

Faculty of Theology  
University of Helsinki  
Finland

**A TEST TO PASS OR A TOOL FOR GROWTH?**  
Evaluating the usefulness of the psychological  
assessment of ministerial aspirants

**Aura Nortomaa**

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Theology  
at the University of Helsinki in Hall 6, University main building,  
on the 9th of December 2016 at 12 noon.

Helsinki 2016

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# LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following publications:

## I

Nortomaa, A. (2015). To Ordain or Not to Ordain? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on How Ministerial Candidates And Diocesan Representatives Use Psychological Assessment in Ordination Process. *Journal of Empirical Theology* 28(2), 242-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15709256-12341332>

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## II

Nortomaa, A. I. (2016). Who is Not Ordained, and Why? A Mixed-Method Analysis of Dropped Ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 20(1), 51-68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2014-0021>

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## III

Nortomaa, A. (2016). Predicting Ordination, Early-Career Mobility, and Career Adaptation from Ministerial Applicants' Psychological Assessment Results. *Review of Religious Research*. Published online 19<sup>th</sup> June 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13644-016-0254-5>

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Villa Salin

Last week of October in 2016

*Aura Nortomaa*

## ABSTRACT

Working as a pastor has become increasingly demanding in an era of boundaryless work and in a landscape of declining institutionalized religion. Amidst these sociological changes, the selection of a new pastor is a challenging task. Therefore, psychological assessments are nowadays frequently used by churches in the recruitment process.

This study examined the usefulness of the psychological assessment of applicants to the ministry. Usefulness was approached in three ways: as a subjective evaluation by the applicant, as a subjective evaluation of the church representative, and as predictive validity for career success. The study used psychological assessment data from applicants to the ministry in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland from 2006–2010 (n=718), follow-up survey data from 2012 (n=314), a list of ordained persons from 2014, and qualitative survey data from diocesan chapter members (n=29) from 2014. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed.

Neither the ministerial applicants nor the church representatives declared that the assessment results were of personal significance to them. However, both clearly indicated that the assessments are generally necessary. This contradiction is explained with the Self-Determination Theory framework as the protection of one's autonomy. Further, the study found weak and modest predictive connections between the assessment results and career outcomes. In cases where the ordination process had been dropped, the results had played no role. All in all, the findings indicate that the seemingly prominent role of psychological assessment in the transition from education to working as a minister is actually rather small. The study confirmed that the determination of the aspirant is the most essential element in pursuing a ministerial career.

The study concluded that the assessment was intended to be a tool for growth, but has instead been experienced as a test to pass. Following the Cognitive Evaluation Theory, the study highlights the importance of clearly communicating the informational (not controlling) nature of the assessment in order to receive the most benefit from the results. In the future, qualitative research on how ministerial aspirants have experienced the assessment process, and how the assessment result and their calling interact, would provide more understanding on the role of the assessment results in the process of becoming a minister.

The study raises the question of which characteristics to favor in a new pastor in the current sociological situation. The churches stand at a crucial crossroads: when selecting new pastors, the churches face the choice of whether to recruit personalities who will preserve the church or who will change the church. Selecting a new pastor is, namely, a part of selecting the future of the church.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early days of Christianity, the question of who can be ordained to the ministry has been a much discussed topic. Even today, ordination criteria and processes are under constant re-evaluation. After decades spent in discussions on whether women could be ordained to the ministry, in recent years more attention has been devoted to discussions on the ordination of persons on the LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer) rainbow. Alongside these debates, little attention has been given to more general topics of aptitude, or the reasons underlying different outcomes of application processes. In particular, individuals who have made it as far as to apply to be ordained, but who have not been, have escaped almost all scholarly attention. It is unknown how their psychological aptitude might relate to the outcome. Further, the connections in general are poorly known between the psychological aptitude of a ministerial aspirant and eventual ordination and other career events.

The current sociological situation in the Nordic countries highlights the importance, if not the necessity, of the question of who is and who is not ordained. Even when the formal and authoritative power of the ordained clergy is waning due to the changed position of religion in the public sphere, they still hold a key position when the future of churches and their role in societies are explored. Ordained ministers have a unique opportunity – even responsibility – to participate in the pursuit of finding the place of religion in late modern society. The recruitment of new church ministers has a direct connection to what the future of the church will look like. Selecting a new pastor is thus, in part, selecting the future of the church.

In addition to a decline in religion, the occupational group of pastors is currently facing another sociological whirl of change: the emergence of a boundaryless work culture. The changes in work life itself also make the job of a pastor more demanding. Both of these sociological change processes have implications for churches' recruitment processes and the career patterns of new pastors. The selection of new employees amongst these sociological changes is thus an important task.

Acquiring an accurate understanding of psychological assessment as an element in the recruitment process of a new church minister would, however, be advisable. If properly utilized, standardized psychological assessment can be a valuable tool in the recruitment of new church ministers in the current societal situation. The assessment can provide a tool for identifying applicants who have the best abilities for coping with the changing religious landscape in the realm of fragmented work. Studies on these selection assessments have, however, been very few as yet. How to use these assessment results or which characteristics to look for in a ministerial aspirant are among the questions that have not yet been explored. Thus, it is unknown how

these assessments are incorporated in the recruitment process of a new minister or how influential they are.

In the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland (the ELCF), psychological assessment for ministerial aspirants was initiated in 2002. In the ELCF, the assessment was from the start conducted identically throughout the country: in every diocese and for every applicant for ordination. In other words, standardized assessment data has been gathered from everyone willing to enter a certain profession throughout the country. This level of standardization is globally unique and provides unique opportunities for studying the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants. Finland is thus one of the very few places where suitable datasets of adequate size, quality, and representativeness are available. This makes the ELCF a very suitable case for studying the usefulness of the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants. However, even though the assessments in the ELCF began almost 15 years ago, no studies have been done on how useful the procedure has been.

This thesis examines the usefulness of the psychological assessments of ministerial aspirants in the ELCF. The aim of the study was to determine how the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants affects their career process. This topic required combining knowledge on psychological measurement and evaluation with a theological understanding of the ministerial profession. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach was indispensable. As a whole, one single theoretical framework was not applied that would encompass the entire work. Instead, the study started with an empirical question and continued as a pioneering work between several disciplines. Along the way, it used several concepts and theoretical frameworks from many disciplines. The main two disciplines were church and social studies and work and organizational psychology, with sociology of work and practical theology on the side. Church and social studies is a discipline that traditionally has studied church as an organization from various viewpoints, including those of recruitment and church personnel. Thus, the present study continues an established line of research in the discipline of church and social studies.

Regarding the terminology used in this introductory article, first, several English terms can be used to describe people who have been ordained to the ministry. Here, the terms “minister” and “pastor” and the plural “clergy” are used to refer to ordained people. Following the general custom, the term “priest” is used only when referring to someone ordained to the Catholic clergy. The terms “ministerial aspirants” and “applicants to the ministry” are used to refer to people who aim at becoming ordained and working as pastors. Within the context of this paper, the term “students of theology” is not used to refer to all students of theology, but to the group that participated in the assessments and thereby expressed the intention to become ministers. Even though in Finland it is possible (and nowadays also common) to study theology without the intention of becoming a pastor, only

those students who were heading for ordination were of interest in the current study. Therefore, in this introductory article, the expression “students of theology” decidedly overlaps with “ministerial aspirants,” with the additional information that the previous term refers to people still in the student phase. Second, the terms “psychological assessment,” “psychological evaluation,” and “psychological testing” are often used interchangeably, even though they refer to separate things. The American Psychological Association defines their relation as follows: “Tests and assessments are two separate but related components of a psychological evaluation” (American Psychological Association, 2015). According to the APA, testing involves the use of formal, often standardized, tests in, for example, a questionnaire format. An assessment is done to answer specific questions or to determine whether the subject meets the criteria for a certain position, such as being a good manager or pastor. An assessment may include a variety of components such as standardized tests, an interview, or observation. In the Handbook of Psychological Assessment, psychological assessment “places data in a wide perspective, with its focus being problem solving and decision making” (Groth-Marnat, 2009, p. 3). In the current study, the term psychological assessment is used to refer to the process of gathering information on subjects, using, for example, psychological tests, in order to evaluate their suitability to be ordained to pastorhood.

## **2 THE SOCIETAL LANDSCAPE OF THE PASTORAL PROFESSION**

### **2.1 NEW PASTORS FACE THE DECLINE OF RELIGION**

The changes in the role of religion in society will form the field in which the pastors selected today will work in the future. The way religion is experienced and expressed in society is undergoing a major change that affects churches and church ministers. Religiosity in the late modern, post-industrial era can be seen as incompatible with traditional religious communities, particularly religious institutions (for an analysis, see, for example, Riis & Woodhead, 2010). This change goes by many names and interpretations. The discussion has become more nuanced; the original term “secularization” has been supplemented with new key terms such as “privatization,” “deinstitutionalization,” “immigrant religion,” and “new spirituality.” Whether the general situation in the Nordic countries is viewed as believing without belonging (e.g. Davie, 1990), believing in belonging (e.g. Day, 2009), or neither believing nor belonging (e.g. Voas & Crockett, 2005), some developments in the way religion is nowadays lived seem indisputable. Especially in the Nordic countries, majority churches are experiencing a steady decline in membership. In addition, the discussion on the role of religion in a secular society is vivid and ongoing in these societies.

In these circumstances, the societal position of the clergy is of particular interest. The clergy comprise a central occupational group in an institution whose place and status in society are now being challenged. Their own position and status in society are changing, as are people’s expectations of them. Despite these changes, clergy are still in a key position at a time when society expects a sense of direction and even religious leadership. Clergy are naturally also a key occupational group when discussing the future of churches and the future of religion in society.

The changes described above will have a notable effect on what working as a pastor will look like in the future. As the influence of religious institutions diminishes, churches face the loss of authority, meaning, and position in society. This process denotes corresponding losses for the professionals working for these institutions. In a study on declining religious authority, Field (2014) found that from the 1960s to today in Britain, public attitudes towards the Church and clergy have been deteriorating in aspects such as perceived importance, influence, admiration, and trust. Further, a decline in church attendance is related to a decline in integration in religious communities, which in turn affects the resources pastors have at their disposal in their work. Finland, the context of this study, has often been described as a country of “believing in belonging.” In 2014, 73.7% of the population belonged

to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church (ELCF), but on average only 7.3% attended religious services (Church Statistics, 2015). To be more precise, Finland's religious situation can be described as a high level of denominational organization, a low rate of church involvement, and a below-average intensity of faith (following Pollack, 2008). Additionally, membership rates are declining. To illustrate, in 1995 85.6% of the population belonged to the Church, compared to 73.7% in 2014; in addition, in 1995 0.3% of the population resigned from the Church, whereas in 2014 the number had grown to 1.9% (Kirkon tilastot [Church statistics], 2015). With this profile, Finland can be described as an example of fuzzy fidelity in full bloom (Voas, 2009). Fully in line with these characteristics, Finnish pastors report that uncertainty, dismissals, and a lack of resources caused by the weakening economic situation of the church greatly affect their work (Niemelä, 2014). In sum, it is evident that changes in the role of religion in society strongly affect religious institutions and the people working for them.

Surprisingly, it has not been studied how the implications of these societal changes should be taken into account in the recruitment of future employees of religious institutions. Hardly any studies have focused on what consequences the presumed decline of religion, the decline in religious attendance, and the loss of the relevance of religious institutions have on the selection of the future employees of the institutions in question. Psychological assessment is generally used to evaluate aptitude when selecting new personnel for demanding positions. How psychological assessment has been used to help in the recruitment of pastors in the current sociological situation has, however, not yet been evaluated.

