

The Influence our Emotions and/or Reason/Facts within the Decision-Making Process

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Abstract:

The focus of this research is to develop an understanding of the influence our emotions and/or reason/facts have within the decision-making process. Such a study is important in order to identify the presence of emotions and their impact within the decision-making process. In identifying the impact, an evaluation of the thought process applied by parish councillors when involved within decision making enables exploration as to whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated within the decision-making process.

This research project was based on a review of the relevant literature with questionnaires being sent to parish councillors and parish clerks via an online survey platform. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, interviews were held with participants from within the researchers own support bubble. The findings from this research provides evidence that emotions influence parish councillor decisions. It also highlights that emotions are invariably the first response to new information and whilst the majority believed they could separate their emotions when making a decision, the data indicated otherwise.

The research produced a number of key findings, specifically that virtual platforms stifled debate and discussion. It confirmed a need for an updated non-verbal communication and body language checklist due to evident subtle changes.

This research argues for the introduction of a definitive step by step process to aid decision making for parish councillors and parish clerks. In recognising their own emotional responses, the definitive process is to act as a guide in the coming together of reason, the rational brain, and the heart, our emotional response.

The main conclusions drawn from this study are in the importance of Emotional Intelligence skills for parish councillors to encourage rational and reasonable decision making. The recommendation is a solution based on the training of councillors in Emotional Intelligence to encourage effective decision making.

Keywords: *Emotions, facts, reason, decision-making, influence, emotional response, rational brain, the heart, emotional intelligence.*

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List of Charts

1. Which of the following emotional skills do you believe you possess?
2. Before making a decision, do you consider any of the following?
3. When making a decision are you?
4. Prior to a meeting, as a Councillor, do you?
5. Can focus be maintained on policy and legislation when a decision is of a sensitive or personal nature?
6. Have Virtual Meetings affected communication among members?
7. Do you believe Virtual meetings have had an impact, or changed decision making?
8. Do you believe Virtual meetings have had an impact, or changed decision making, if yes, please explain how? (SurveyMonkey)
9. Do you believe Virtual meetings have had an impact, or changed decision making, if yes, please explain how? (Face-to-Face interviews)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces, and outlines the aims and objectives of this study, to identify the influence emotions have within decision making.

1.2 Background

Many Political thinkers and philosophers have thought it necessary to understand the role of emotions in politics. Aristotle (1954,1983), Plato (1974), Hobbes (1968), Descartes (1989 [1649]), and the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, all embarked on studies to establish the role of emotions, yet the question remains as to how these thinkers actually understood emotion (Elster 1999, Rorty 1996).

William Davies, a political economist at Goldsmiths, University of London, documents in his book “Nervous State” the struggle in politics between “reason” and “feelings”. He believes that people have not become more emotional, or have more feelings than they used to, rather they have a variety of ways in which those feelings can be expressed in real time, (Economist, 2019).

Feelings and emotions cannot be dismissed, they need to be understood so their influence can be determined and ways in which they can be harnessed to work in harmony with each other established.

1.3 The Aim and focus of this research

The aim of the research has been to develop an understanding of the influence our emotions and/or reason/facts within the decision-making process.

1.4 Objectives

The key objectives of the research are to:

1. **Identify** the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process.
2. **Evaluate** the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making at meetings.
3. **Explore** whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision.

- 4. Formulate** recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions.

1.5 Literature Review

The Literature Review provides an analysis of the academic literature, journals, studies, and psychological practice papers reviewed relating to the influence of emotions, reason, and fact within the realm of decision making. The Literature Review forms Chapter 2.

1.6 Research Methodology

Based on Walliman's (2009:37) definition that "Research is a systematic investigation of a question...based on critical analysis of relevant evidence" the study comprised of two online questionnaires, conducted during May, June, and July 2020. This was supported by one-to-one interviews carried out in July 2020. The research methods are set out in Chapter 3.

1.7 Research: Questionnaires and Interviews

The questionnaires were developed to gain qualitative and quantitative data to provide an insight into a parish councillors perspective of their feelings and emotions experienced when making a decision. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, interviews were limited to participants within the researchers support bubble. The Results and Analysis form Chapter 4.

1.8 Summary

This Chapter has explained the research study designed to understand whether emotions influenced decision making. It sought to establish whether measures could be developed and implemented to assist parish councillors within decision making. The study was of a personal interest to the researcher, a parish clerk at Burghfield Parish Council, and was intended to expand their knowledge of the influence of emotions within decision making. Emotions influence what information we retain, and therefore form the basis upon which we evaluate and subsequently make a decision. (Brader et al., 2011)

Keywords: *Emotions, reason, feelings, influence, decision-making, presence, research, aims, objectives, questionnaire, perspective.*

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This Literature Review aims to investigate and explore the basis upon which a parish councillor makes a decision. Is it based on their emotional response or through a rational assessment of the facts and reasons presented? Are councillors representing their parishioners, the people who voted for them, or are their emotions the driving force behind decisions?

Emotions are an important and even desirable element in political attitudes and behaviours. Lasswell (1930, 1948) held the belief that politics are the expression of personal emotions. Whilst we may understand that emotions are incredibly complex, involving a large number of different functions both internally and externally, they are also often an individual's motivation.

Sears & Critin (1982:222-23) believe "Emotions enable people to steadfastly remain true to their most deeply held values and attitudes", (Sears, 1993). Emotions are capable of stirring people up, causing them to abandon their habitual commitments. As quoted by Oscar Wilde (1891), "*The Emotions of Man are stirred more quickly than man's intelligence*".

Emotions can be powerful, making us do things we may later regret. However, they generally do not last long, a few minutes at most (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Today we may feel anger towards an individual, yet tomorrow we may wish we had shown more compassion and acted rationally. Emotions can lead us to make choices that have an impact on our long-term interests, making us appear both rational and irrational, depending upon the environment. Emotions help us to make decisions whilst guiding us towards good things rather than bad.

Many Political thinkers and philosophers have thought it necessary to understand the role of emotions in politics. Aristotle (1954, 1983), Plato (1974), Hobbes (1968), Descartes (1989 [1649]), and the Scottish enlightenment thinkers, especially Hume (1739–1940) and Smith (1959), among many others, all thought it necessary to understand emotion in order to explore human nature and our capacities for politics, (Marcus, 2000), yet how these thinkers understood emotion remains a valuable question (Elster, 1999., Rorty, 1996).

Arkes (1993) argues that progress and democratic politics require less emotion and more reason. Madison (161, [1787]), believes that emotion should be treated as an unavoidable factor in politics that should be constrained and minimised so that reason dictates judgement with minimal distraction (Callan, 1997; Homes, 1995).

The scientific study of emotion began with Darwin (1998, [1872]) and James (1883, 1894). Darwin argued the influence of emotions on decision-making had survived the rigors of natural selection. Emotions provide us with the guidance needed when the surrounding environment fails or is unable to provide the necessary information for thoughtful analysis. In contrast, William James famously proposed: “our feeling of [bodily] changes as they occur IS the emotion” (James 1884:189-190).

Understanding human choice and response is hard, something may appear entirely rational for one person but completely irrational for another. Plato and Aristotle saw reason as superior to emotions, with Plato describing emotion and reason as two horses pulling us in opposite directions. Aristotle, however, argued that human happiness depended upon the exercise of reason.

So, what is the difference between emotion (the Heart) and reason (the Head)? Barrett (2012) suggested that emotions were both biologically evident and socially constructed. According to her conceptual act theory (Barrett, 2006, 2013; Barrett and Kensinger, 2010), physical states and actions can be transformed into different emotion expressions under different social constructs.

Reason can be described as a process upon which an individual must weigh up the pros and cons, identify the alternatives and determine the best option. Decision making is often referred to as the process in which a choice is made upon reflection of the consequences of that choice.

We feel emotions for a particular reason. Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean summarises the excellence of an individual’s character as being concerned with emotions and acts, in which there can be excess, deficiency or a mean. For example, one can be frightened or bold, feel desire, anger or pity, and experience pleasure and pain generally (Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean, Introduction to Ethics, 2020). Excellence is not about acting well or thinking correctly, but also feeling right, of feeling the proper

responses at the right time, towards the right objects, towards the right people, for the right reasons in the right manner.

