.01	1.21	32.34	8.21	3.98	0.80
Calling	7	5.59	0.73	5.24	2.15	30.03	13.24	4.20	0.87
Time Management (S)	8	4.77	1.00	5.99	1.57	29.31	10.77	2.95	1.07
Reading Comprehension (A)	9	4.81	0.87	5.92	1.45	28.97	9.77	3.59	0.95
Intelligence (A)	10	4.68	0.93	6.09	1.47	28.90	9.88	3.42	0.91
Spiritual Disciplines (S)	11	5.19	0.85	5.40	1.54	28.56	10.26	3.06	0.94
Administration (K)	12	4.36	0.97	4.90	1.86	22.13	10.73	3.04	0.87
Management Principles (K)	13	4.34	1.05	4.36	1.98	20.01	11.44	3.06	1.00

[a] 6-point scale (1=Not at all Important; 6=Extremely Important)
[b] 7-point scale (1=Multiple times a year; 7=Multiple times a Day)
[c] Formed as the product of the respondents importance and frequency ratings yielding a scale range of 1-42
[d] 5-point scale (1=A small amount; 5=An extreme amount)

actions that underlie the task clusters or roles. The present research also represents the first quantitative investigation of the 65 knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that support the effective performance of the local church pastor's activities.

The task cluster importance results presented in Table 1 provide immediately actionable information. These task clusters provide a concrete representation of performance effectiveness and one or more performance evaluation instruments, such as a 360° evaluation tool, should be developed to assess pastor performance on each of these performance dimensions. From an individual level of analysis, the performance evaluation instrument can be used in a diagnostic fashion to help local church pastors understand their performance strengths and weaknesses to better allocate their self-development activities. From an organizational perspective, if a standardized instrument could be implemented across the annual conferences, then The United Methodist Church could use the information as a benchmark to evaluate the current level of effectiveness provided by local church pastors and as a planning instrument for setting effectiveness improvement targets.

Table 2 presents the most highly rated KSAPs that survey respondents believe are required to enable highly effective performance. As such, these highly rated KSAPs provide the most potent levers for improving effectiveness among local church pastors. The knowledge and skill components (e.g., oral communication, theology and scripture, calling, and time management) are readily amenable to instruction and practice and, as such, are clear targets for developmental interventions. The abilities and personal characteristics (e.g., trust in God, integrity, authenticity, and dependability) are relatively stable individual differences. Abilities and personal characteristics can be changed over time but the process is often slow and requires constant attention or a highly salient life event for meaningful changes to occur. As such, abilities and personal characteristics should weigh heavily in ordination decisions, church placements, and possible disciplinary actions. It is important to highlight that the remaining KSAPs not presented in Table 2 are still believed to be important contributors to effective performance. A reasonable first step in promoting effectiveness among local church pastors would be to emphasize development in the KSAPs presented in Table 2. For those pastors who are strong in these KSAPs or become strong in these areas over time, a reasonable second step would be to identify weaknesses among the remaining KSAPs presented in the full report and invest effort into improving competency on these identified domains.