## **2.2 CHOOSING A PROFESSION IN A BOUNDARYLESS WORK CULTURE**

Working as a pastor will become more demanding not only because of the decline of religion, but also because working life itself is undergoing a major change. Sullivan's review from 1999 already described a shift from traditional work to boundaryless work (Sullivan 1999), and this shift was confirmed a decade later in Sullivan and Baruch's review (2009). The traditional model of a career as linear progress in the context of one employer throughout an employee's life, measured by raises and promotions, is gone. The current era has been given many descriptors, for example, boundaryless, protean, nomad, spiral, and post-corporate (list adapted from Chudzikowski, 2012; see also Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Of these, the term boundaryless is considered the most suited for the purposes of the present study, and is thus employed hereafter. The boundaryless work paradigm describes individuals as driven more by their own desires than by organizational career management

practice. It follows that they also take more responsibility for their own career management, development, and employability (Sullivan & Baruch 2009).

Due to these changes in working life, the transition from education to work has become increasingly blurred. Many students work alongside their studies or start studying anew later in life after already experiencing one or several careers. Despite this blurring, becoming a pastor still includes one clear rite of transition: ordination, which marks the shift from education to the working life of a pastor. In an increasingly complex working life that, as stated above, expects quite much from the individual in terms of career management, a person's preparedness for this transition is of key importance. Career adaptability refers to "the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions" (Savickas, 1997) and is closely linked to career preparedness, defined as "a cognitive-motivational construct including career self-efficacy with the confidence to implement the actions required to acquire and maintain work-related goals, and prepare for career setbacks during career as its intertwined ingredients" (Salmela-Aro, Mutanen, & Vuori, 2012).

Despite the large amount of research done on boundaryless, new work, certain segments of the workforce have not yet been studied in these efforts. Most notably, studies on professions in religious institutions seem to be lacking almost entirely. Studies on these occupational groups would, however, be profitable additions to the field, as certain aspects of these professions may be difficult to reconcile with the boundaryless work concept. In one way, pastors can be seen as forerunners of the boundaryless work culture in that they do not have fixed work hours, and the profession has been considered more of a lifestyle than a career option. However, the current generation of pastors is challenging this perspective. They report that the biggest threat to their work-related well-being in fact is the work hours (Tervo-Niemelä, 2016), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has already made some attempts to regulate working hours (for one experiment, see Keskinen, 2012). In other words, in the midst of the boundaryless work culture, church ministers are now calling for boundaries.

Not all aspects of the pastoral profession fit well to the boundaryless paradigm. The concept of a calling, for one, is a challenging construct to reconcile with the boundaryless work paradigm. In the current diffuse situation where both religion and work are undergoing major transformations, living out one's calling to a religious profession is more easily said than done. In studies of work psychology, a calling has been approached as a long-term work orientation (Conway, Clinton, Sturges, & Budjanovcanin, 2015) encompassing three features: an external summons, a profound meaning, and a clearly implied prosocial motivation (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Theologically, a pastor is expected to have *vocatio interna*, an inner calling to become a pastor, and *vocatio externa*, a parish calling them to work

as their pastor. Traditionally and theologically, churches uphold the ideal of a lifetime calling for a pastor's position (or career). Nowadays, the external vocation may be a fixed-term contract for a few months, as is often the case, for example, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. Still, an internal vocation is assumed and expected to be solid, permanent, and continuous – an ontological characteristic. This creates a contradiction. Fragmentary employment is typical for the boundaryless era, but difficult to reconcile with the ideal of a permanent calling.

The contradiction between a permanent calling and fragmented employment is an example of the general change that has taken place in the psychological contract between employer and employee. In traditional work, this contract has entailed exchanging loyalty for job security, whereas in the realm of boundaryless work, the new contract assumes the exchange of performance for learning and marketability (for an overview, see Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). These changes are also catching up to religious institutions. When short-term positions are becoming more common, the church no longer offers job security. In terms of a psychological contract, the church as an employer has thereby breached that contract. A breach from the employees' side is presumably followed by a shift from offering loyalty to offering performance. Therefore, turnover may likely increase among pastors – in fact, up to half of them have considered leaving their position (Randall, 2004). The breach in the psychological contract between an employer and an employee is a product of the sociological changes of the late modern era. Consequently, new employees face novel requirements. The pastors that are selected today will in the future be working in an environment where they need to be able to cope with short-term contracts and potential unemployment. They are further required to find their calling within this fragmentary career.

The emergence of a boundaryless work culture has implications for churches as employers and for pastors as employees. Churches need to take the changing work life into account when recruiting new employees in order to select the most suitable candidates in the current societal situation. Which personal characteristics best equip future pastors for working in a boundaryless era, has, however, not yet been much discussed or explored.

## **3 EXAMINING THE SELECTION OF NEW PASTORS**

### **3.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Amidst these simultaneous sociological changes in both religion and working life, the precise recruitment of new pastors is of particular concern. How can those individuals be selected who will most likely remain in their position, perform well, and be satisfied in their work in this new, demanding societal situation? Until now, becoming a pastor has in Finland mainly been studied from the viewpoints of motivation and a calling. Since a calling has repeatedly been identified as the leading reason for selecting a pastoral career (for the most recent results, see, for example, Buchert, 2013 and Niemelä, 2013), many of the studies have focused on exploring this concept in detail. Consequently, several types of callings and career motivations have been identified among theologians (see, for example, Litmanen, Hirsto, & Lonka, 2010; Niemelä, 1999; Niemelä, 2014). A recent qualitative study (Niemelä, 2013) found that a vocation and living according to one's values and faith were the strongest determinants of professional orientation among students of theology. Additionally, self-efficacy was found to play a key role in career orientation motivations. Similarly, in Buchert (2013), the lack of a calling and cracks in self-efficacy beliefs were found to be the biggest reasons among students of theology for opting out of the study path that would have qualified them for a pastoral career. Self-efficacy beliefs thus seem to have a strong influence on students' decision to pursue a pastoral career. In sum, the central role of a calling, motivation, and self-efficacy in a pastoral career path has been rather extensively studied. What is lacking in Finnish research is studies on the relevance of the psychological aptitude assessment to this career process.

Psychological assessment is nowadays widely used in many occupational fields to help in recruitment. Specifically, churches and religious institutions are increasingly taking a professional approach to their recruitment and applying psychological assessment to screen their applicants to the ministry. Already in 1993 93% of Roman Catholic vocational directors reported using psychological assessment when evaluating applicants to religious orders (Batsis, 1993). This reflects a shift in the understanding of what makes a suitable minister. It is not enough to select those with "the right faith"; instead, an evaluation of other aspects in a professional manner is needed. One branch of psychological screening of ministerial aspirants since the 1990s has been motivated by the sexual misconduct scandals in the Catholic church. Therefore, some studies have been motivated by the need to filter out applicants at risk of being abusers. Examples of this line of research in particular include the studies by T. G. Plante and colleagues. Besides studies on aspiring Catholic priests,



this line of research has lately expanded to also examine applicants to the Episcopal church (to become acquainted with this line of research, Plante, Aldridge, & Louie, 2005 and Plante, 2011 are suggested as starting points).

The practices employed in screening ministerial applicants in these evaluations are remarkably varied (see Bonney & Park, 2012, for a cursory overview). As no comprehensive reviews are available, and as providing such an overview was not a focus of the present study, only an estimation can be presented here. To obtain a basic overview of how psychological assessment is incorporated in the recruitment of new ministers, I made unofficial inquiries regarding the assessment practices of majority and minority churches in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In addition, I sent an inquiry to an assessment institution in Boston, in the US, which I knew was conducting evaluations of clergy applicants for several churches in their area. Based on the replies I received from these countries, the variation in selection practices and measures is vast. Most importantly, even the variation inside a single church or even diocese was wide: dioceses and even local parishes had their own practices of evaluating their applicants, and no standard protocols existed. This informal inquiry supports Malony's claim from 2000 that the United Methodist Church (US) may be the only church with a standardized assessment protocol (Malony, 2000). Standard protocols have been explicitly called for (McGlone, Ortiz, & Karney, 2010), and two protocols for assessing ministerial applicants have indeed been proposed. However, they have not gained wide support. The first was drafted by Plante and Boccaccini (1998) and another by Bonney and Park (2012). The latter was based on known stress factors and resiliency boosters in the clergy profession. It remains to be seen whether it will in time become more popular than the previously suggested protocol.

Only a few studies have evaluated psychological assessment in the context of the recruitment of church ministers. One reason for this lack of studies is presumably the vast variation of the assessment methods used, which means no large datasets are available for research purposes. Besides the variety of assessment procedures, another explanation for the lack of follow-up research might be the unclarity of which concepts to evaluate. Indeed, a key problem when studying the predictive validity of clergy assessments is determining which outcomes should be judged. For example, salary or prestige are ill-suited measures for evaluating how someone has succeeded as a pastor. Several suggestions for better measures have been made, but none seem to have gained major support (a review is available in Malony, 2000).

Follow-up studies connecting the psychological assessment results to even clearly defined outcomes, such as whether the applicant was eventually ordained, seem to be lacking almost entirely. Several descriptive studies about various characteristics of the clergy have been published (for example, Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley, & Slater, 2007; Gamino, Sewell, Mason, & Crostley, 2007; Loudon & Francis, 1999; Plante et al., 2005; Plante, 2011), but predictive studies using pre-ordination

assessment data have been very rare. The study by Malony and Majovski from 1986 still stands alone as an attempt towards a standard validation process. In the study, results from a psychological assessment were compared with the pastors' success ten years later. Success was assessed with several measures, incorporating evaluations by not only the pastors themselves but also parishioners and supervisors. Objective outcomes such as church attendance rates and salary were also included, as well as subjective self-reports of satisfaction, appreciation, and effectiveness. As a result, no connections between the psychological assessment results and these measures of success were found. In 2000, Malony published an update on the situation of studies on predictive validity in the field and did not note considerable improvement. Now, in 2016, even this update was published 16 years ago, and no recent reviews seem to have been published.

Predictive studies have explicitly been called for (Bonney & Park, 2012) since there is a clear need to evaluate the assessments. Further, as Plante et al. (2005) note, the lack of a control group (those not ordained) in their study seriously limits how their results can be interpreted. In other words, comparing ordained and not-ordained applicants to the ministry is necessary to evaluate whether there actually are differences between these groups. This is presently a clear research gap. To continue, as a specific case of ordination decisions, situations where an applicant has not been ordained have never been studied. It is surprising that no studies have examined cases where ordination has not been granted. It is therefore unknown what happens in these events – whether the applicants were rejected, dropped out of the process on their own initiative, encountered some outside obstacle, or were stopped by something else. And if the applicants were rejected, the underlying reasons are also unknown. The lack of research is presumably due to the delicate nature of the topic. The potential role that psychological assessment results might have in these cases is, however, a very interesting issue and clearly invites research.

Besides predictive studies, another way to evaluate assessment is to investigate if and how the parties involved in the assessment have benefited from it. Regarding the assessment processes of ministerial aspirants, only one study has looked at the assessment process from the employer's viewpoint: the supervisors of Catholic candidates to the priesthood were studied by Batsis (1993). Additionally, the psychologists involved in the assessment of candidates to the Catholic priesthood were studied by McGlone, Ortiz, and Karney (2010). These studies did not, however, provide any light on what effect the assessment result had on the ordination process of the candidate. It is surprising that no research efforts have been made to find how the psychological assessment information has been incorporated into the ordination process.

