

Being On Fire without Burning Out in Ministry

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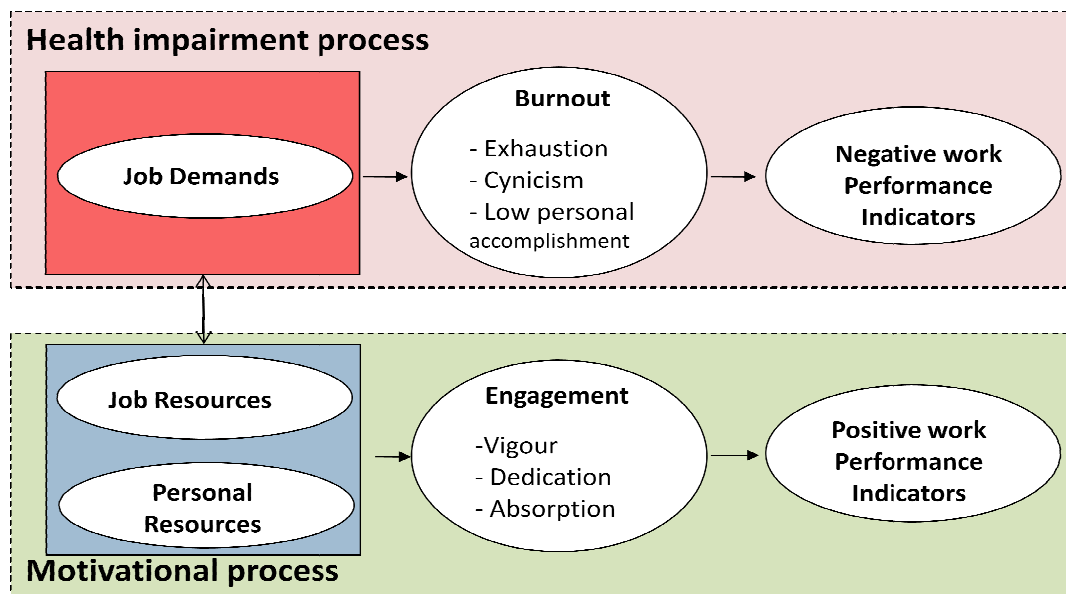
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Introduction:

While most discussions of stress emphasise its negative qualities, stress has its positive side as well. External demands can be challenges rather than threats, and challenges can stimulate creativity, improve performance, and yield such personal benefits as satisfaction and self-esteem. Earlier researchers used the term *distress* to refer to "bad" or disruptive stress, and *eustress* to refer to "good" stress that has positive outcomes. Outcomes of occupational distress and eustress have been conceptualised as the negative experience of burnout and the positive experience of engagement or thriving despite, and almost through, the pressures and stressors.

The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) Model



Burnout: is a psychological syndrome in response to chronic stressors related to the occupation. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming **emotional exhaustion**, feelings of **cynicism** and **detachment** from the job (or clients), and a sense of **ineffectiveness** and **lack of accomplishment**.

Work Engagement: is a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by **vigour**, **dedication**, and **absorption**. Consider Romans 12:11

Job Demands are those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and, therefore, cause stress. Although job demands are not always negative, experiencing them requires high effort that if not replaced due to them being chronic stressors, can deplete energy resources leading to burnout, which results inevitably in negative personal and work outcomes such as anxiety, depression, diminished personal initiative, work quality and quantity, and intention to leave.

Common job demands of Australian clergy and other religious workers:

- Workload, work type, and Time Demands
- Demands of Work-Home interference or blurred family boundaries
- Demands of High Expectations
- Interpersonal conflict and values mismatches
- The variety of tasks and skill-set required
- Control, Role conflict and Ambiguity
- Financial Demands
- Changes in Society
- Fairness

Questions for Discussion:

What are some of the **job demands** you consider significant in your role?

Which job demands would you consider challenges?

Which job demands would you consider hindrances?

