

Chapter 13

Vision Conflict Scale: Instrument Profile

J. Louis Spencer

American Public University System, USA

W. David Winner

Regent University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the development of a scale that measures vision conflict, which refers to the disparity between what a minister anticipates a ministry to be like versus the real-life experience. Vision conflict is correlated with four similar phenomena, including role ambiguity, negative job satisfaction, negative values congruence, and negative ability-job fit. The scale addresses key factors that may affect pastoral terminations and exits from church ministry. It also encourages the understanding of critical elements that hinder pastoral effectiveness and create a stronger resilience to exiting the ministry.

A PASTORAL MINISTRY CRISIS

Evangelical clergy from a cross-section of denominational traditions are increasingly withdrawing from the ministry due to significant difficulties related to various spiritual, physical, emotional, and social issues manifested in maladies such as burnout, depression, discouragement, immorality, poverty, inadequacy, conflict, and stress (Elkington, 2013; Farley, 2016; Joynt, 2017; Krejcir, 2016; Wickman, 2011). The struggles facing pastoral ministry are not new, but according to a landmark study by London and Wiseman (2003), pastors in the 21st century are facing diverse challenges and adversities associated with contemporary ministry, coupled with fluctuating perceptions that create conflict among clergy:

Unprecedented shifts in moral, social, and economic conditions are battering congregations. These changing circumstances and declining values directly affect pastors and their way of life . . . At the same time, pastors' concepts of ministry are in flux. Now, clergy expect personal fulfillment and meaning, where former generations seemed satisfied with sacrifice and even expected to suffer. Clearly, this new

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breed of pastors views their world, their work, and themselves differently than their preaching parents and grandparents did. (p. 34)

Pastors progressively appear ill-prepared to fulfill congregational expectations while also answering to their family, denomination, community, and self, since resources and ministry partners are diminishing (Lee, 2017; London & Wiseman, 2003; Tanner, 2016). Hoge and Wenger's (2005) study of 963 pastors from five different evangelical denominations found that there is typically a combination of issues that contribute to pastoral exits. Their study concluded that secularization of the church coincides with a changed view of the pastorate as "a religious vocation based on lifelong calling, self-sacrifice, and personal holiness to a new professional ideal stressing learning, certification, and identity" (Hoge & Wenger, 2005, p. 4). Three important findings come from the Hoge and Wenger (2005) study. First, conflict with parishioners, church staff, and denominational leadership is the primary cause of pastoral exits. Second, women tend to leave the ministry more often than men, with family-oriented issues being the main factor. However, the women in the study reported stronger feelings of disillusionment related to denominational systems and resistance to women as clergy. The third important finding was that more minister exits are associated with institutional or interpersonal complications, not because of a loss of faith or financial shortfall.

Reed (2016) examined the antecedents associated with longevity of ministry and its association with numerous elements such as spiritual practices, lifestyle habits, vocational crises, the role of calling, personal relationships, and congregational characteristics. The qualitative study concludes that healthy relationships with God, family, friends, and congregational members, are key indicators as to whether a minister is likely to remain in the pastorate.

Joynt (2017) found calling as a significant antecedent affecting pastoral exits because of the variation of ways in which calling is viewed. According to Joynt (2017):

Some respond to the call yet leave for various reasons; some consider the call to be seasonal (e.g., a set time frame) or bi-vocational in nature (e.g. both pastoral and business or both pastoral and missions); and some were never called in the first place but merely followed the only route they considered to be a means to serve God. (p. 5)

Another work by Joynt (2018) examines the multi-level role of conflict in creating a negative environment for ministry—conflict stemming from miscommunication with the congregation and/or denomination, including "role ambiguity, role conflict and leadership conflict" (p. 6)—that can result in clergy exiting the ministry. A treatise by Greenfield (2001) focuses on pastor abuse and notes the occurrence of discord between congregations and ministers. According to Greenfield, typical pastor abuse is characterized by "a set of problems in the church that serves as background for the conflict that develops between the minister and one or more laypersons who begin identifying the minister as the cause of the problems" (p. 24). The senior ministers tend to receive the majority of abusive treatment associated with feelings of rejection, questioning their calling, and occasionally, clinical depression. Greenfield's (2001) qualitative work underscores the emotional and social nature of negative confrontations with pastors, and it supports the conclusion that the issues facing ministers are unique from leaders in other sectors. For members of the clergy, the congregation is also the de facto employer and may contribute to a greater sense of devastating attack.

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