To continue, no studies have examined how the ministerial applicants themselves have reacted to the assessment. In studies on applicant reactions among other occupational groups, attitudes, affects, and cognitions that the person can have

towards the recruitment process have been rather thoroughly studied (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), and applicant reactions to assessments are quite well known (Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). For example, the applicant's result has been found to be connected to how they evaluate the assessment – the better the result, the more favorable the evaluation (Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002). Further, in a Finnish dissertation that evaluated the general use of psychological assessments in Finland, the factors that most strongly affected the respondents' evaluation of the assessment were the expectations for the assessment, the overall rating they received, their motivation towards achievement, a positive result in their favor of the eventual selection, their satisfaction with their own performance, and the oral feedback they received. In turn, the overall picture that the participants had of the assessments predicted their trust in the assessment in general (Kuuskorpi, 2012). However, no studies from the applicant viewpoint seem to have been conducted on the occupational group of pastors: all previous research has focused on other occupational groups. No studies have been done on the subjective evaluation of the assessments or on reactions to the selection procedure in general among applicants to the ministry. Since the interplay with a calling might complicate how applicants react to an assessment of their aptitude, studies specifically on this occupational group would be needed.

In sum, studies on the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants have been rare. Only very few predictive studies have been done, and the reactions of the employer and the applicant have been overlooked. Thus, there is currently no comprehensive understanding of the role and significance of psychological assessment in the recruitment of church ministers. In order to provide such an understanding, several different aspects of how useful these assessments are need to be addressed simultaneously.

### **3.2 A THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF USEFULNESS**

Currently, no coherent understanding exists of the usefulness of the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants. Across occupations, the usefulness of psychological assessment as part of recruitment has previously been studied from many viewpoints. For the most part, usefulness has been approached as the ability to predict or ensure work efficiency, job performance, or economic gain (Thornton & Gibbons, 2009). Likewise, career success has been operationalized as salary or status (Zacher, 2014). However, regarding pastors and other religious professions, an approach that focuses on economic measures as outcomes is clearly not suitable. Therefore, other operationalizations for usefulness should be formulated.

A model for evaluating the usefulness of a psychological assessment is proposed here. The model encompasses three dimensions: applicant evaluation, employer

evaluation, and predictive validity. Subjective evaluation by the applicant has in previous research been examined in studies on applicant reactions. However, these studies have been done only among occupations other than pastors, and their generalizability to this group is not certain. The second dimension, subjective evaluation by the employer, has been even more scarcely researched.

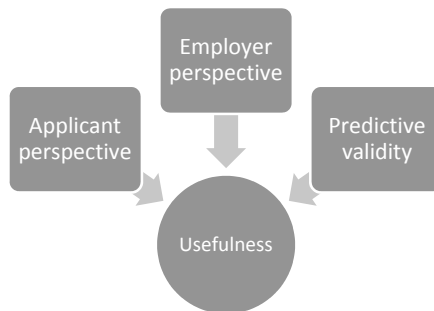
In this study, these subjective dimensions are approached through Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, people's subjective perceptions of assessment practices may be influenced by their need for autonomy (Nolan & Highhouse, 2014). SDT describes human motivation as involving three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for autonomy is one of the strongest social contextual factors that shape people's actions and interpretations, for example, the way they perceive the use of standardized selection methods. In this study, SDT is used as a framework to study the applicants' and the employer representatives' perceptions of the psychological assessment of new pastors. These subjective aspects are further discussed in article I.

The third dimension of the model includes the objective practical worth – the predictive validity of the assessment results. Choosing the relevant outcomes for evaluating the predictive validity of an assessment among church ministers is a challenging task. First, for career events, ordination and turnover were selected. These are both aspects of physical mobility in that they indicate moving away from or remaining at a certain career position, and can also be approached as life transitions. Most research on boundaryless careers and mobility has concentrated on physical mobility, mostly because it is easier to measure (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). However, especially when moving to an era of boundaryless careers where career changes become more frequent, psychological mobility is also of high importance. Psychological mobility has been defined as “the capacity to move as seen through the mind of the career actor” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Psychological mobility was here operationalized as the intention to leave the church as an employer instead of leaving the ministry (renouncing priesthood), taking into account the request by McDuff and Mueller (2000) to separate leaving the ministry from leaving an employer.

Additionally, besides mobility outcomes, psychological assessment results should also succeed in predicting aspects of career adaptation, or a good job–person fit. Amongst several potential indicators of these, job performance and job satisfaction were considered the most relevant for the present study. The third dimension of usefulness thus measures two aspects of predictive validity: the ability of the assessment results to predict career mobility and career adaptation. These concepts are further defined and discussed in article III.

The three-dimensional model of usefulness thus encompasses two dimensions of subjective evaluation and one dimension of objective evaluation. The subjective dimensions are evaluation by the applicant (the assessed party) and evaluation

by the employer (the party who receives the assessment result). The objective dimension consists of predictive validity: the ability of the assessment results to predict relevant outcomes. From the viewpoint of career adaptability, the usefulness of a psychological assessment is here seen as how well it as an intervention enhances the individual's preparedness for a transition from education to work (in this study: subjective evaluation by the applicant), and how it predicts career-related outcomes (in this study: career adaptation). A graphic presentation of the three-dimensional model is shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The three-dimensional model of the usefulness of psychological assessment.

This model can be considered a rather comprehensive tool for evaluating the usefulness of psychological assessment, as it takes into account both the perspective of the applicant and that of the employer, as well as includes an aspect of objective evaluation. This model will in this study be applied to the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland.

### **3.3 ASSESSMENT IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND**

As noted in the previous sections, the usefulness of the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants has not yet been evaluated. Moreover, no study has yet evaluated an assessment taking into account all three relevant viewpoints at the same time: the applicant perspective, the employer perspective, and predictive validity. This study aims at filling this research gap by taking into account all these three dimensions of usefulness simultaneously, using a case from Finland. This study thus focuses on the psychological assessment of ministerial applicants to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (the ELCF). To provide the necessary context for the assessment of interest, the process of becoming an ordained minister in the ELCF

is next described. This process has also been described in each of the three original articles.

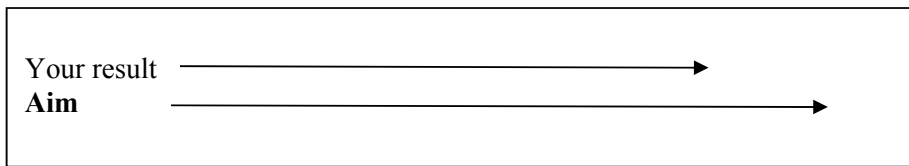
To start with, to become ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, an eligible Master's degree in theology is required. Therefore, the aspirant first applies to a university to study theology and takes the entrance exams, which only measure academic skills. Three lines of study are offered: 1) studies that fulfill the qualification requirements for becoming ordained, 2) studies that fulfill the qualification requirements for becoming a teacher, and 3) studies which aim at employment in the wider society. Those students who pursue prospective ordination undertake a psychological assessment after three years of study, after completing a practical training period in a parish. The assessment is overseen by the Church and since 2006 has been conducted by a private company, Päämäärä Oy. Participation in the assessment is not obligatory for studies in theology, but anyone wishing to become a pastor is required to show their results to the diocese when applying for ordination. If a person has not participated in the assessment during their studies and decides to aim for ordination only later in life, they are required to participate in the assessment at that stage.

The background for the psychological assessment is in a Church Order. In the ELCF, one Church Order delineates three criteria for receiving ordination (Kirkkojärjestys III 5. 2§, see Halttunen, Pihlaja & Voipio, 2002). The person must 1) be a confirmed member of the church, God-fearing, and known for living a Christian life, 2) have a degree in theology that fulfills the requirements for pastorhood, and 3) be otherwise suitable for pastorhood. This third requirement, "otherwise suitable," is rather vague. To better equip the dioceses and bishops to evaluate the fulfillment of this third criteria, the church introduced a psychological assessment for all applicants in 2002. The assessment has been given two goals (Institute for Advanced Training for the ELCF, 2001):

1. to provide the student with a tool to evaluate his or her aptitude for working as a pastor, and a tool to enhance his or her professional growth, and
2. to provide the diocese and bishop with a tool to evaluate the aptitude of the applicant.

These two goals correspond directly to the two dimensions of usefulness that were defined in section 3.2. of this introductory article: the first goal encompasses the applicant dimension and the second goal the employer dimension. These goals can also be described in terms of increased competence within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000): the assessment as an external incentive was meant to inform the applicant and the employer, and thus increase their competence.

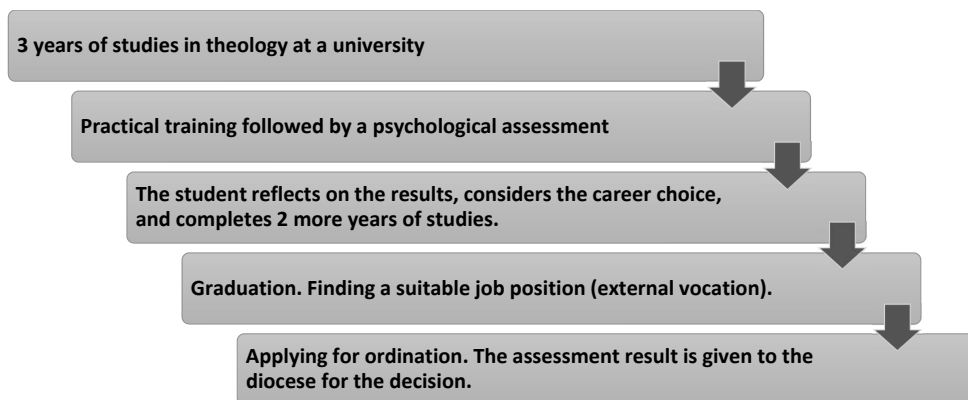
The assessment, as conducted by Päämäärä Oy, is comprised of various measures, including personality tests and tests on the level of professional thinking, attribution strategies, and cognitive skills, as well as the evaluation of motivation, communication, and presentation skills. The assessment methods are shortly described in the Method section of this introductory article and in more length in article III. After the assessment, the student is given his or her results in the form of a lengthy, detailed report. He or she is also given an overall assessment rating, a graph called “the arrow.” The diocese only receives this arrow, representing the overall assessment rating, and no other material from the assessment. An example of the arrow is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** An example of the overall assessment rating graph. “Aim” refers to the ideal suitability for becoming a pastor in a parish.

Source: Päämäärä Oy.

Upon completing their degree after a further two years of studies, the person next needs to secure a job position (external vocation) for a minimum of six months in a suitable context such as a parish, a religious organization, or a school as a teacher of religion. Applying for a position in a parish varies from one diocese to another: either the person informs the diocese that he or she is available for employment and the diocese finds a position for him or her, or the person applies for an open position in a parish directly. After receiving this external vocation for becoming a pastor, the person seeks ordination from the diocese. At this point, he or she hands over to the diocese the overall assessment rating of the psychological assessment together with the graduation certificate and other documents. The diocese representatives and the bishop interview the applicant to evaluate his or her suitability. Assuming approval, the person is eventually ordained. This whole process is summarized in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The process of becoming ordained in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland.

In the Lutheran tradition, once a person is ordained, he or she thereby remains a minister throughout life regardless of his or her work (Halttunen, Pihlaja & Voipio, 2002). In other words, a person remains an ordained pastor even if after the initial six months of working in a parish that person chooses a completely different career path. Renouncing priesthood is a specific, hefty process that only a few people choose to undergo, even if they choose not to work as a pastor as a career.

The assessments began in the ELCF in 2002, but no studies on their usefulness have yet been done. Since providing an assessment for all ministerial aspirants is a considerable economic strain for the church, there was a practical need for a comprehensive evaluation of the utilization of the assessment results.