Neurobiologist Antonio Damasio identified that the experience of negative emotions can both help and hurt decision making. He studied people who had experienced damage to the part of their brain where emotions are generated and found their ability to make a decision was also damaged. They were able to describe the decision they were supposed to make but were unable to determine the basis upon which to make the decision. The inability to decide also extended to their moral decision making. They could lie, steal, cheat and ignore punishment, implying that the inability to experience emotions therefore also affected their logical and moral decision-making processes.

We do not always make decisions by carefully weighing up the facts. Time constraints can remove the desire or capacity to calculate the statistical probability and associated risk of every choice or decision. Though emotions can derail highly rational thoughts, there are occasions where overly rational thinking would be highly inappropriate. Friends and family tell you to “listen to your heart,” as it “knows what’s best for you”. The heart often speaks to us quietly and with common sense, where the mind tends to rationalize our desires and reactions (Rozman, 2016).

Dan Sperber, a cognitive scientist at Central European University, holds the belief that the social implications of any decision are far from irrelevant. “Even if a decision seems to bring a benefit, if it is ill-judged by others, then there’s a cost,” he says. “The main role of reasoning in decision-making is not to arrive at the decision but to be able to present the decision as something that’s rational.”

In a political context, we can think of emotion as a result of the process by which individuals appraise the significance of a political situation and act accordingly (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). The French existentialist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), argued that emotions are strategies. People use them to manipulate others and, more importantly, to manoeuvre themselves into ways of thinking and acting that suits their goals and self-image.

Drew Westen, in his book *The Political Brain*, states that the “political brain is an emotional brain. It is not a dispassionate calculating machine, objectively searching for the right facts, figures, and policies to

make a reasoned decision.” Voters, though often well-informed and politically aware, think “with their guts,” he suggests.

Marcus (2000:221-250) argues that “Emotions role in politics is pervasive both because emotion enables past experience to be encoded with its evaluative history and because emotion enables contemporary circumstances to be quickly evaluated”. On September 7, 1964, a 60-second television advert changed American politics indefinitely. A pretty 3-year-old girl counted as she plucked daisy petals, her voice was replaced with a mission-control countdown followed by a massive nuclear blast in a classic mushroom shape. The “Daisy Girl” advert used images of a nuclear explosion to raise voters’ anxiety so they would subsequently vote for Lyndon Johnson. It was the start of the use of emotions as potent weapons in many future political campaigns, with specific techniques being employed that had previously only been applied to selling cars or soap.

People who feel angry are more likely to support risky and confrontational policies than those who feel anxious or fearful (Lerner et al., 2003; Nabi, 2003). Emotions influence what information we retain, and therefore form the basis upon which we evaluate and subsequently make a decision. Fear and anxiety direct our attention towards threats, increasing the processing of such information in an attempt to resolve the threatening situation (Brader et al., 2011).

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) discovered that emotions, particularly anxiety, are a natural part of our decision-making process. Anxiety encourages us to find out more and to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. It can lead to rational thinking and aid the generation of the cognitive decision-making process.

The literature review identifies that our default is to respond emotionally before reason steps in and weighs up the pros and cons to formulate a considered response in the decision-making process. Emotions make us act quickly and decisively.

The overall aim of this research is to develop an understanding of the influence of emotions and/or reason/facts within the decision-making process.

Within the context of a parish council, the specific objectives of this research are to:

- 1. *Identify*** the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process.
- 2. *Evaluate*** the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making meetings.
- 3. *Explore*** whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision.
- 4. *Formulate*** recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions.

Keywords:

Emotion, explore, investigate, emotional response, rational assessment, decision-making, reason, irrational, influence, constraints, political, feelings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methods, and methodology implemented for the study of the influence emotions and/or reason/facts have within the decision-making process.

Are Parish Councillors aware of their emotions in the decision-making process? Are they logical and rational in their approach as elected members, or emotional and impulsive, driving their own views and thoughts?

This research study has a number of inter-related objectives within the context of being a parish councillor:

1. **Identify** the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process
2. **Evaluate** the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making
3. **Explore** whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision
4. **Formulate** recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions

This section will provide the details of the research strategy adopted to address the research objectives identified.

3.2 Research Strategy:

Saunders *et al.* (2000:92) summarise the use of research strategies thus: '*what matters is not the label that is attached to a particular strategy, but whether it is appropriate for your particular research...*'.

Objective 3 of this research sets out to explore '*whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision*' and this was implemented through the collection of data via an online questionnaire/survey.

Face to face interviews were conducted to identify *the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process* (Objective 1). The interviews were carried out during July and August 2020, strictly adhering to Covid-19 social distancing rulings.

3.3 Research Design:

This study relies on two data collection techniques: questionnaires and interviews, with the former being the main source of data. Questionnaires are an appropriate means of collecting quantitative data, they are reliable and a quick method for collecting information from multiple respondents. They allow a wider geographical coverage, not restricted to particular localities, and provide an environmentally friendly approach to conducting research (Greenfield, 2002; Silverman, 2004; Bell, 2005).

A general disadvantage of the questionnaire is their fixed and strict format, which eliminates the possibility for more in-depth or abstract observation (Bell, 2005; Sarantakos, 2013).

It can be quite challenging to get a good response rate from an online questionnaire. When the research population can be identified, response rates tend to be higher. There is also the question of reliability when using such a strategy. Questionnaires rely on personal opinion, and so are open to bias and inaccuracy.

Rolfe (2006) argues it is down to the researcher to ensure methodological rigour, but also, that the reader should be allowed to judge the trustworthiness of the research (Rolfe, 2004).

Where research wants to explore complex and subtle phenomena such as opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences, interviews assist the researcher to gain a deeper understanding (Denscombe, 2014:186).

3.4 Research Ethics:

People were advised they would be participating in the survey both voluntarily and confidentially, being free to decline to answer any question at any point during the questionnaire. The identity, as well as the name of the councils they were members of or employed by, were kept in strict confidence, meeting the requirements set by the code of ethics of the University.

The appropriate research ethics documentation confirming the core ethical principles of *transparency*, *confidentiality* and *voluntary* input were to be adhered to, being submitted, and approved prior to any research commencing.

All survey data was stored securely, with electronic records being password protected. Upon the results being reviewed and processed, data held was destroyed accordingly.

All information collected in the course of research required for this dissertation, has been used only for the purposes of this study and kept confidentially.

3.5 Questionnaire:

Two questionnaires were developed, being designed, and delivered via the web-based survey engine SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2020). As Bhaskaran and LeClaire (2010) point out, there are distinct advantages to using a design facility such as SurveyMonkey: *They help with good practice, they encourage completion, they reduce potential errors, and they help with data processing.* (Denscombe: 2014:179)

The closed nature of the majority of questions resulted in quantifiable data being obtained and therefore enabling easy logging of results, and subsequent comparison. The questions were intended to give a range of data linked to the aim, objectives, and research issues (Stapleton, 2011).

The councillor specific questionnaire was open for completion between 19/04/2020 and 30/06/2020. The questions were a combination of closed questions and Likert scale responses, with provision for individual comments via open ended questions. An estimation of the time required for completion, approximately five minutes, and a progress bar, also formed part of the questionnaire.

(A complete set of the questions presented are provided within Appendix A)

The Clerk specific questionnaire was an adaptation of the councillor's questionnaire, being delivered online between 03/08/2020 and 01/09/2020. It required 3 minutes to complete with a progress bar at the footer of the page. *(A complete set of the questions presented are provided within Appendix B).*

The survey questions were designed for the collation of both quantitative and qualitative data, however, in essence this research is primarily quantitative in nature.

In order to encourage a higher return rate, an invitation to partake in the councillor specific questionnaire was published using identified research population via the following channels:

- An email to the Communications Officers at the following County Associations:
Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Buckinghamshire
- Level 4, 5 and 6 Community Governance Students, SLCC:
The request was forwarded to Clerks as the main point of contact, to share the survey link with their Councillors for completion

The country was in lockdown at the time the invitation to partake in the questionnaire was circulated due to the outbreak of Covid-19. Accessing the County Associations Communications Officer proved difficult and it was noted that not all councils were members of their County Association. The chosen approaches, however, had the potential to reach a significant number of individual councillors.

The Clerk specific questionnaire was delivered via the Clerks Community Network Facebook page. Membership is monitored and strictly by approval via the administrators only, with a current membership of 1,000 plus parish clerks.

The use of Facebook for research and program delivery is a relatively new area that warrants more research attention and guidance around issues like validity of data, representativeness of samples, and protections of human subjects (Pedersen, 2016; Kurz, 2016). Facebook, founded in 2004, is the second most visited website in the world.

3.6 Questionnaire design:

Questionnaires vary considerably but are primarily designed to collect information which can be used subsequently for analysis (Denscombe, 2014:166).

Designing the questionnaire proved challenging, being complicated due to the varying degree of detail required within the questions. The wording of a question is critical in ensuring the meaning and intent is interpreted as intended. Even small word changes can substantially affect the answers provided and associated thought processes.

As suggested by Bell (2005), the questionnaire was piloted, being sent to 12 Level 6 colleagues, selected on the basis they had each devised research questionnaires of their own. Valuable feedback was obtained, encouraging additional questions and minor amendments.

Each of the questions were designed to provide data relating to at least one of the objectives of the research:

	Research Question:	Survey Questions:
1.	Identify the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process	1,3, 5, 7, 12, 13, 17, 18
2.	Evaluate the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making	2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14,16
3.	Explore whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision	4,6, 9, 15, 19, 20
4.	Formulate a checklist of recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions	

Questions 1,3, 5, 7, 12, 13, 17, 18 were designed to encourage respondents to think about their own emotions and level of emotional awareness. Specifically, question 1, was based on Daniel Goleman’s 5 domains of Emotional Intelligence to determine whether respondents were aware of their own emotional intelligence and its importance within decision making. (Goleman, 2012)

Questions 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14,16 sought to determine the level of thought and preparation given within the decision-making process. Was a specific rationale, or process applied, and was the individual aware of such justifications within their own decision making.

Question 2 presented a recognised formula for decision-making whilst question 10 asked whether individuals applied a specific decision-making rationale.

Questions 4, 6, 9, 15, 19, 20 were aimed at being thought provoking, providing the opportunity for respondents to consider how they “felt”. In recognising an “emotion” was it possible to then separate it within decision making?

The questionnaire, was by design, intended to evoke emotion. However, a questionnaire as a research method has the disadvantage of there not being a measurable way to determine how truthful a respondent is being, or how much thought they put in when preparing their response (Denscombe, 2014:182).

People read questions differently and as a result, base a reply on their own interpretation. The question therefore exists as to whether, as the researcher, I am making my own assumptions as to what is important?

The questionnaires were reviewed and analysed, with the results being presented within Chapter 3.

3.7 Interviews:

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain additional qualitative information in the exploration of the individuals’ emotions, and their own awareness of the influence they have within decision-making. The interview enables the researcher to explore the opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences of the individual in more depth (Denscombe, 2014:186).

Denscombe (2014:200) believes the most crucial question when conducting research interviews is whether the informant is telling the truth. When the interview concerns matter such as emotions, feelings, and experiences of the interviewee, it is a lot more difficult to check to see if the information is corroborated by other people and sources.

Participants were selected following an expression of interest, being provided with an overview of the purpose of the research. Participation information and consent forms were presented in accordance with the university’s research ethics requirements.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, interviews were conducted via Zoom and face to face interviews with individuals who existed within the researchers own support bubble. All interviews were undertaken whilst adhering strictly to the social distancing guidelines stipulated by central government.

3.8 Interview Questions:

The interview design, and question phrasing will influence the depth and freedom upon which a participant can respond. Some interviews encourage lengthy and detailed replies while others are designed to elicit short and specific responses. (Fox, 2009:5)

The interview questions were semi-structured in format, being predominantly open-ended questions to; *“let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the interviewer”* (Denscombe, 1998:113). The intention was to explore the emotional intelligence and awareness of the individual to collate as much appropriate data as possible.

This style of interview was selected as the open-ended interview is seen as the gold standard of qualitative research (Silverman 2006). However, it is acknowledged that it also gives the freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her (Bell 1999) and not necessarily the researcher. It offers greater freedom to explore specific avenues of enquiry (Kitchen and Tate, 2000).

The semi-structured format of the interview provided the framework to ensure the aims and objectives of the research were met, enabling questions to be modified so as to not constrain the overall format. It presented the opportunity to delve deeper into specific questions that had demonstrated a definitive split of opinion between councillor and clerk.

Body language was able to be observed during the face to face interviews, providing additional information and insight as to the individuals emotional state during the interview. Any changes were noted, with the specific interview question also being acknowledged.

The notes from the interviews were reviewed with the results being analysed in Chapter 4.

3.9 Collation of data & Analysis:

Rarely do researchers get responses from all the people they invite to participate. Generally speaking, the aim of a good survey is to achieve a high response rate (Denscombe, 2014:22)

Responses received to the first questionnaire were overwhelming, providing significant data. 352 questionnaires were completed, equating to an approximate response rate of 18.5% of the total possible number of councillors the invitation was presented of approximately 6742.

The parish clerk's specific questionnaire received a response rate of 13.8%, with 138 parish clerks out of a potential 1,000 completing the online survey.

3.10 Limitations:

It could be reasonably argued that to gain a fuller perspective, the research could have been improved by including a series of observations of parish council meetings. This would have assisted in establishing the presence and extent emotions existed within councillor's decision-making. The outbreak of Covid-19, and a national lockdown imposed by central government excluded that option.

Interviews, whilst being particularly good at collating in depth data and details, rely on the data being provided by what the individual "says" rather than "does"; it cannot therefore be assumed the answers always reflect the truth (Denscombe, 2014:202).

Walliman (2004) states it is necessary to consider whether the answers provided are valid (is the respondent telling the truth) and reliable (is there a level of consistency to the answers). Validity is strengthened in the knowledge of the research population being fellow parish clerks and parish councillors. The responses received demonstrated sufficient evidence to confirm reliability.

However, self-completion questionnaires offer little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the answers given (Denscombe, 2014:182).

3.11 Conclusion:

The Literature review appears to support the assertion that emotions guide decision-making, being the default response before reason steps in to formulate a considered response.

This chapter has provided the rationale, and outlined the methodology implemented for this research. The key research tools used were questionnaires with face to face interviews supplementing the data.

The results from the questionnaires were analysed via the SurveyMonkey online survey analysis tool. Notes taken at interviews were reviewed and analysed manually. The next Chapter examines the primary data, providing an analysis of the results obtained.

Keywords:

Research methods, influence, emotions, reason, decision-making, rational, objectives, research strategy, questionnaires, interviews, data collection, ethics, quantitative data, qualitative data, rationale, methodology.

Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reveals the results of research undertaken for the study of the influence emotions and/or reason/facts have within the decision-making process as described in Chapter 3: Research Methods. The research focuses on the presence, and potential influence of emotions within the parish council decision-making process.

Two questionnaires were developed, one specifically for completion by parish councillors, delivered via the online platform, SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2020). The second questionnaire was designed for completion by parish clerks to gain a perspective as to the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors within decision making.

This chapter provides examples of how the findings from the research compare with those within the Literature Review and whether the research objectives have been met.

4.2 Objectives of the Research

The objective of this research is to:

- **Identify** the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process
- **Evaluate** the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making meetings/items
- **Explore** whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision
- **Formulate** recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions

4.3 Respondents description

According to the Local Government Association Council Consensus (2018), the average age of a councillor in 2018 was 59.4 years, with three in five councillors being male and 45.1 per cent retired.

More than four out of five (84.6%) became councillors in order to serve their community, with more than half stating they did so in order to change things (54.4%) or because of their political beliefs/values (52.9%). Three-fifths of councillors (60.4%) thought that representing their local residents was among the most important of councillor roles (Local Government Association, 2018).

The parish clerk is the principal officer responsible for the administration of council business, the main 'engine' of an effective parish council. The clerk's role is to ensure the council as a whole conduct its business properly and to provide independent, objective, and professional advice.

Sue Baxter, Chair of the National Association of Local Councils, states that 'Councillors are non-executive directors, the clerk is chief executive.'

4.4 Response rate

The results covered the geographical areas of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, and Buckinghamshire. The questionnaire was completed by individual parish councillors and parish clerks with their identity remaining confidential, as indicated in the accompanying email correspondence.