## 4 METHODS

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study was to determine how the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants affects their career process. For this aim, this study examined the usefulness of the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. Usefulness was operationalized using a three-dimensional model that incorporated both subjective and objective approaches. Three research questions were formulated. Each of the three research questions was investigated in an article as follows:

1. How influential has the psychological assessment been for the two user groups of aspirants and church representatives, and how have they used the results? (article I)
2. What has been the role of psychological assessment in cases where the aspirant has not been ordained despite desiring ordination? (article II)
3. How do assessment results predict career mobility and career adaptation? (article III)

Table 1 presents how the aspects of each research question correspond to the three dimensions of usefulness.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of usefulness with aspects of the corresponding research question and the number of the related article.

Dimension	Research question	Article
Applicant evaluation	How influential have the psychological assessment results been for the ministerial aspirants? (1)	I
Applicant evaluation	How have the ministerial aspirants used the psychological assessment results? (1)	I
Applicant evaluation	What has been the role of psychological assessment in cases where the aspirant has not been ordained, according to the aspirant? (2)	II
Employer evaluation	How influential have the psychological assessment results been for church representatives? (1)	I
Employer evaluation	How have church representatives used the psychological assessment results? (1)	I
Employer evaluation	What has been the role of psychological assessment in cases where the aspirant has not been ordained, according to church representatives? (2)	II
Predictive validity	What has been the role of psychological assessment in cases where the aspirant has not been ordained? (2)	II
Predictive validity	How do the psychological assessment results predict career mobility and career adaptation? (3)	III

The applicant dimension was thus explored in articles I and II, the employer dimension in articles I and II, and predictive validity in articles II and III.

## PROCEDURE

Psychological assessments from 2006–2010 were selected for the study because the same company (Päämäärä Oy) had been responsible for the assessment procedure for the entire five-year period and was able to provide the assessment data for research purposes. During these years, the assessment, which included several paper-and-pencil tests, took one working day for the participant to complete. In addition to self-report measures, the assessment also included a simulation task and an interview. The simulation task required the participant to present a speech in the role of a pastor to an imaginary audience while being videotaped. This task evaluated presentation skills and stress management (those interested in the validity of the simulation task are referred to the graduate thesis by Kristian Kurikka, 2010). Lastly, participants underwent a half-structured interview with a psychologist. The interview focused on personal history, motivation, communication skills, and general aptitude, and the participants were instructed to bring a CV with them.

Some of the assessment measures were excluded from the present study. First, the SWOT, the simulation task, and the interview including the CV had not produced quantitative data and were thus excluded. Second, the test measuring the level of

professional thinking was excluded for two reasons: it had too many missing values in the dataset, and as the test had been developed privately by Päämäää Oy, the introduction of a novel test to the international scientific community was beyond the scope of this study.

A follow-up survey was sent in 2012 to those who had participated in the assessment during 2006–2010 and who had given permission to use their data for research purposes. The respondents received either an email invitation to an electronic survey or a mailed questionnaire. The cover letter explained and emphasized the confidentiality and anonymity of the study. The data collection procedure is described in articles I and II. Not all measures included in the questionnaire were used in the present study since data was collected also for post-doctoral research purposes at the same time. The questionnaire is included as Appendix 1. Each person who had participated in the assessment was assigned an identification number that was used in the follow-up data collection. After the follow-up data collection, the assessment dataset and the follow-up dataset were merged using the identification number to match cases. All identification information was removed, and the analyses were conducted with only the identification number left for identification purposes.

Qualitative data for article I was collected from bishops of the nine dioceses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland from 2006 onwards (currently in office or retired) and members of diocesan chapters at the time of the study (2014). Including all the chapter members from 2006 onwards would have expanded the target group too much to feasibly conduct the study; therefore, only the current members were selected. They received an email invitation to an electronic survey with open-ended questions. This data collection procedure is presented in article I.

Lastly, for article III, the Church was asked to provide a record of ordained people. This list was compiled by the dean of the Helsinki diocese and sent to the author in November 2014.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Articles I, II, and III used the assessment and follow-up datasets. In total, 785 people had participated in psychological assessment during 2006–2010. Of the 785, 718 had given permission to use their data for research purposes and were thus the population of this study. Of these 718, 291 were male (37.2%) and 492 female (62.8%), and they ranged in age from 21 to 69 years ( $M=32.6$ ,  $SD=10.7$ ). The age of the subjects is on all occasions presented as it was at the time of assessment. A

total of 655 persons received the invitation to participate in the follow-up,<sup>1</sup> and 314 (48.2%) answered the survey. Of these respondents, 111 (35.4%) were male and 203 (64.6%) were female, and their age range was 21–69 ( $M=33.4$ ,  $SD=11.3$ ). Since the follow-up sample was sufficiently similar to the population regarding demographic variables, no weighting adjustment was performed.

For article I, bishops from 2006 onwards (current or retired) and the members of diocesan chapters at the time of the study (2014) were approached with an invitation to participate in the study. In total, 64 people were invited to answer the survey, and 29 replied. The respondents included seven bishops (current and retired) and 22 current diocesan chapter members. At least one respondent participated from each of the dioceses. No demographic information on these respondents is presented for privacy reasons.

For article II, a total of 13 subjects were identified as cases of dropped ordination in the follow-up dataset of 314 persons. These 13 subjects had graduated with a Master's degree in theology, and they had answered yes to the question "Have you asked to be ordained?" and no to the question "Have you been ordained?" in the follow-up survey. Five of them were male and eight female, with an age distribution of 27–66 ( $sd=12$ ).

## MEASURES

The measures that Päämäärä Oy had used in the psychological assessment and that were utilized in the present study are described in detail in article III. Shortly, they are listed below:

- **Social and achievement strategies** were assessed with the Cartoon Attribution Strategy Test (Nurmi et al., 1997). The subjects' answers were classified and placed in one of 22 subcategories on the basis of their content. The scores were summed up into seven final content categories (fear of failure, positive orientation to the task, irrelevant actions, positive seeking of support, defensiveness, hesitation, self-serving attributions) for both social situations and achievement situations, resulting in 14 final scores. These were transformed into percentages in this study.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a technical error, 63 people who had participated in the assessment in 2010 were not invited to participate in the survey: they were accidentally filtered out of the dataset due to having a string-format value in the participation year variable. Since the group was random regarding other variables, no corrections were performed to the remaining dataset.

- As a measure of **attributional strategies**, the Learned Optimism Test (Seligman, 1999) was used. The final sum scores for optimism and pessimism were used in the analyses.
- Verbal and spatial skills were measured with V3 and S3 tests from Kykytestistö-AVO-9 (Pulliainen, 1995). In this study, the scores from V3 and S3 were summed up to generate a sum score for **General Mental Ability**.
- Personality was measured using several personality test versions, all based on the 16PF (Cattell & Cattell, 1995) and developed privately by Päämäää Oy. In this study, personality was operationalized as two metatraits, **stability** and **plasticity**. Scores were obtained by factor analysis. The process is described in detail in article III.
- **Overall Assessment Rating** from the psychological assessment was set manually by the psychologist responsible for conducting the assessment.

The measures that were included in the follow-up survey and used in the present study are described in detail in articles I, II, and III, and the questionnaire is included in full as Appendix 1. Most of the questions had a Likert scale for answers. Shortly listed, the measures were the following:

- One's **determination** to become a pastor as it had been at the time of assessment was inquired with "When you participated in the assessment, how sure were you about wanting to become a pastor?" (articles I and III)
- The respondents' subjective evaluation of the **accuracy of the assessment result** was measured with five items, the **influence of the assessment** on their career orientation with four items, and the **usefulness of the assessment** with three items. (article I)
- To assess **prior working experience**, the subjects were asked if they had work experience prior to their studies in theology. The options were "No," "Yes, from the church," and "Yes, from elsewhere." They were also presented with an open-ended question about where they had been working and for how many years. In addition, they were asked whether they had prior degrees and to describe what these were. (article II)
- To map **attachment to religious communities**, a list of 27 Christian communities and movements active in Finland was presented, and the

subjects were asked to evaluate the extent that they thought they belonged to each group. (article II)

- To evaluate certain aspects of **activity in a parish**, the subjects were asked if they had participated in seven different parish functions. (article II)
- To look into **possible obstacles to becoming a pastor**, a list of 12 potential obstacles was presented, and the subjects were asked to rate the extent to which these issues had complicated their own professional orientation. (article II)
- Regarding the **reasons for dropped ordination**, the subjects were asked if the outcome was mainly because of their own decision, the diocese's decision, or if it was unknown. They were also asked how much the psychological assessment affected the outcome, and what they thought the main reason was for not having been ordained. (article II)
- **Career mobility** was inquired by asking the ordained respondents to indicate whether they were still working as a pastor. Those who were working as pastors were asked about their intentions to leave. Those who were not working as pastors were asked about their intentions to resume the ministry with four items adapted from McDuff and Mueller (2000). (article III)
- **Career adaptation** was operationalized as job performance and job satisfaction. Job performance was examined with a 16-item measure developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999). Job satisfaction was measured with the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS; Francis, Robbins, Kaldor, & Castle, 2009). (article III)

Lastly, **ordination** was verified from Church records. A list of ordained people was compiled by the dean of the Diocese of Helsinki in November 2014 and sent to the author.

## **EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

To address as many aspects of the usefulness of psychological assessment as possible, several methodological approaches were used in the study. In article I, statistical methods such as t-tests, ANOVAs, and regression analysis were used to analyze the responses to the follow-up survey. Additionally, inductive content analysis (conventional content analysis) was employed to analyze qualitative data from the

open-ended questions to the dioceses. In article II, a mixed-method approach was utilized to analyze the sparse data available. Non-parametric statistical methods, inductive content analysis, and finally a mixed-method analysis were used. Lastly, in article III, t-tests, ANOVAs, and regression analyses were used to analyze the predictive value of psychological assessments to find the best indicators of career mobility and career adaptation. Additionally, factor analysis was here used to extract personality metatraits from the personality data.

Statistical methods were selected as the main approach of the study for several reasons. Most importantly, the study aimed at generalizable results instead of a deep understanding of the lived experience of a few subjects. This could only be obtained with a statistical analysis of a large and representative sample. Second, the study set out to provide an objective evaluation of the predictive validity of the assessment results, in order to reflect it against the subjects' experiences and their career outcomes. These effects, for example, detecting group differences, could only be found with a large enough group and statistical analysis. Third, an anonymous en masse data collection was preferred so that respondents could share their experiences anonymously.

In addition to statistical methods, inductive content analysis and a mixed-method approach were employed in the study. Open-ended questions in an e-survey were chosen as the best option for collecting experiences and opinions from the dioceses in article I. Even though including all the bishops and diocesan representatives meant sending out an e-survey instead of interviewing the respondents in person, this proved to be the right decision. The huge variety in how dioceses use the assessment results would not have become evident if only a selection of representatives had been interviewed. The e-survey further provided full anonymity for the respondents, which was crucial for obtaining honest answers. Inductive content analysis was used to analyze these answers.

Further, a mixed-method approach proved to be a very good choice for the study of dropped ordinations (article II). The method is especially suited for multifaceted, sensitive phenomena previously unexplored in previous literature. Here, the topic was delicate, requiring that close attention be paid to the privacy of the 13 subjects examined, and only sparse information was available for exploring the nature of these cases. Non-parametrical statistical methods were employed to extract potential group differences between the 13 cases and other groups; despite the limitations of these methods, the results gave some indications of the possible factors characterizing dropped ordinations. Further, adding a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions to the results of the statistical analysis, resulting in a mixed-method approach, provided a unique opportunity to extract information from the data available. Even though the group was small and the data available sparse, the chosen analysis methods succeeded in providing an understanding of this novel research topic. The study thus serves as an example of a case where a

mixed-method approach can be useful when conventional one-method solutions are not enough.