352 responses were received to the online survey prepared for parish councillors from a possible 6742. A further 150 responses were received from parish clerks from a potential 1000.

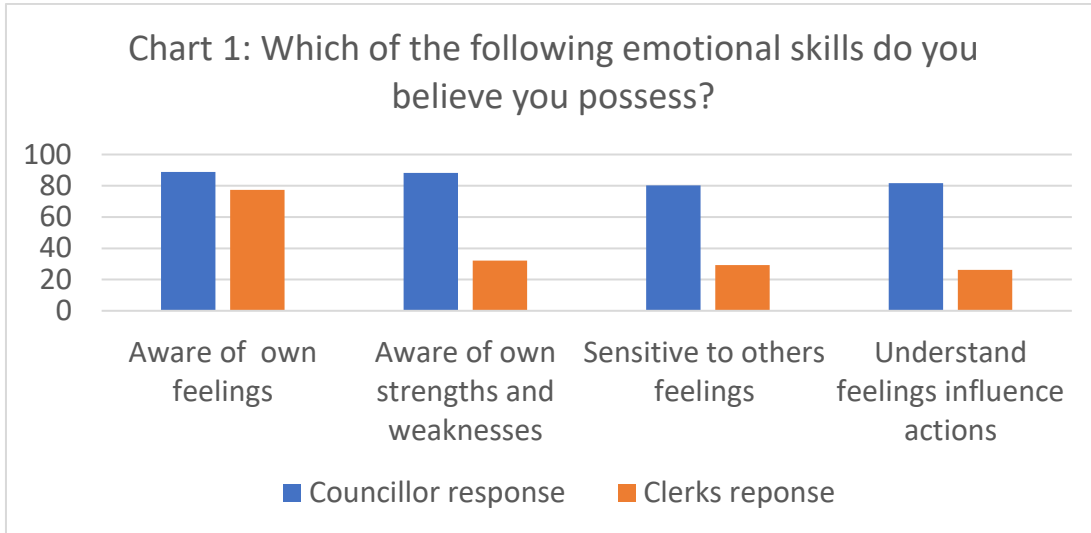
It is not possible to determine the exact response rate due to the variation in the number of councillors upon each parish council. However, it is estimated that the responses received from parish councillors represents 18.5% of the total number of councillors the survey was distributed to during April, May, and June 2020.

Parish Clerks responded to the questionnaire during June & July 2020 with 150 responses being received. This equated to approximately 15% of the parish clerks who currently subscribe to the Facebook Group.

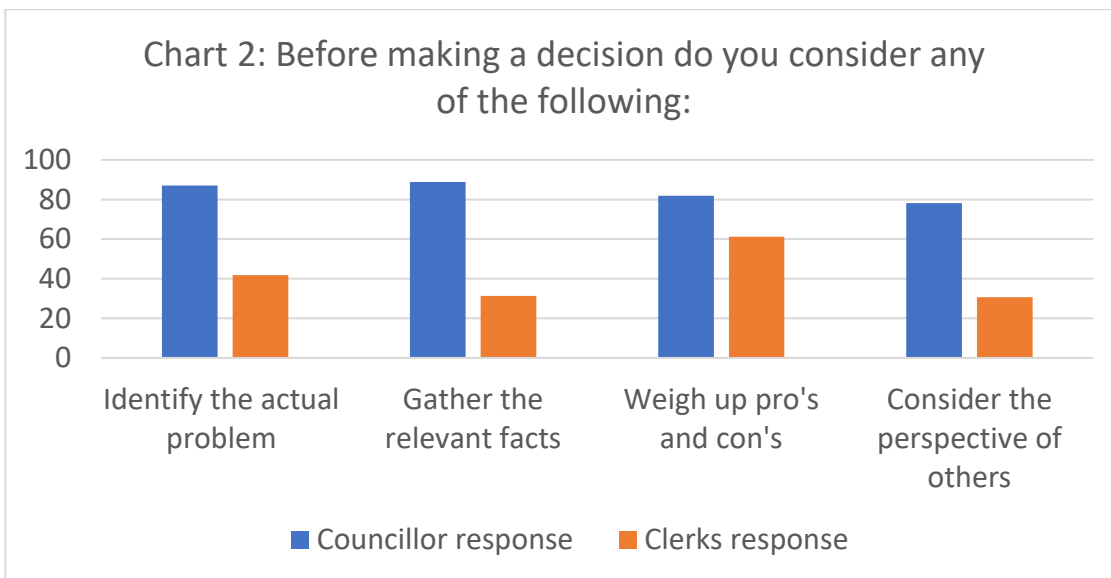
4.5 Findings from the research – Questionnaire data

Bogdan and Birklen state 'working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others' (1982:145).

The findings from the research are presented below, providing both quantitative and qualitative data collected via the online survey platform, SurveyMonkey (2020) and the analysis of the face to face interviews.



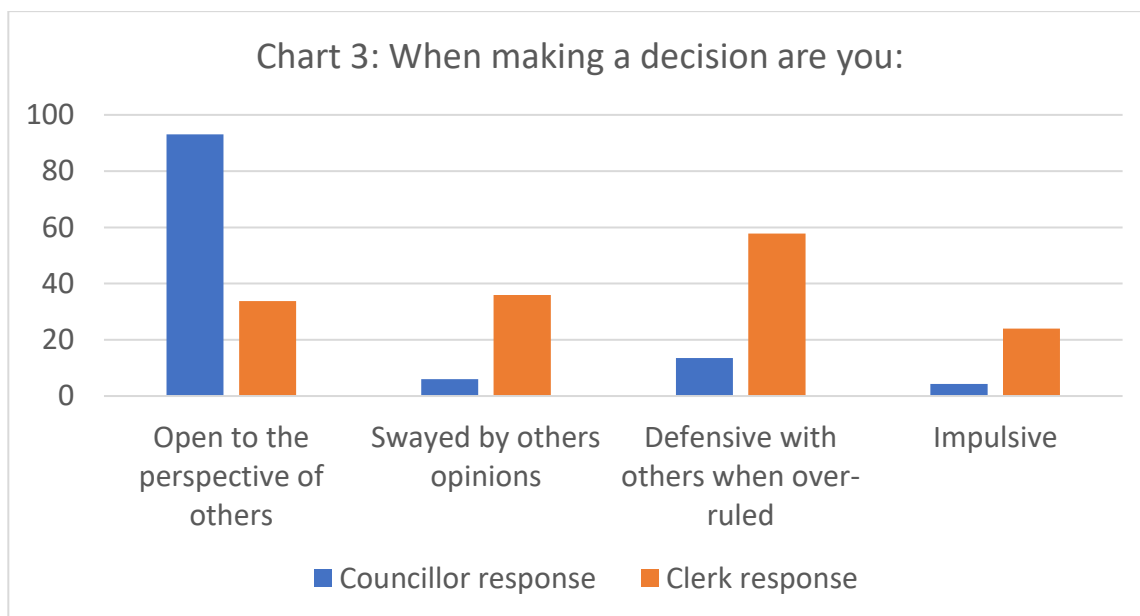
Self-awareness is a key component of emotional intelligence, being a base for good intuition. Responses indicate that councillors were aware of their own feelings, and their influence on others as well as themselves. Clerks, however, did not believe that councillors were sensitive to others or understand how their feelings influenced their actions.



Councillors were asked whether they applied a definite thought process before making a decision. The options presented were in a sequence emulating the 7 Step Decision Making process advocated by Dr Pam Brown (2007), a GP from Swansea. The process allows for problems to be identified, reviewed by weighing the evidence presented and examining potential alternatives. The process also provides opportunity to consider whether the decision was the right one in the preparation of the answer. The data implies that councillors believe they give significant thought to their decision making, possibly reinforcing the conclusion of the Local Government Association that stated the overall intention of a parish councillor was to represent their community.

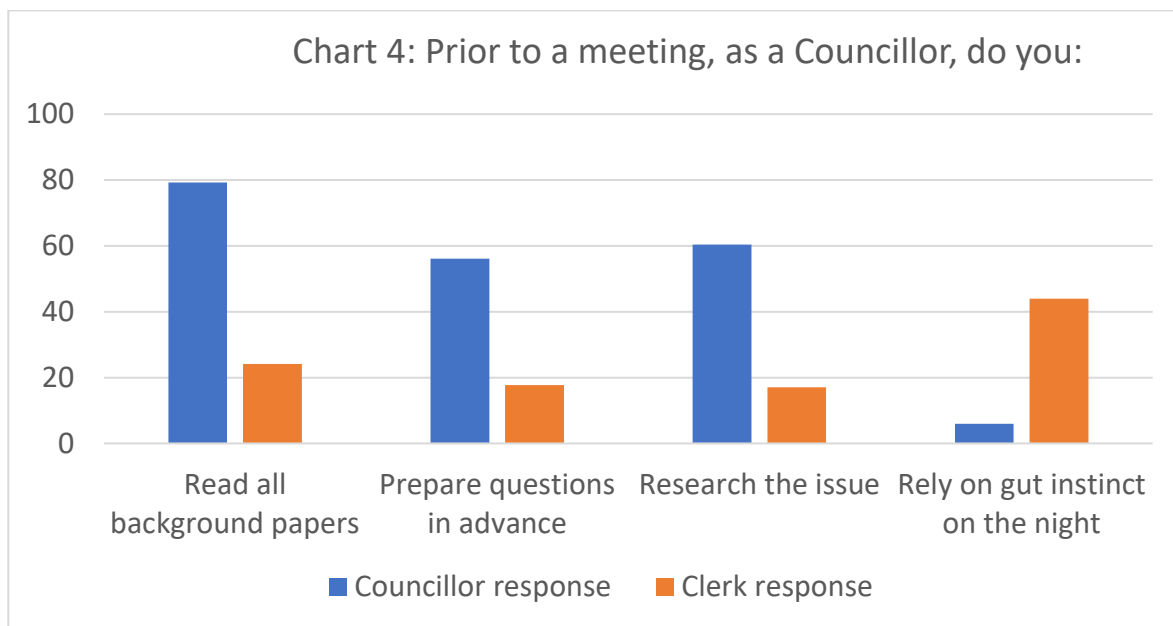
By comparison, parish clerks did not respond with the same enthusiasm. They specifically did not believe their councillors considered the perspective of others or gather the facts prior to making a decision. Were parish clerks being honest and answering the questionnaire based on fact, reason and rationality or were their answers purely emotive? Do the responses from councillors indicate that an ego is required in the pursuance of the position of councillor?

Scott Trettenero, (2017) believes the most important part of emotional intelligence is recognising how the emotions of our egos can rule us if we are not aware of their controlling nature, real intelligence cannot be achieved until one has their ego under a certain amount of control.



Ruben Gonzalez, Olympian Motivation Keynote Speaker, believes the best way to make a decision is to do your due diligence to understand the pros and cons of all your options, talk to someone who has dealt with something similar, and finally go with your gut feeling, your intuition. In an instant, your subconscious mind takes all of your knowledge and creates a feeling that will steer you in the right direction.

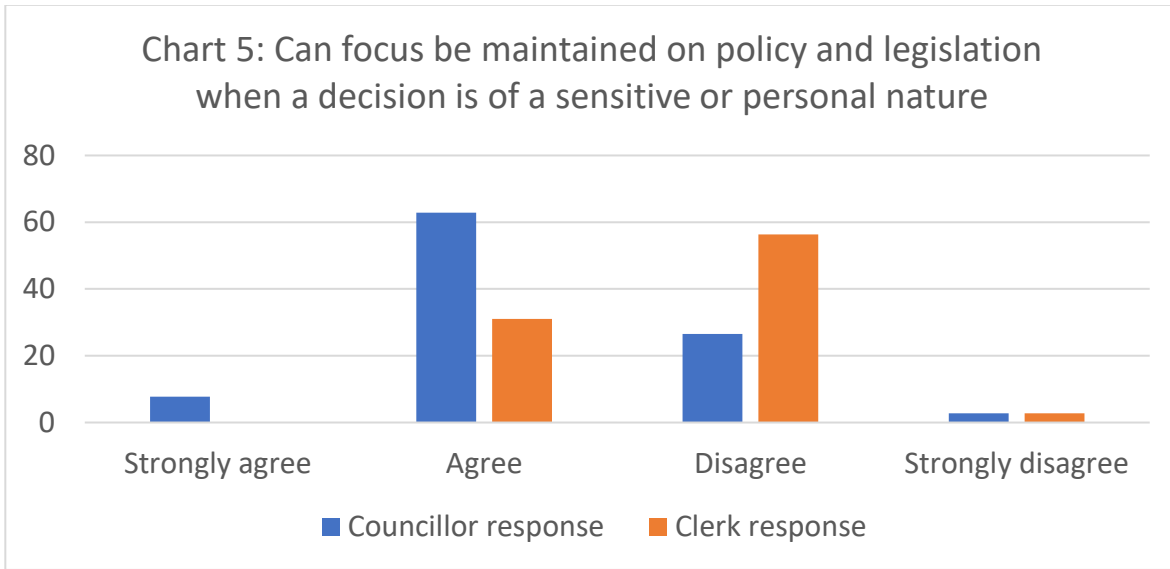
The use of language within the questioning was deliberate to determine whether an emotive response would be provoked. When councillors were asked whether they were impulsive, their response differed from that of the clerks. The word “impulsive” evoked emotion on both sides.



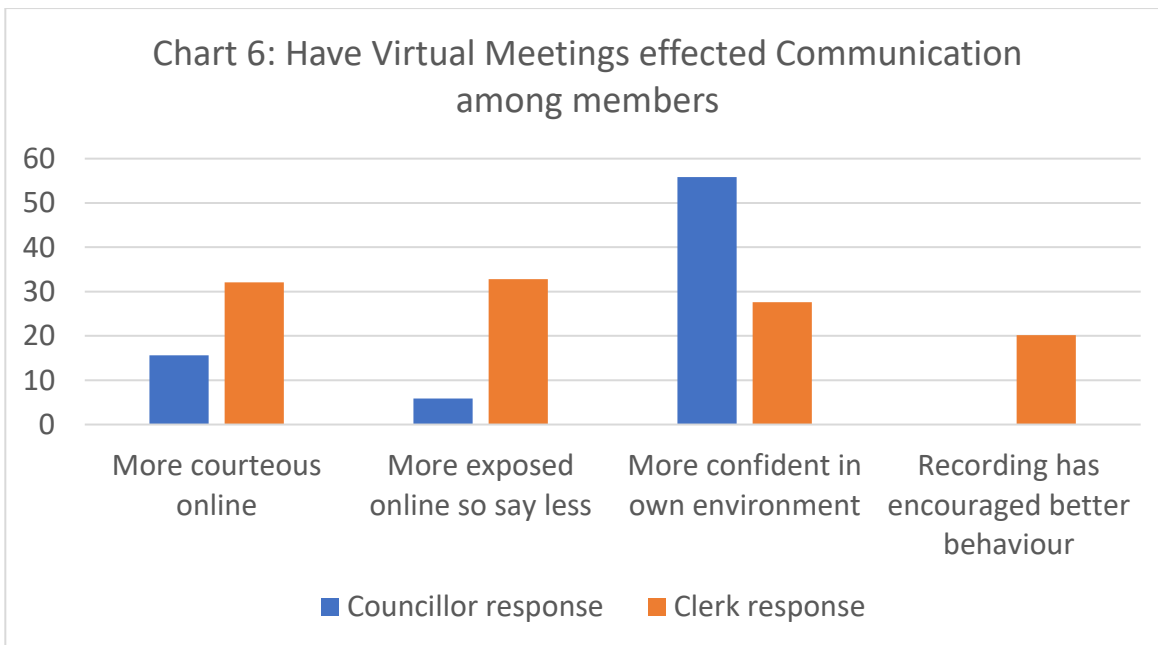
Nearly half of the clerks responding believed councillors relied on their gut instinct on the night of the meeting and did not prepare sufficiently. Councillors disagreed, stating they were significantly prepared, and therefore able to make informed decisions.