Relying on secondary data not collected by myself for the purposes of this study posed some challenges. The measures used by Päämäärä seemed to incorporate the three levels of personality as described by McAdams (1995): level one (broad constructs: personality traits) was covered by the 16PF-based personality test, level two (personal concerns: strategies, attributions, motivations etc.) was covered by CAST and LOT, and level three (frameworks, narratives, identity) was covered by the interview. Thus, the assessment could also be evaluated based on these levels.

The original dataset was delivered by Päämäärä in 2011. This dataset was used in article II, which was submitted to a journal in 2013. Since the original dataset only included sum variables for personality measures and had a considerable amount of missing data on CAST variables, additional data were requested for article III in November 2014. These data were received in August 2015, and the last specifications were received in October.

During fall 2015, several attempts were made to find a way to use the personality data. However, due to limitations in the datasets, it was not possible to proceed within the 16PF (Cattell, Cattell, & Cattell, 2002) or the Big Five (Goldberg, 1990) frameworks in this study. The metatrait theory (DeYoung, 2006) of personality proved to be the only applicable way to use the data. The two personality metatraits proposed by the theory stem from the Big Five as follows: stability encompasses Neuroticism(-), Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, whereas plasticity encompasses Extraversion and Openness (Strus, Ciecuch, & Rowiński, 2014). In turn, these Big Five dimensions have emerged as second-order structures of the 16PF. For the history of and more detailed interrelations between 16PF and the Big Five, see Cattell and Mead, 2008. The factor analysis of the personality data into two metatraits and the subsequent limitations are described in more detail in article III.

As another limitation, the follow-up data collection relied solely on self-reports. While not ideal for evaluating, for example, job performance, a self-report approach was the only realistic way to conduct the study with the resources available. Further, since the questionnaire was designed to produce material also for post-doctoral research purposes in addition to the present study, its length might have discouraged some people from answering. A further limitation is the short follow-up period. It poses a restriction on interpreting the results, since as in Hills and Francis (2005), the subjects may not yet have emerged from their “honeymoon period” and faced the full reality of ministerial life. Due to the set-up of the data collection, common method variance may also have occurred.

Lastly, since the assessment results were used in the selection of new pastors, article III cannot strictly speaking be considered a proper predictive validity study since the results influenced the formation of the follow-up population (Malony, 2000). There was, however, no way to escape this limitation in the current study due to the process



of becoming ordained in the ELCF. Further, the assessment was not done purely for selection purposes, but also to help the aspirant in their professional growth. Therefore, exploring connections between the assessment results and the eventual career outcomes is a different matter in this study than in selection assessment research in general.

# 5 FINDINGS

## 5.1 SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

This dissertation consists of five studies reported in three articles. Article I reports two studies: one examined the experiences of students, and the other studied the experiences of diocesan representatives. Article II focuses solely on a previously unknown theme, dropped ordinations. Article III again reports two studies, one of which explores the career outcomes of ordination and turnover, and the other job performance and job satisfaction.

### Article I

Nortomaa, A. (2015). To Ordain or Not to Ordain? A Self-Determination Theory perspective on how ministerial candidates and diocesan representatives use psychological assessment in ordination process. *Journal of Empirical Theology* 28(2), 242-262.

Article I examined the subjective experiences of both the applicants and the employer. The aim was twofold: first, to find how the applicants evaluated their results and how the assessment had influenced their career orientation, and second, how the diocesan representatives had used the assessment results in their evaluation of the applicants. To examine the applicant perspective, those people who had participated in a psychological assessment in 2006–2010 were approached with a quantitative follow-up survey in 2012. They were asked about their views of the assessment. The data was analyzed statistically. The results showed that the applicants in general considered that the assessment results had described them pretty accurately as people, employees, and prospective pastors. In other words, the results were in line with how they saw themselves. However, the applicants did not report that the results had helped them become more certain of their career orientation or influenced their decision on whether or not to become a pastor. They had decided on their career path already before they participated in the assessment. Nonetheless, they thought that the psychological assessment of students of theology is very important and necessary in general.

Next, to study the employer perspective, the bishops that had been in office since 2006 in addition to the current diocesan chapter representatives were approached with a qualitative survey in 2014. The answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed with inductive content analysis. The answers revealed considerable variation in how the assessment results were handled across dioceses,

including who in each diocese had access to them. Consequently, the estimated usefulness and influence of the assessment result varied accordingly across dioceses. In general, the assessment result was used in the dioceses mainly as a tool, not as information. It was utilized as a conversation starter for conducting a discussion with the applicant and especially for probing the applicants' self-reflection skills. Notably, the respondents did not mention using the result as an indicator of the aptitude of the applicant: it was sometimes used as background information or a warning signal, but mostly it served as a conversation starter. In line with this finding, the diocesan representatives strongly stressed that the result had no influence on the decision to ordain the applicant. An "overall evaluation" of the applicant was emphasized. However, as was the case with the students, the diocesan respondents also unanimously declared that the assessments are very important and valuable.

Thus, neither the applicants nor the diocesan representatives reported that the assessment was useful to themselves, but both parties considered the assessment very necessary on a general level. This contradiction was interpreted within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, the reluctance to use standardized methods is due to an experienced lack of autonomy by the person in question. Both the students and diocesan representatives may thus have protected their need for autonomy by claiming that the assessment results had not influenced their own decisions, while simultaneously expressing appreciation for the assessment in general. The role of spirituality in the assessment process emerged as a potential, although small, source of misconceptions: certain measures that had been used in the psychological assessment were experienced as not taking into account the effect of faith on a person's attributions about the world. Feeling that religious views would negatively affect the outcomes of the assessment would be a logical contributor to an autonomy conflict.

This study contributed to the overall research aim by examining the subjective evaluations of both the applicants and the employers. The main findings were that even though neither of the parties reported using the assessment results nor considered them useful on a personal level, they both still regarded the assessment to be very necessary and valuable on a general level. This is the first study among the occupational group of clergy where applicant reactions and employer reactions to the same set of assessment results have been studied simultaneously and the views of both groups discussed in relation to each other.

## Article II

Nortomaa, A. (2016). Who is Not Ordained, and Why? A Mixed-Method Analysis of Dropped Ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 20(1), 51-68.

Article II reports a pioneering study that set out to investigate those persons who have applied for ordination but have not been ordained. No previous research on the topic had been done, probably due to the delicate nature of the topic and the lack of available registers of these incidents. Since not even the terminology for these cases existed, they were named “dropped ordinations.” The aim of the study was to find the causes behind dropped ordinations and the role of psychological assessment in the process. First, a total of 13 cases of dropped ordination were identified for this study from the follow-up survey dataset. In these 13 cases the subject declared that he or she had asked to be ordained, but had eventually not been ordained. The study set out to explore these cases in detail. Due to the small number of cases and the limited amount of information available, the cases were analyzed with an exploratory mixed-method approach. Non-parametric statistical analyses were conducted to identify potential group differences, and inductive content analysis was employed to analyze the answers to open-ended questions. Information from these two analyses was then combined. Three types of dropped ordinations were thus revealed: 1) The *conflicted* were in a disharmonious situation. They were, for example, in conflict with representatives of the parish or diocese in question, or had dogmatic disagreements with some teachings of the ELCF. 2) The *unqualified* did not fulfill all the criteria necessary for ordination. They had, for example, an inadequate degree or lacked a proper job position. 3) The *doubtful* lacked the required motivation. They were unsure about becoming a pastor and often themselves dropped out of the process.

The role of psychological assessment was insignificant in all three types of dropped ordination cases. The subjects had not experienced that their assessment result affected the ordination outcome. Indeed, in the statistical analyses no differences were found regarding the assessment result between the dropped ordination groups, the ordained, and those who had not applied to become ordained. Further, the subjects reported that the assessment had not been very influential in their own career process. It was thus concluded that psychological assessment does not play a role in dropped ordination cases, but that the ordination process is disrupted for other reasons.

This study contributed to the overall research aim by examining the role of psychological assessment in cases where ordination had not taken place. The study found that the assessment result did not play a role in dropped ordinations. In general, the study has considerable significance as the first published study on disrupted ordination processes. This has been the first reported effort to identify, describe, and analyze cases of dropped ordinations. It has created new terminology and an initial classification of these cases.

### Article III

Nortomaa, A. (2016). Predicting Ordination, Early-Career Mobility, and Career Adaptation from Ministerial Applicants' Psychological Assessment Results. *Review of Religious Research*. Published online 19<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

Article III examined the connections between psychological assessment results and later career mobility and career adaptation. The aim was to evaluate the predictive validity of assessment results. The psychological assessment measures included an overall assessment rating, general mental ability, social and achievement strategies, and attributional strategies. Personality measures were factored into two personality metatraits, stability and plasticity, and used as such. Career mobility was operationalized as ordination, turnover, and commitment to working as a pastor. Career adaptation was operationalized as self-reported job performance and job satisfaction. Additionally, the study examined whether the applicant's determination to become a pastor was connected with these career outcomes.

In general, no strong connections between assessment results and later outcomes were detected; those connections that were significant had rather modest effect sizes. In general, the overall assessment rating was a better predictor of outcomes than single assessment measures. Regarding career mobility, those who had been ordained had a better overall assessment rating, were stable, and used less pessimistic strategies in social situations than those not ordained. Those committed to working as pastors were more optimistic and had lower plasticity than those not ordained, and used less pessimistic achievement strategies than those whose commitment was wavering. Regarding career adaptation, only one connection was found: the overall assessment rating predicted job performance among people working as pastors. Notably, general mental ability was not related to job performance, contrary to findings among several other professions. Further, determination was found to have a stronger connection to ordination and commitment than any of the assessment results. This points to the importance of motivation and self-efficacy in the career choice process. However, since no differences in determination were found between those who were committed to or detached from the ministry, determination seems not to be enough to keep people in a ministerial career. Work environment and psychosocial factors at work may play a strong role in committing to a pastoral career.

This study contributed to the overall research aim by investigating the statistical connections between assessment results and career outcomes. No strong connections were found. The most relevant of the observed modest connections were that ordained people had a better overall assessment rating, they were more stable, and they used more optimistic strategies. In addition, the study indicates the significance of determination in the career process. The study is a valuable addition to the field of studies on clergy, where predictive studies using pre-ordination assessment data have been very rare.

## **5.2 PERSONAL AND GENERAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASSESSMENT**

In this study, usefulness was approached with a three-dimensional model that incorporated both subjective and objective evaluations of usefulness. The subjective evaluation included an evaluation by the aspirant and by the employer. As to the aspirants, the findings show that the role of psychological assessment seems not to have been significant in the career process of students of theology (articles I and II). The results had not influenced the career reflections of the applicants (article I), and according to their experiences, the assessment result played no role in dropped ordination processes (article II). All in all, the subjective experience of the aspirants in this study was that the assessment had not been personally useful to them. Conceptualized within the life transition framework, the assessment can be considered as an intervention to enhance the career adaptability of the students by providing a tool for self-reflection (the first goal set by the ELCF, see section 3.3.). Based on the subjective evaluation by the applicants, participating in the assessment had not been very influential for the students in regard to improving their preparedness for this life transition.

However, the applicants were strongly in favor of the assessments on a general level and considered them very useful (article I). They thus claimed a low personal significance, but a high general significance. All in all, the findings are in line with previous research on applicant reactions, including the finding that the more pleasing the assessment results, the more favorably the applicant views the assessment (article I) (for applicant reactions, see Kuuskorpi, 2012).