Gut instinct can be interpreted as the measure of an individual’s confidence, or their “nerve”. The perceived display of courage in possessing the ability to make a decision quickly can leave others in awe of this non-transferable skill. In a survey of executives, Jagdish Parikh, (2006) a Harvard Business School

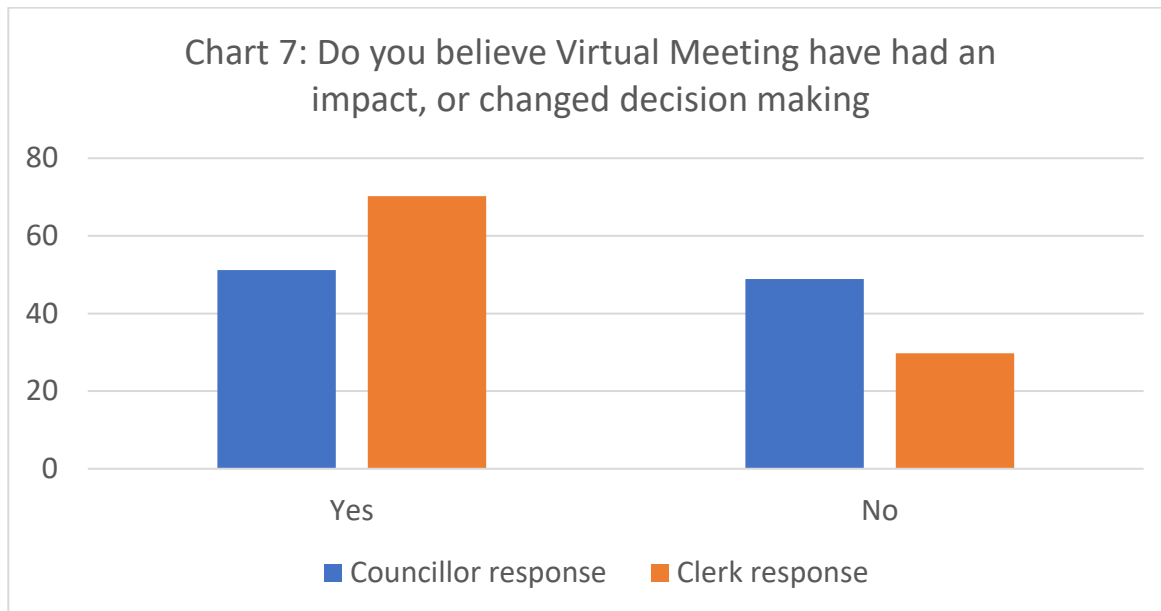
Student, said respondents used their intuitive skills as much as their analytical skills but credited 80% of their success to instinct alone.



70% of councillors either agreed, or strongly agreed, that members could maintain their focus on policy and legislation rather than their own emotional response when a decision was of a sensitive or personal nature. However, the responses received from parish clerks was in complete contrast with 70% disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing with the statement.



Respondents were asked as to whether virtual meetings had affected communication, specifically with each other. Clerks believed members were more courteous, with recording and live streaming of meetings encouraging better behaviour, yet they indicated that their councillors appeared more exposed and as a result, said less. Councillors, however, said they felt more confident in their own environment.



There was a definite 50/50 split of opinion amongst councillors as to whether they believed decision making would be changed through the use of virtual meetings. Clerks, however, had a stronger belief that decision making would change in the use of online platforms for meetings.

4.6 Findings from the research - Open questions:

When asked to explain how they believed virtual meetings would change the decision-making process, the following comments were submitted (Chart 8).

181 out of 352 (51%) parish councillors responded, whilst 50 out of 142 (35%) parish clerks presented their perception of how they believed virtual meetings had changed decision making. A summary of the most noteworthy responses is listed below in Chart 8:

Chart 8: Do you believe Virtual Meetings have had an impact or changed decision making. If yes, please explain how:	
Councillor Comments	Clerk Comments
Chairman has greater control of meetings online	Chairman has greater control of meetings online
Meetings have become much more focused	Virtual meetings more focused and quicker
Harder to bully when online	Ability to silence or remove aggressive members
Loss of personal interaction and social aspect	Loss of personal interaction
Councillors struggling with technology	Councillors struggling with technology
Removes opportunity to vote the same as those sat next to you	Councillors have own opinions and make own decisions rather than for the parish
Better preparation is required from councillors for the meetings to be effective online	Detailed reports speed up meetings and improves decision making
Debate is difficult online, being stifled	Debate has diminished significantly
Meetings more professional and quicker	Meetings more professional and quicker
Body language is difficult to read online	Non-verbal communication is difficult to interpret

The comments are similar in nature and consistent with the data contained within the body of the questionnaire. **Chart 9** however, highlights specific comments received that challenge the views held by each of the responding groups, demonstrating conflicting opinions.

Chart 9: Do you believe Virtual Meetings have had an impact or changed decision making. If yes, please explain how:	
Councillor Comments submitted	Clerk Comments submitted
Less willing to challenge	More aggressive online
Able to make informed decisions from being prepared	Councillors are able to separate the fact from emotion, but decision is taken on feeling
Councillors are more considered in their decision making	Councillors are under-prepared, making gut-feeling, spur of the moment decisions

Comments, although of a positive nature overall, highlighted a general reservation in relation to the use of virtual platforms for meetings. Councillors specifically held the belief that debate would be stifled significantly. It is worth noting that responses were collated early in the lockdown period, had the questionnaire been repeated again at week 12 of lockdown, when councils had experienced online meetings first-hand, the responses may have been different.

4.7 Findings from the research - Interviews:

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, and a national lockdown being imposed, interviews were conducted via Zoom, and face to face interviews held with participants from within the researchers own support bubble.

The 5 interviewees were of varying ages, and differing professional backgrounds, with 2 out of the 5 being previously employed within Local Government.

It would be wrong to draw any firm conclusion from the interviews as the number of participants was considerably smaller when compared to the responses received via the online surveys. The interviews were consistent with the survey results, confirming the views expressed by parish clerks, but not always those of parish councillors.

The face to face interviews had the distinct advantage of enabling the researcher to read non-verbal communication cues and individuals body language. Participants engaged in discussions and debates, inciting numerous emotive responses.

4.8 Analysis & Discussion:

The objective of the research was to develop an understanding of the influence of emotions and/or reason/facts within the decision-making process, and to explore whether emotions, facts and reason could be separated when making a decision.

The questionnaire was based on the findings of the Literature Review, identifying that our default position is to respond emotionally before allowing reason to step in and formulate a considered response.

It is interesting to note that in the interviews the majority of the views expressed by parish clerks were echoed by the interviewees, potentially reflecting the view held by Lasswell (1930,1948) that “politics are the expression of personal emotions”.

The literature review references Plato (1974) and Aristotle (1954,1983) who saw reason as superior to emotions, with Plato describing emotion and reason as two horses pulling in opposite directions. It is worth noting that the views expressed by councillors and clerks were at times conflicting. People who are good at noticing how they feel can calm themselves down and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Recognising emotions and learning to manage them is an important skill.

A specific response worth highlighting is the belief councillors hold of being aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (Chart 1), parish clerks did not share that same view. Chart 1 illustrates that parish clerks also did not accept that councillors were sensitive to other’s feelings or understand how the feelings they experienced went on to influence their actions.

The research findings reveal that both sets of respondents have much in common in their experience of virtual meetings, both believing discussion and debate are stifled. The difference noted from the answers at the beginning of the questionnaire to the comments submitted within the open questions at

the end indicate that reason had started to emerge, overriding the immediate emotional response being evoked within the respondents. The literature review indicated that whilst emotions can be powerful, making us do things we later regret, they generally do not last long, a few minutes at most (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Watson, 2000).

Reason can be described as a process, involving an individual to weigh up the pros and cons. The results shown in Chart 2 provides evidence that councillors believed they weighed up the pros and cons before making a decision, this was echoed within the responses received from parish clerks.

However, Chart 3 offers a comparison to those views expressed within Chart 2. The Literature Review indicates that an effective decision requires due diligence to understand the pros and cons before going with your gut feeling, also referred to as your intuition. Chart 3 highlights that whilst a quarter of clerks believe councillors are impulsive, only 4% of councillors agreed with the statement.

Chart 4 provided further interesting and significant data, with half of the responding clerks stating they believed councillors relied on their gut instinct on the night of a meeting, compared to only 6% of parish councillors. The Literature Review references that the “political brain is an emotional brain” and that “voters, though often well informed and politically aware, think “with their guts”, (Western, 2008).

The Literature Review identified that emotions are strategies, used to manipulate others to manoeuvre individuals into ways of thinking and acting that suits their goals and self-image. The results obtained, and illustrated in Chart 5, provided evidence of the attitudes held by councillors that focus could be maintained on policy and legislation when a decision was of a sensitive or personal nature.

Comparatively, Clerks appeared to reinforce the ascertain that emotions are strategies, believing focus could not be maintained on policy or legislation, suggesting significant influence within the decision-making process being evident.

The results shown in Chart 6 outline the views regarding the effect virtual meetings have had on communication. In being within their own environment, councillors stated they felt more confident and less exposed, but it suggested that the introduction of virtual meetings had not resulted in improved

behaviour. This would benefit from further investigation to determine whether the responses came from an emotional perspective or were factual.

When asked whether virtual meetings had altered decision making in any way, the results showed a 50/50 split but in opposing directions. The questionnaire for parish clerks was distributed at a later date and therefore further into lockdown, having experienced virtual platforms to a greater extent. Interviews were also held further into lockdown, supporting the view that virtual meetings were appearing to have a positive impact on decision making.

4.9 Summary:

The findings from this study and the associated research undertaken have been analysed, providing critical commentary and discussion points.

The results have revealed that whilst we may understand that emotions are incredibly complex, involving a large number of both internal and external function, they are also the basis upon which one's motivation lies.

The results and findings within this chapter, offer the evidence to support the conclusions and recommendations within the next chapter.

Keywords:

Influence, emotions, decision-making, objectives, responses, research data, analysis, discussion, findings, results.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Research objectives: Summary of findings and conclusions

The overall aim of this research has been to develop an understanding of the influence of our emotions and/or reason/facts within the decision-making process.

Within the context of a parish council, the specific objectives of this research were to:

1. **Identify** the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process
2. **Evaluate** the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making at meetings
3. **Explore** whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision
4. **Formulate** recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions

5.1.1 Research objective 1

- **Summary of findings**

Identify the impact the presence of emotions has within the decision-making process

The Literature Review identified that every emotion has a function, a purpose. It is the key to how we handle ourselves and our relationships. If we did not feel, we would be devoid of any understanding or empathy.

The research demonstrated that councillors believed they were aware of their own strengths, were sensitive to others feelings and understood how their feelings influenced their actions.

When councillors were presented with multiple answers within the survey, it was evident they ticked the boxes they “thought” they should, illustrating an emotional response rather than a rational, carefully thought through answer. This suggests that in the moment, decisions are invariably driven by an individual’s emotional state.

- **Conclusion**

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that emotions affect decisions. Feeling angry could result in poor judgement, unconscious bias, or rash decision-making, being clouded by uncertainty and caution. Feeling happy can affect our judgement in just the same way as we ride the wave of happiness and ultimately, enhanced confidence.

You are not the emotion. In identifying the emotion, it loses its power, allowing the rational brain (reason) to assist and provide the logic required. Finding the balance is key in decision making to enable choices that serve communities to be made with confidence.

Emotion and logic play a role in helping us make positive decisions. First, we need to understand where they come from, then notice how they affect our thinking. From that, we can then start to manage our responses and subsequently learn to make better decisions.

5.1.2. Research objective 2

- **Summary of findings**

Evaluate the extent of preparation and thought given by councillors for decision making at meetings/items

The disparity in the results between councillors and clerks provides a clear indication as to both the perceived, and actual preparation for decision making by members prior to meetings. Councillors believed they prepared well, reading their background papers, yet half of the clerks responding believed that most decisions were taken on the night, with councillors relying on their gut instinct.

Virtual meetings appear to have encouraged councillors to be better prepared, however, they expressed that their impersonal nature had resulted in the loss of any debate and discussion. The inability to read body language, combined with the perceived loss of non-verbal cues, had in the councillors view distinctively stifled debate.

- **Conclusion**

It would appear, from the research, that councillors are struggling to adapt to the use of virtual platforms for meetings. The loss of personal interaction having an effect on their decision-making in removing the opportunity for discussion and debate.

Unspoken messages matter. What speakers communicate with body language often sticks with viewers. Zoom elevates the gestures individuals use to emphasise their point, making it more impactful and playing to the viewers feelings and emotions. This information may not register consciously with us, but our subconscious definitely notices.

5.1.3 Research objective 3

- **Summary of findings**

Explore whether emotions, facts and reason can be separated when making a decision

Whilst the majority believed they could separate their emotions when making a decision, the variation in the answers as the questionnaire progressed, would indicate otherwise.

The conclusions are based on the review of related literature which asks the question as to what do we react to first, the information or the emotion it has evoked within? Emotional responses do not happen through choice, they are felt. However, the way we respond is also a choice. The words we use and the actions we take are our choice and we therefore have control of these responses.

There was evidence of the attitudes of the respondents changing when the language was altered within the questions. For example, the use of the word 'impulsive' received considerably less acknowledgement than the word 'gut instinct'. Emotional balance, combined with self-awareness, provides the confidence to make decisions and to then trust your own intuition and gut instinct.

The use of virtual meetings, where it has become difficult to read an individual's body language, may be responsible for initiating fact-based decision making. In participants having to wait their turn to speak and remaining on mute for the duration of the meeting, the opportunity for an immediate emotional response has been removed. The time lapse between listening, processing, and responding to

information has been extended, providing space for emotion and reason to join together to provide the preferred balanced view.

- **Conclusion**

Whilst we may know, and have, the literature to support the theory regarding our emotional responses, we do not ultimately understand the influence or impact our emotions have upon our own, or an individual's decision-making.

The strength of this study is from within the findings indicating our emotions are invariably the first response to any new information received. They are encoded in each of us, having derived from our own individual past experiences and memories. The question remains as to whether this is of detriment to the decision-making process or adds value?

The upcoming councillors of the future, having already been taught Emotional Intelligence at school and within their lives through social media coverage, are more set up to make fact-based decisions rather than emotional responses. However, will the regulation of emotions ensure the decision-making process is one where the heart (emotions) and head (reason) are working together?

The difficulties and changes experienced following the outbreak of Covid-19 have demonstrated a need for Emotional Intelligence more than ever. The adaptations required by individuals as well as organisations have established Emotional Intelligence skills as a core attribute.

5.1.4 Research Objective 4

Formulate recommendations to assist councillors in making decisions that are based on fact and reason rather than their emotions and/or personal opinions

- **Recommendation 1 - Training in Emotional Intelligence**

Conclusion 1 stated that emotions affect decisions. Providing training in emotional intelligence to councillors and clerks to harness their self-awareness, self-management, and empathy is the first recommendation from the findings of the research. Guidance in the continued application of those skills to benefit and enhance relationships is also recommended.

Emotional Intelligence is recognised as an important skill, both personally and professionally. The ability to identify both your own and your counterpart's emotions could change the behaviours within a council setting. There is no validated test for Emotional Intelligence, simply a description of interpersonal skills. It is a skill however, that requires constant practice. Skill development strategies need reviewing regularly to keep up the practice.

- **Recommendation 2 - Body Language and Non-verbal Communication checklist**

From conclusion 2 it is recommended that a simple checklist identifying the non-communication cues and subtle changes in body language when utilising virtual platforms is formulated. The introduction of virtual meetings has changed the way in which body language is interpreted, a simple checklist advising members of changes in behaviour would instil confidence and encourage the debate and discussion they felt had been stifled.

- **Recommendation 3 - Step by Step process for Decision Making**

Conclusion 3 supports the adoption of a defined step by step process for decision making to enable councillors and clerks alike to recognise an initial emotive response, analyse the information rationally and combine the two responses to provide a balanced outcome. The coming together of the head (reason) and heart (emotion).

5.1.5 Summary:

Councillors should balance the needs and interests of their residents, their council, and the political party they represent (Local Government Association, 2012). Whilst there are no specific qualifications required, communication, team working, problem solving, and analytical skills would all be enhanced in achieving a deeper understanding of emotional intelligence.

The research has confirmed that emotions effect decisions, they are something we feel and subsequently respond to. Dan Sperber, a cognitive scientist at Central European University, believes "Even if a decision seems to bring a benefit, if it is ill-judged by others, there's a cost,".

5.3 Self-reflection

This research was hugely enjoyable and worthwhile, being of genuine interest to me.

The questionnaire required considerable thought in structuring the questions the literature review identified and in ensuring the data could be analysed effectively. Interviews were held in a reduced capacity following the outbreak of Covid-19.