If the findings from the applicant dimension were evaluated at face value, the goal set by the Institute for Advanced Training of the ELCF – “to provide the student with a tool to evaluate his/her aptitude for working as a pastor, and a tool to enhance his/her professional growth” (see section 3.3.) – would, at first glance, seem to not have been met. However, the goal was not to strongly influence the career choice either. Instead, the assessments were meant to provide a tool for reflection. Thus, a lack of significant influence is in a way an expected finding. If the assessment were found to have a strong effect on the students, the goal would not have been met. Further, the assessment and the feedback might have had some influence on the choices and professional reflections of the aspirant, even if they declare otherwise in a survey. If the assessment result has confirmed one’s career choice and provided an understanding of one’s abilities, would the person in question describe this confirmation as something useful?

Moving on to the employer dimension, the second goal set for the assessments by the Institute for Advanced Training was “to provide the diocese and bishop with a tool to evaluate the aptitude of the applicant.” The assessment did indeed succeed in providing a tool, although the tool was not exactly used for evaluating

the aptitude of the applicant (article I). Instead, the tool was used to initiate a discussion with the applicant. The result provided some background information or a warning signal, but the dioceses did not report using the assessment result as a direct evaluation of the aptitude of the applicant. Further, the dioceses decidedly declared that the assessment result had not influenced their decisions on whom to ordain. They also stressed that, from their point of view, this was not the purpose of the assessments. The findings in article II confirm these observations: the aspirants reported that the results from the psychological assessment had not influenced the outcome in the dropped ordination cases. Looking at the goal set for employer use by the Institute for Advanced Training, this way of using the results seems to be in line with the intention of the Institute. The assessment was not meant to have an eliminatory function, but to provide a tool for the diocese. Further, as was the case with the aspirants, even though the diocesan representatives did not report that they personally used the assessment result, they however unanimously announced that the assessments are very useful and valuable (article I). Here as well a low personal significance and a high general significance were identified.

Thus, the findings from the two subjective dimensions of the three-dimensional model – the aspirant and the employer dimensions – are similar. The personal significance of psychological assessment in the career process of a new pastor is low both among the aspirants and the employer representatives. However, the general significance was found to be high: the assessment was considered very important on a general level. This contradiction is discussed in chapter 5.4.

### **5.3 A FILTERING FUNCTION AND PREDICTIVE VALIDITY**

At the end of the follow-up survey in this study, the respondents could freely comment on the topic if they so wished. One respondent chose to sum up the goals of the assessment as follows: “Try to filter out the idiots.” Indeed, one of the aims of this study was to determine if the assessment formed a bottleneck for becoming a pastor: whether the assessment result had a filtering effect. To evaluate the possible filtering function of psychological assessment in the career path of an aspiring minister, the study identified points of straying from a ministerial career path. First, a clear difference was found between the number of people who undergo psychological assessment and people who are actually ordained (article III), indicating that an initial disruption on the career path has already taken place at this stage. Thus, some do not continue to pursue ordination despite an initial motivation for a ministerial career (indicated by participating in the assessment). Next, a bit further down the road, the study discovered cases where a person had applied for ordination, but had never been ordained (article II). Lastly, the study detected a group of ordained

ministers who had worked as a pastor, but who expressed the desire to discontinue this career path or had already abandoned this occupation (article III).

The assessment results had weak connections to career outcomes in general (article III). Predictive validity, the third dimension of usefulness, was explored in articles II and III, which examined how the assessment results were connected to career mobility and career adaptation. The predictive validity of the overall assessment rating (OAR) was found to be modest, even though the predictive validity of single assessment results was rather weak (article III). Since the overall assessment rating was given to the diocesan representatives for the specific reason of influencing their decision making, the OAR has thus been involved in making the entry-level selection decision. Therefore, the connections of the OAR to later career outcomes are more complex than the results of single assessment measures, which were not given to the dioceses and could therefore not directly influence the selection. Nevertheless, the connections were not strong between the assessment results and career outcomes. Regarding other occupational groups, this lack of notable connections on both the first and second level of personality (following McAdams, 1995) is in contradiction with previous research. For example, Zacher (2014) detected connections between Big Five personality constructs and career adaptability. Further, Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, and Nurmi (2009) found that optimistic and pessimistic strategies were connected to later work-related engagement and burnout, respectively. However, regarding the specific occupational group of pastors, this study thus duplicates Malony and Majovski's (1986) findings in that no strong connections were detected between assessment results and later career success.

Since the assessment result was not experienced as influential and the predictive connections were modest at best, leaving the ministerial career path must thus instead result from processes other than active filtering based on aptitude. Two potential causes are suggested. First, it is conceivable that self-selection by the applicant takes place after the assessment and during the remaining studies. Especially those who had a weak motivation for a ministerial career might self-select themselves for other career paths. Some students might have participated in the assessment because they wanted to keep the option to become a pastor open, instead of participating out of a strong specific calling and a decided career path. Considering that motivation is one aspect evaluated in the assessment (even though a specific score for it is not given), this explanation for the connection between lower overall assessment ratings and dropping out of the ministerial career path (article III) is likely. Further, these persons might consider this decision so much their own that they would not report that the assessment result influenced this outcome, explaining the low levels of personal significance found in article I. This taps the third level of personality described by McAdams (1995): creating a narrative of one's life and building an identity. Filtering at this stage would thus be carried



out by the applicants themselves, not by the employer. The assessment might, in other words, have served a self-eliminary purpose.

Second, the recruitment process of a parish pastor itself may contribute to why the assessment result is not given a filtering role. In some dioceses, the local parishes interview and evaluate the applicants and make the selection of whom they want to be ordained to be their new minister. Thus, the recruitment and selection is carried out in the parishes. However, the parishes do not receive the result from the psychological assessment and cannot base their recruitment decision on it. Thus, the selection of a new employee does take place, but the decision is not based on the assessment result. The dioceses still have the authority to grant or deny ordination, but they only meet a prescreened selection of aspirants. Deciding to not ordain an aspirant who has already cleared a parish interview is a very rare event (article II). The low impact of the assessment result on ordination decisions (article I) is consequently an understandable finding.

In sum, the assessment result was found to have no stated or apparent filtering function in the career process of an aspiring minister. However, a self-eliminary function may lead to a prescreened selection of aspirants applying for job positions in the first place, nullifying the need for employer-imposed filtering at that stage. Further, no strong predictive connections to career outcomes were detected, except that those who had been ordained were noted to have better overall assessment ratings.

Even though the focus of this study was not to examine which characteristics would best predict career adaptation, looking at the predictive value of the assessment is one way to examine the usefulness of the assessment. The measures used in the assessment roughly cover the three levels of personality as described by McAdams (1995). Of the three levels, the first (personality constructs) and the second (attributions, motivations) seem to have had little predictive value for later career success. The third level (building a narrative; identity), however, seems influential: the determination of the applicant was found to be more strongly linked to career outcomes than assessment results (articles II, III). Determination is a concept closely intertwined with a calling (and thereby identity) and is further discussed in the next section.

In conclusion, first, the assessment does not regulate the transition from education to working as a pastor, as it is not used for filtering purposes. Second, its ability to predict career outcomes (to assess career adaptability) was modest at best. Of the assessment measures, the overall assessment rating was the best predictor. Since the OAR included information acquired from interviewing the applicant, it can be seen as including the third level of McAdams's conceptualization of personality (1995). Taking into account the considerable role of the determination of the applicant, the narrative, identity level of one's personality was in this study the most determining factor for the career outcomes of a new pastor.

## 5.4 CONTRADICTIONS AS MANIFESTATIONS OF AUTONOMY

The findings from the three dimensions of usefulness contradict one another on two occasions. The first contradiction is located within the subjective dimension of applicant evaluation: whereas the personal significance of the assessments was considered low, the general significance was considered high (article I). The second contradiction is located between the reported use and the actual connections between the assessment results and career outcomes. The applicants and employer representatives both reported that the assessment results did not influence their decisions (article I), and according to them, the results did not influence dropped ordination outcomes (article II), but in the end those applicants with better assessment results were nonetheless more likely to become ordained (article III). The parish recruitment process is a possible explanation for this contradiction (see 5.3.), but there is also another viewpoint to consider: the role of autonomy.

The need for autonomy is a plausible background factor causing these contradictions. The contradiction between personal and general significance was discussed in article I, which employed intrinsic motivation theory, suggesting that the need for autonomy can be a hindrance to utilizing standard assessment methods (Nolan & Highhouse, 2014; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). The other contradiction between the reported use and actual connections between the assessment results and career outcomes can as well be approached via an experienced breach in the autonomy of the subject. The weak personal significance (article I) and the lack of reported personal use of the assessment results (articles I and II) can be seen as a way to protect one's autonomy against outside incentives. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation connects to three psychological needs. External incentives lead the individual to experience freedom (the need for autonomy), be effective (the need for competence), or be emotionally close (the need for relatedness). Of these three needs, SDT describes the need for autonomy as perhaps the biggest motivational force in human behavior (for SDT, see Ryan & Deci, 2000). Seen in this way, admitting to using the assessment result or to being influenced by it would mean giving away one's autonomy. Expressing satisfaction with the assessment can be done more freely on a general level than on a personal level, since the threat towards personal autonomy is smaller.

The study further found that the determination of the applicant has stronger connections to career outcomes than the assessment results (article III). Indeed, one of the reasons for a disrupted ordination process was the weak motivation of the applicant (article II). This indicates that the applicants' motivation is a stronger force in the career process than the influence of the assessment results.

The important role of motivation further supports the notion that an experienced threat to autonomy is the cause of the contradictions found in this study. In this sense, this study confirms previous findings: the central role of motivation has

repeatedly been established as a key element in theologians' career paths. The finding is also supported by studies on other occupational groups: intrinsic and identified motivation are the keys to an integrated career adaptability pattern (Shulman et al., 2014).

Closely connected to motivation, a calling is the most important determinant for choosing a career path among theologians (Buchert, 2013; Niemelä, 1999; Niemelä, 2013a) and the most important supporting factor in a pastor's work (Tervo-Niemelä, 2016). Herein, calling and motivation are understood as deeply interconnected concepts. Attempts have been made to differentiate between motivation and calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009), but the relationship of these concepts is as yet not clear. Recently, Conway et al. (2015) concluded that the SDT types can be considered outcomes of the enactment of a calling: a calling is likely to encourage people to behave in ways that lead to feelings of intrinsic motivation. Regarding the specific relationship of autonomy and calling, they note that a calling as something deeply meaningful will lead to behaviors that are consistent with one's self-identity and passions, and which will thus feel volitional: acting from free will. Further theoretical work is still needed to clarify the relationship between calling and motivation, but that task falls outside the focus of the present study.

Evidence from both previous studies and the current study shows that the motivation of the ministerial aspirant is a central factor for career choice and career outcomes. The key role of motivation fits well with the proposition that an experienced threat to autonomy – a central component in motivation – would restrain people from admitting to having been influenced by the assessment results, as they are protecting a part of their inner driving force. Since motivation is such a key quality in career selection, experiencing a threat to autonomy would make the subjects on a conscious level ignore the influence of an incentive causing a threat: the assessment results.

The timing of the assessment and the role of spirituality in the process are potential contributors to the autonomy conflict. Since the aspirants had already decided on their career path at the time they took part in the assessment (article I), the potential threat to this resolve by the assessment is more severe than if the assessment were carried out at an earlier stage of the career selection process. From this viewpoint, protecting one's autonomy can be seen as protecting one's calling at the time of the assessment. Another potential source of autonomy conflict comes from the role of spirituality in the process. Critique relating to the inadequate inclusion of spirituality in the assessment (article I) can be seen as a way of defending one's certainty of career choice, the calling, and thus one's autonomy, especially since the spiritual aspect, that calling, is closely related to the career decisions of students of theology (Niemelä, 2013a). In general, religiousness has been found to be connected to career choice decisiveness: individuals with a strong spiritual relationship with a higher power and intrinsic religious motivation are more confident in making

career decisions (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Overlooking this basis for career choice confidence may contribute to a conflict with autonomy.

Cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a further look at how autonomy affects the use of the assessment results. According to the theory, all external events have a controlling aspect and an informational aspect for the subject. External events are evaluated by whether they are assumed to control one's behavior or inform them. One's autonomy is affected by the controlling aspect of an external event, and one's competence is affected by the informational aspect of the same event. On the occasion of the external event being the delivery of information (such as an assessment result), what is of importance is what the subject believes to be the reason for receiving this information, and whether the information is positive or negative. If an external event is assumed to be mainly for controlling one's behavior, for example, to influence their career-related decisions, one's autonomy decreases and thereby intrinsic motivation decreases. If an event is assumed to mainly be for information, for example, to increase their self-knowledge, the result depends on that information: if it is positive, competence increases and intrinsic motivation increases, but if it is negative, competence decreases and motivation decreases. The role of autonomy is, again, important here: the more autonomous the motivation, the more the subjects strive to achieve their goals (Reeves, 2009, p. 132), such as ordination. The assessment is thus an incentive, attracting or repelling the person towards or away from a certain course of action. Here, it is important to notice that what is relevant is not the reason why the information is given, but *what the subject believes to be the reason* why the information is given. The goal of the assessment was to help enhance the competence of the applicant (to inform), but it seems that it was experienced as challenging autonomy (to control behavior) instead. Simply put, the assessment was meant to be a tool for growth, but has instead been experienced as a test to pass.

As a final note, autonomy can also be approached on an organizational level. The hierarchy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland gives considerable independence to the dioceses. Therefore, despite a nationwide standardized assessment protocol, the treatment of the assessment results can vary – and indeed does vary (article I) – greatly across dioceses. In general, the assessment results were not influential in the decisions: the diocesan representatives reported relying more on their own evaluation and intuition when deciding on accepting an applicant than on the standardized assessment result (article I). The findings of this study are interpreted as reflecting one way in which the dioceses manifest their independence from the decisions of the national governing church bodies. However, this variation in practice results in unequal treatment of applicants across dioceses. This lack of commensurability can be seen as a problem. Further, using intuition is not a recommended practice in recruitment (Highhouse, 2008). Based on this study, intuition seems nevertheless to be used in selection in dioceses (article I). Roughly

put, since the bishop has the authority to decide on ordination, does this mean that *vocatio externa* includes the “gut feeling” of the bishop?

## **6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 MINI-CYCLES OF WORK – MINI VOCATIONAL CYCLES?**

The aim of this study was to determine how the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants affects their career process. For this aim, the study explored the use of the results of the psychological assessment, their subjectively evaluated significance for the aspirant and for the representatives of the church, and the predictive validity of the assessment results. This has been the first study where the applicant and employer perspectives of psychological assessment have been studied simultaneously for this occupational group. What is more, the study further combined these two perspectives with a third: an examination of the predictive validity of the assessments. The three-dimensional model incorporating all three aspects was used here for the first time. The predictive validity of psychological assessment has also very rarely been studied for this occupational group.

The study found that neither the applicants nor the employer representatives considered the psychological assessment very useful for themselves. In addition, the study found that the assessment had a rather low predictive validity regarding job–person fit. In contradiction to what these findings would directly imply, both the aspirants and the employer representatives were of the opinion that the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants is very important on a general level and felt that the assessment should continue. All in all, the findings indicate that the role of psychological assessment in the career process of an aspiring new minister is currently rather small. Nevertheless, the assessment is considered very important. This contradiction is seen as a manifestation of autonomy both on the personal and organizational levels. The need for autonomy is the key to how the psychological assessment of ministerial aspirants is used, and how significant it is considered to be.

The key role of autonomy in the career process of an aspiring church minister is a fitting illustration of the boundaryless work paradigm in late modernity. The boundaryless work culture focuses heavily on the individual's own efforts for pursuing, creating, and crafting their work, career, and job (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Further, the fragmented career pattern detected in this study demonstrates that boundaryless career patterns are already present in the ministerial occupation. Employment in the boundaryless work era thus shows itself also in church organizations as a pattern of forced and voluntary, short-term and long-term exits and entries to the ministerial profession. The psychological contract between a church as the permanent employer and a minister as the loyal employee has been broken. As individuals swim in this sea of fragmented employment, deconstructed

career patterns, and the absence of HR services to guide them in their career process, they cling more strongly to their autonomy as a tool to keep them afloat.

Previously, leaving the pastoral profession has been approached mainly as escape. However, the rise of the boundaryless work culture suggests another approach to the fragmented career patterns of church ministers. A change in career direction might no longer be accurately described in terms of escape, but as something more deliberate and less negative. Within the boundaryless paradigm, career changes can be seen as an individual seeking meaningfulness and applying independent career management. Fitting nicely into one of the master paradigms of late modernity, constructivism, career thus becomes an individually constructed story: a personal narrative. As Savickas (2011) describes: “individuals cannot maintain their employment, so they must maintain their employability and actively manage their careers through adaptability, intentionality, life-long learning, and autobiographical reasoning.” The narratives on what pursuing a pastoral profession entails, however, are undergoing a change as fragmented employment has a strong influence on how a calling is lived out in a boundaryless work culture.

Further, in a boundaryless work culture, choosing a profession is a reoccurring event. Thus, a career becomes a series of individual reflections and re-evaluations, followed by reorientation and potentially re-employment in a new field. The result, a sequential career pattern, is becoming the new norm for work. Even though entering the pastoral profession is still marked by a distinct transition rite, ordination, the transition from education to work has become somewhat blurred as working life and studies increasingly overlap, and as people pursue theological studies later in life as their second or third career. The boundaryless era has thus entered the educational field and changed the nature of the related life transitions. This will inevitably also change the meaning of preparedness for life transitions.

As the boundaryless work culture creeps up on churches, the interplay between a calling and employment becomes more complex. The ideal of a lifelong calling has not changed – this career narrative is still supported and encouraged – but as seen in the present study, the reality no longer supports this narrative in practice. Within the boundaryless work paradigm, the incidents of career disruptions – a fragmented employment pattern – that this study found can be approached as mini-cycles of work. Two of these disruptions in particular – turnover and detachment from the current work – are good examples of reorientations in the early-career phase. The result, a career consisting of mini-cycles, is the new norm of work.

In the ministerial profession, the mini-cycles of work require re-evaluating the relationship between work and a calling. Theologically, a *vocatio interna* to be a minister is ideally considered a solid and permanent construct, something a person nurtures and holds for life. This is nowadays in contradiction with the way work life is constructed. As careers are becoming series of mini-cycles, creating a serial career pattern, the role and meaning of an inner vocation needs to be rediscussed.

In their analysis of vocations and callings in the general work context (not restricted to religious settings), Dik and Duffy (2009) still discuss the concepts within the context of a certain, single job held by one person. As illustrated here, having a single job is, however, no longer the reality of working life. Can a calling still be considered an ontological matter when working as a pastor becomes fragmented due to the limited job positions available? The research approach to a calling needs to change accordingly. If employment is short-term, can a calling be approached as permanent – psychologically, ontologically, or theologically?

The findings of this study invite one to ask how autonomy and a calling best fit into the boundaryless career paradigm. One answer to this question might be a mini-cycle of a calling. In today's mini-cycles of work, disruptions in a career may not necessarily mean that one's calling is disrupted. Instead, in today's work life, the relevant issue might not be "what," but "when." The question is no longer about what calling a person might have in their life, since work life will often lead the individual to carry out several different tasks and callings – but about when each calling will take place and flower. In the future, the *vocatio interna* may be considered a permanent matter that will actualize itself as mini-cycles of ministerial work when a position becomes available, placing a ministerial calling as one cycle of several cycles a person can experience in life.

## **6.2 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

To start with the theoretical contributions of this study, it has created three new constructs: a three-dimensional model for the evaluation of the usefulness of psychological assessment, the idea of mini-cycles of calling, and the term dropped ordinations and a classification for it. It should be noted that this study has been the very first to address the issue of dropped ordination and to offer an insight into these cases. Further, this study successfully applied Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to explore and explain the ways in which psychological assessment results were (and were not) used in a church context. The study is also a landmark in the field of boundaryless work culture research, where vocation-based occupations have not yet been studied. Additionally, the study is one of the very first where the theory of personality metatraits has been applied in a recruitment selection context with a real-life dataset. Further, the study is the first where personality metatraits have been studied in the occupational group of pastors. Regarding methodological contributions, this study included a successful exploration of the utilization of a mixed-method approach with non-parametrical statistical methods in a situation where the number of cases is small and the topic intimate. Lastly, this study used a large, nationwide, and church-wide sample. The size and representativeness of



the dataset is globally unique and provides better opportunities for generalization of the results than several previous studies.

My position as a researcher seemed very apt from the beginning. I was not a theologian myself and did not aspire to become a pastor, but knew the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the pastoral occupation well. As a licensed psychologist, I can access and use psychological tests and their results. Since I had previously completed minors in a few theological disciplines and worked in a related field, I had enough grounding to comprehend the ELCF as an organization both theoretically and practically. My position thus provided me with the necessary distance from my topic while simultaneously keeping me close enough to understand it. This initial observation proved true as the process went forward.

The limitations of this study have been discussed in the original articles and in the Method section of this introductory article. What remains is a note on how work in the boundaryless era should be studied. Research on boundaryless work needs to be done with methods and measures that account for the new, boundaryless forms of work. The questionnaire that was used in the follow-up in the present study is an example of an attempt to study boundaryless careers with tools that have been designed for studying traditional careers. Forced-choice items with dual options to choose from do not allow the full variety of working life to come into view. Addressing transitions and fragmented work especially requires a more flexible approach. All in all, assessing aspects of current working life needs a more versatile survey design in future studies on work.

### **6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future studies on the psychological assessment of ministerial applicants are encouraged on several fronts. First, to complement the findings of the present study, studies are needed that use qualitative methodology, with interviews in particular. Interviewing both the aspirants and the diocesan representatives would provide valuable additional information on how the psychological assessment has affected the life and career processes of the applicants, and how the dioceses experience the process, respectively. Further, evaluating job performance should be done with means other than self-reports. Second, as the present study was the first to approach the topic of dropped ordinations, further studies on this topic are highly encouraged. Interview studies of people who have experienced a dropped ordination – aspirants and diocesan representatives alike – would be a valuable input to this novel field. Third, since this study focused on the early-career phase of the ministerial career, follow-ups with a longer time gap would be very valuable for further examining the predictive validity of the assessment results. Fourth, as an additional aspect, future research could also extend to taking into account the expectations a person

might hold of a pastor's profession and the influence of these expectations on their motivation or calling to become a pastor.

A very crucial line of study for research is the connections between assessment results and occupational well-being. Clergy burnout is a worldwide phenomenon on the increase (Lewis, Turton, & Francis, 2007). The majority of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are at risk of serious burnout, and over 25% considered changing jobs altogether (Ala-Kokkila et al., 2010). As it is known that burnout is often connected to turnover (for example Randall, 2004), intentions to leave could in future studies be approached from this angle. Further, since attributional strategies during university studies are linked to work burnout and work engagement in early career in other occupational groups (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2011), it would be beneficial to see if these second-level personality constructs (McAdams, 1995) are related to success in a pastoral career – and if yes, an intervention could be designed. To address these research needs in the near future, the survey in the present study included measures of burnout and work engagement for post-doctoral research purposes.