A limitation of the research was in not being able to observe meetings in person following the outbreak of Covid-19. To overcome this, observation was undertaken via Zoom, however, understanding the body language of the participants proved difficult, echoed in comments submitted by councillors.

Another limitation of the research was in establishing an individual's tipping point, the point at which reason starts to either override or calm our feelings and whether the presence of feelings and emotions helps or hinders the decision-making process? There is the possibility that if emotions were to be removed, and we were all exposed to the same facts, that we would all arrive at the same decision.

Although this research achieved its aim of developing an understanding of the influence of our emotions and/or reason/facts within the decision-making process, it has also highlighted that further research is required to validate the importance of Emotional Intelligence, particularly within Local Government.

The advantage of having a group of diverse and differing individuals is to enable the varying emotive responses to be heard and interpreted into rational and reasonable responses. With the correct training, the process for decision making can become natural, harmonious, and ultimately effective.

“We can judge our progress by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers, and our willingness to embrace what is true rather than what feels good” - Carl Sagan, 2016.

(8778 words)

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Appendix A – Parish Councillor Survey

Emotions & Decision Making

Emotions & Decision Making

This questionnaire forms part of a dissertation being presented to De Montfort University for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Community Governance.

The aim of the questionnaire is to encourage you to think about the role your emotions play in decisions, and to gain a deeper understanding of their influence on your thinking and behaviour. Participation is both voluntary and confidential and you are free to decline to answer any question.

We currently find ourselves in very challenging times. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on life for us all, changing how we work and interact with each other. Social distancing has meant face to face meetings can no longer be held with parish councils moving to meeting and making decisions via virtual platforms. The severity and enormity of the pandemic will undoubtedly influence our emotional responses.

Thank you for taking the time to assist my research in these extreme times we currently find ourselves in.

1. Which of the following emotional skills do you believe you possess? Please tick all that apply:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am aware of my own feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> I am aware of my emotional triggers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am aware of my own strengths and weaknesses | <input type="checkbox"/> I understand my feelings influence my actions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I notice and am sensitive to others feelings | |

2. Which of the following do you consider before making a decision? Please tick all that apply:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I try to identify the actual problem | <input type="checkbox"/> I give consideration to the perspective of others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I gather the relevant facts and information | <input type="checkbox"/> I prepare my answer carefully |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I look at the options and possible alternatives | <input type="checkbox"/> I take action if and where needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I try to weigh up the pros and cons | <input type="checkbox"/> I rely on my gut instinct |

3. How do you express your opinion about a decision?

- Non-verbally - Communicating through eye contact and facial expressions
- Verbally - through speech, making requests and responses

4. It is completely possible to separate your emotions during decision making?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. Do you believe that your feelings play an important role in making decisions?

- Yes
- No

6. To what extent do you consider other's opinions before making a decision?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. Do you find it difficult to separate your emotions from facts when making a decision?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

8. Do you feel that your own personal opinions and morality steer your decisions?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. Are you able to put your own beliefs or feelings aside when making a decision, especially when it is a decision you do not agree with?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

10. When making a decision do you have a specific process, rationale or justification?

- Yes
- No

11. Does your decision process change depending on either the complexity or size of the decision?

- Always Rarely
 Usually Never
 Sometimes

12. Do you prefer to make decisions on your own, or talk through the options?

- I prefer to make my own decisions
 I use the advice of others when making decisions

13. When making a decision, which of the following are true?

- I feel confident in my ability to make decisions When making decisions I rely upon my instincts
 I think I am a good decision maker I don't consider others opinions before making a decision
 I weigh the pros and cons of each option before I make a decision

14. When giving consideration to a decision, are you:

- Open to the perspective of others?
 Easily swayed by others opinions?
 Defensive with others, particularly if over-ruled?
 Likely to retreat and say nothing?
 Likely to make a decisions on the spur of the moment
 Liable to to overthink a decision

15. How do you feel when your opinion is not heard or valued, or even disregarded by colleagues?

- Frustrated
 Supportive of the majority decision
 Angry
 Accepting of the democratic process

16. Prior to an upcoming meeting, do you:

- Thoroughly read all background papers? Discuss it with family, friends or colleagues?
 Prepare questions in advance? Rely on gut instinct?
 Research the issue in hand? None of the above as you feel confident that you can make a well balanced decision at the meeting?

17. Councillors are regularly reminded to Declare an Interest, either of a personal or prejudicial nature, at meetings. This process ensures the council acts within the interest on the "public", removing the potential for both personal and emotive responses?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

18. Do you believe members can maintain focus on policy and legislation rather than their own emotional response when the decision is of a sensitive or personal nature?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

19. Virtual meetings enable Local Authorities to continue the decision-making process. Will this affect verbal and/or non-verbal communication between people?

- Yes as people tend to be more courteous online
- No as people feel more exposed on video
- Yes as talking to a computer screen can remove the complexity of human interaction
- No as people communicate using body language as well as words

20. Do you believe virtual meetings will change/ impact the decision making process?

- Yes
- No

21. If yes, please explain how?

22. Any further comments?

Thank you for your time and assistance in furthering my research into the influence our emotions have when making decisions.

Appendix B – Parish Clerk Questionnaire :

Emotions & Decision Making - Clerks Survey

Emotions & Decision Making

This questionnaire forms part of a dissertation being presented to De Montfort University for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Community Governance.

The aim of the questionnaire is to encourage you to think about the role emotions play in decisions, and to gain a deeper understanding of their influence on thinking and behaviour. Participation is both voluntary and confidential and you are free to decline to answer any question.

We currently find ourselves in very challenging times. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on life for us all, changing how we work and interact with each other. Social distancing has meant face to face meetings can no longer be held with parish councils moving to meeting and making decisions via virtual platforms. The severity and enormity of the pandemic will undoubtedly influence our emotional responses.

Thank you for taking the time to assist my research in these extreme times we currently find ourselves in.

1. Which of the following emotional skills do you believe the your Councillors possess? Please tick all that apply:

- They are aware of their own feelings
- They are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses
- They are sensitive to others feelings
- They understand their feelings influence my actions

2. Do you believe your Councillors consider any of the following before making a decision? Please tick all that apply:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> They try to identify the actual problem | <input type="checkbox"/> They consider the perspective of others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They gather the relevant facts and information | <input type="checkbox"/> They prepare their answer carefully |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They look at the options and possible alternatives | <input type="checkbox"/> They take action if and where needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They try to weigh up the pros and cons | <input type="checkbox"/> They rely on my gut instinct |

3. Do you believe it is completely possible to separate emotions in decision making?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. Do you feel that Councillors are able to separate their emotions from facts when making a decision?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

5. Do they put their own beliefs or feelings aside when making a decision?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

6. Do your Councillors consider other's opinions before making a decision?

- Yes
- No

7. When making a decision, which of the following statements are true for your Councillors?

- They are confident in their ability to make decisions
- They are good decision makers
- They weigh the pros and cons of each option before making a decision
- They rely upon gut instincts
- They don't consider others opinions before making a decision

8. When considering an item for decision, are they:

- Open to the perspective of others?
- Easily swayed by others opinions?
- Defensive with others, particularly if over-ruled?
- Likely to retreat and say nothing?
- Likely to make a decisions on the spur of the moment

9. When the opinion of an individual Councillor is not heard or valued, or even disregarded by colleagues, what is the general feeling?

- Frustration
- Supportive of the majority decision
- Angry
- Accepting of the democratic process

10. Prior to an upcoming meeting, do your Councillors:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thoroughly read all background papers? | <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss it with family, friends or colleagues? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare questions in advance? | <input type="checkbox"/> Rely on their gut instinct on the night? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research the issue in hand? | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above? |

11. Do you believe members can maintain focus on policy and legislation rather than their own emotional response when the decision is of a sensitive or personal nature?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Do you believe virtual meetings have changed or impacted the decision making process?

- Yes
- No

13. Have Virtual meetings changed the way Councillors communicate with each other?

- Yes, they tend to be more courteous online
- They feel more exposed on video and therefore say less
- Being in their own environment has changed their behaviour, becoming more confident
- Members become frustrated when unable to express their opinions
- The recording & live streaming has encourage better behaviour

14. Any further comments?

Thank you for your time and assistance in furthering my research into the influence our emotions have when making decisions.