Further, a large, cross-denominational study has found that many pastors left their post for preventable reasons (Hoge & Wenger, 2005). This highlights the importance of support and timely interventions when necessary. Since the current study found no strong links between assessment results and career outcomes, it is likely that other factors, including the work environment, are relevant for different career outcomes. Thus, another valuable aspect would be to examine the influence of psycho-social factors on adaptation to a pastoral career. Structural equation modelling would allow for examining the moderating and mediating effects of these constructs on the relationship between assessment results and career outcomes. Some affective–motivational antecedents that reduce turnover intention among clergy have already recently been preliminarily studied (Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2015). The well-being of clergy is a societal concern given their role in local communities and the larger society, and identifying the means to support sustainable work among this occupational group is encouraged.

The role of spirituality in the assessment process is an intriguing question and worthy of separate research attention. Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, and Griffin (2014, 2015) propose paying more attention to spiritual resources as a means of increasing work engagement and reducing clergy turnover. Since spiritual resources promote work engagement, lower exhaustion, and reduce turnover intentions (Bickerton et al., 2014), it is a good question whether spirituality should thereby be included in a selection assessment in some manner. Further, a versatile vocational profile is connected with better work-related well-being (Tervo-Niemelä, 2016). Yet spiritual matters or calling are not evaluated in the psychological assessment. Discussion on the role of spiritual aspects in the process is therefore needed.

As a broader topic, the negative implications of the boundaryless work culture are an important topic worthy of more research attention. Sullivan and Baruch (2009) present an impressive overview of the outcomes that the boundaryless career orientation has produced. To sum up their timely manifest, the boundaryless work era requires more from the individual than is reasonable to expect or require. As they note, research on boundaryless careers has perhaps too often concentrated on those capable of managing successfully in this new era. Not much research has yet been done on those who have not succeeded so well in the non-traditional working environment. In addition, the boundaryless era will change how we view the transition from education to work and, consequently, our views of career adaptability and preparedness. These concepts will need adapting to the changed working culture.

## **6.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study has several practical implications. First, regarding higher education in theology, the findings indicate that the educational system needs to prepare graduating students for a boundaryless work culture. Students heading for a pastoral career need to have adequate self-regulation skills and career management tools to cope with the fragmented careers ahead of them. Career adaptability is not an innate quality, but a learnable skill that can be improved with interventions (Koen, Klehe, & van Vianen, 2012; Koivisto, Vuori, & Vinokur, 2010; Salmela-Aro et al., 2012). Career adaptability is more strongly linked to career satisfaction and career performance than first-level personality constructs (following the classification by McAdams, 1995) such as the Big Five traits (Zacher, 2014). Thus, specific training on career adaptability will be a crucial element in future higher education. Of other skills, developing social strategies among students has been called for also in other studies that have followed students into work life (Innanen, Tolvanen, & Salmela-Aro, 2014). Further, career counseling will in the future be needed not only once, but on several occasions, as the narrative proceeds and the career construction progresses via deconstruction and reconstruction throughout a person's working life (Savickas, 2011).

Second, the views expressed by the students in the present study imply that they felt that the assessments were meant to function as an eliminatory tool. However, the findings indicate that purposeful filtering does not take place. Even so, if the students considered the assessment more as a test to pass than a tool to help them in their growth, this outlook might well have influenced the way they used the results. In this case the students would have been under the impression that the assessment is done for the dioceses' purposes. In contrast, the diocesan representatives explicitly declared that the assessment was not done for them, but that it was for the students'

personal growth. Thus, it would seem that both of the parties involved are harboring an ill-informed conception that the assessment is done not for them, but for the other party. Therefore, informing the aspirants that the assessment is not used as an eliminatory tool, thus diminishing the image of the controlling function of the assessment, might enable them to benefit more from the results. In this way, the assessments do not pose a threat to their autonomy, but only serve as a tool to enhance their competence.

Third, the bishops and diocesan chapter representatives had distributed, used, and interpreted the assessment results in a variety of ways. That the assessment results have different uses, meaning, and relevance in different dioceses implies issues in commensurability. From the viewpoint of the equal treatment of applicants in different dioceses, standardization of the use of the assessment results (since the conduction of the assessments has already been standardized nationwide) across dioceses would be recommendable. One issue with how the assessment results were handled in the dioceses might relate to the lack of training in the interpretation and use of the results. In her dissertation, Kuuskorpi found that the most significant deficits in psychological testing were related to the communication between the testees and the testers (2012). Further, Nolan and Highhouse (2014) highlight the need for better communicating to employers how test results can be used. In relation to this, taking into consideration different recruitment practices in dioceses, the church bodies in question might want to discuss whether different dioceses would actually benefit from using the assessment results in decidedly different ways.

Fourth, the discrepancies in career patterns detected already in the early-career phase were not connected to the assessment results. This implies that the reason for the intention to leave lies in the work environment or other aspects that relate to the work itself. In order to decrease turnover (if this is the aim), it is recommended to pay attention to the psycho-social work environment and support well-being in this regard.

Three practical implications that this study could have suggested had already taken place by the time this introductory article was published. First, the assessment measures have been further developed. This study used a dataset from 2006–2010, and since then the assessment procedure, especially the personality test, has already changed in several ways. Second, the threat to the aspirants' autonomy may no longer be as substantial in 2016 as it was in previous years, due to new ways of giving feedback and reflecting on the results together with the students. Due to these changes, the assessment may now actually function as intended: as an intervention to enhance the professional growth or even preparedness or career adaptability of the applicant. In fact, students of theology now speak of their weaknesses and deficits as areas where they can grow (Niemelä, 2013b). An understanding of personal growth has been the intent of the assessment procedure, and a successful planting of this view is only possible if the threat to autonomy has diminished. Third, the

format of the overall assessment rating has been improved to now encompass four arrows, covering more aspects of the aspirant, instead of only one arrow, as was still the case in this study.

To conclude, the assessment in the ELCF has now run for almost 15 years, and this study now provides a tool for evaluating what has been accomplished. This practical evaluation is not the task of this study, but a task of the ELCF. The relevant church bodies are encouraged to discuss the goals for the assessments anew. If the main goal is to enhance the self-reflection of the applicant, the second current goal of informing the diocese about the aptitude of the applicant could be eliminated. If, on the other hand, this aspect is considered relevant as well, ways to better reach this goal could be negotiated. Educating the dioceses and further developing the graphical presentation of the overall assessment rating are suggested as ways to achieve this purpose. Depending on what the revised goals will be, how the goals and the procedure are communicated to the students could also be considered in order to avoid threatening their autonomy and to help them to grasp the informing aspect of the assessment results. Further, as previous research strongly supports using standardized assessment methods in recruitment selection, it is encouraged that the churches re-evaluate how influential they want the assessment result to be in the selection and whether a stronger predictive validity would be desired in the future. Lastly, if the assessment is meant to function as an intervention to cultivate the readiness of a student to embark on a sustainable career path, the future development of the assessment and the feedback meetings could benefit from a look at studies on how career adaptability can be improved (for example, Koen et al., 2012)

## **6.5 TO PRESERVE OR TO CHANGE A CHURCH?**

Working as a pastor in the era of boundaryless work and in the landscape of declining religion is a challenging task. Therefore, the selection of a new church minister needs to take into account the societal situation and its requirements for new employees. Psychological assessment can, when properly employed, provide a valuable tool for selecting new ministers for sustainable careers. To provide an understanding of where psychological assessment stands in this process, this study examined the role of psychological assessment in the career process of ministerial aspirants and the effects of the assessment results on the early-career outcomes. The study found that psychological assessment seems currently to play only a minor role in the career process of an aspiring minister. Even though the assessment was considered important, it was not influential. These findings invite the church to re-evaluate what they wish to gain from the assessment, and how they wish to use the information that the assessment provides.

Recruitment is a difficult task in the current times. Based on the findings of the present study and previous research, some guidelines can be given with regard to which characteristics an employer should look for in an aspirant to ensure a sustainable ministerial career. Generally speaking, characteristics that help individuals to manage better in the boundaryless work life are extraversion, high self-esteem, proactiveness, flexibility, openness to new experiences, and acknowledgement of personal strengths and weaknesses (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The findings from the present study indicate that to adapt to a ministerial career, stability, optimism, and the ability to seek support from others are important characteristics. Further, as societies are becoming more multicultural and multireligious, the clergy needs to be able to meet and connect with people from various faiths and belief systems, including atheists and those who are non-religious. In these surroundings, personal characteristics such as optimism, openness to new experiences, and plasticity form a good profile of a new minister. However, it should be noted that being open to change has a potential downside: Miner (2007) has found that proneness to openness to belief change is a predictor of burnout. Due to this risk, it is recommended that in future recruitment, attention is also paid to the ability to set boundaries and deal with role conflicts, as these have been found to be among the leading reasons for leaving the ministry (Beebe, 2007). Further, Miner, Dowson, and Sterland (2010) have found that autonomy protects from burnout by helping the individual to differentiate between one's own self and the roles taken in the ministry. The boundaryless work culture also requires the individual to possess and utilize self-management skills and career management skills. Thus, high self-management skills should be favored in selecting an applicant.

The decision of which characteristics to prefer in a ministerial aspirant is, however, not that simple. In the landscape of changing religion, the question of whether churches wish to select pastors that will strive for stability or change is of key importance. Will the churches wish to recruit pastors with high stability who are committed to their work, or will they opt for high plasticity, a characteristic that helps the individual to cope with non-traditional career patterns and plausibly also with a changing religious landscape? Should new pastors be selected who act as symbols of something permanent in this fluid late modernity, or who will lead a revision of what it means to "do church" in today's society? Upon selecting new pastors, the churches thus face the choice of whether to recruit people who will preserve the church or people who will change the church.

In terms of personality characteristics, the churches need to evaluate whether high stability is a more desired characteristic in a new employee than high plasticity. As stability and plasticity are not mutually exclusive personality characteristics, but instead equal components of a metatrait circumplex (Strus, Ciecuch, & Rowiński, 2014), the question is not which one to choose, but which proportions of these two metatraits to favor. Stability includes stability in the emotional domain, the

motivational domain, and the social domain. Likewise, plasticity encompasses behavioral and cognitive plasticity, as well as a tendency to explore and engage in new experiences (Strus, Ciecuch, & Rowiński, 2014). The two metatraits can be understood as arising from two fundamental human needs: the need for maintaining stability of psychosocial functioning, and the need for exploration and adaptation to change (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). Taking a step further, these needs are present also on the organizational and societal levels: a balance between what to keep and what to change. Balancing between these is a crucial task for churches in late modern times. The endeavor manifests itself concretely in the selection of new pastors: how important is stability, and how important is plasticity? This requires an analysis of how selecting for certain characteristics corresponds with what kind of church is wanted in the future. It is also relevant to ponder how plasticity and openness to change can be reconciled with keeping one's faith and holding onto one's calling. Likewise, it can be asked if a very determined individual with a strong calling and high stability as the leading personality characteristic is the most suited for meeting the future religious landscape where seekers roam.

The selection of new ministers thus very concretely fulfills the vision of a church, and should therefore be guided by this vision. Future recruitment would thus benefit from embracing the visionary dimension of selecting a new pastor by making a conscious choice of which characteristics are sought after in this regard. A more outspoken strategy for selecting new ministers is thus encouraged. Given that the two major societal change processes – the decline of religion and the emergence of a boundaryless work culture – place increasing demands on employees of religious institutions, the precise selection of new ministers is of utmost importance. Besides ensuring that the new employees will be able to cope with the demands of the job, the selection also has considerable significance for the future of the church in question. The selection of a new minister should be guided by the vision of what that church wishes to look like in the future, as the new minister will participate in forming that future. Selecting a new minister is, thus, a part of selecting a future for a church.

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