Job Resources are those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that:

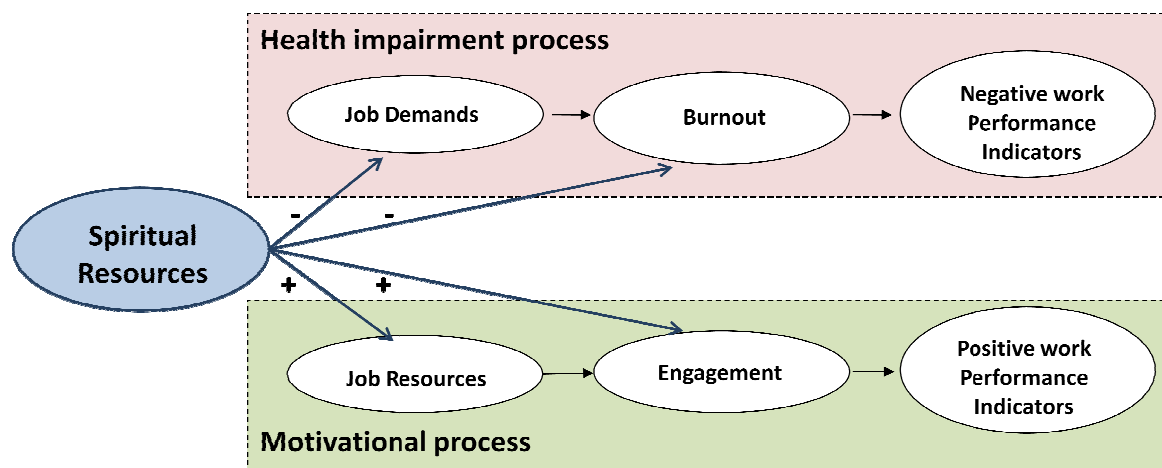
- (a) Help a person achieve work-related goals;
- (b) Reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; and
- (c) Stimulate personal growth and development.

Personal Resources are personal characteristics that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully. Such things as high levels of self-efficacy, an active, problem focused coping style, optimism, extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, etc.

Spiritual Resources a subset of personal resources that consist of spiritual beliefs and practices related to an interaction with God that are linked to resiliency and the ability to effectively influence and impact one's environment. For example:

- Secure attachment to God
- Collaborative religious coping style
- A perceived sense of 'call' to the work.

Together, job and personal resources, due to their (intrinsic and extrinsic) motivational potential, foster people to meet their goals at work. In turn, employees may become more committed and enthused about their job, because they derive fulfilment from it, which is the engaged state, which then flows on to positive work outcomes such as organizational commitment, goal accomplishment, increased initiative and creativity etc.



Note: Beware of making “work engagement” and/or job function the goal of your experience of ministry. One’s spiritual life is the key driver of engagement over time, but if the work (even religious work) becomes the central focus, it is only a matter of time before work engagement decreases.

Questions for Discussion:

What are some of the **job resources** available in your workplace that aid in your accomplishment of work tasks?

Are there any other **job resources** you have experienced in other roles or workplaces that you can recall as being particularly significant in aiding work motivation?

What are some of the **personal resources/practices** you have found to have helped developed engagement with ministry work previously?

Has your spiritual life provided resources for you in generating motivation or managing the demands in your work/ministry? If so, what aspects of your faith and spiritual practices have been particularly “resourceful”?

Demands and Resources Interact

We need to manage and have the right *kind* of demands, as well as having sufficient (plenty!) of job and spiritual resources. Indeed for those in ministry particularly, **focusing on improving job and personal resources (or making the most of what is there) does more good than simply reducing job demands.**

		Resources	
		High	Low
Demands	High	A. Highly motivating and stimulating, but need to detach from work to recover energy.	B. Burnout in role.
	Low	C. Average motivation but plateau in role with potential boredom.	D. Under-stimulated in role with definite boredom – becomes “just a job” at best.

A key point: Resource building is essential – not simply reduction of demands!

Conclusion: Tips for Battling Burnout and Enhancing Engagement

Changing the Individual

- Change work expectations from abstract, overly high ideals to more concrete, short to medium term goals. Detailed and holistic job descriptions with yearly or 6 monthly measurable goals greatly aid this.
- In addition to **daily detachment**, take regular and effective breaks that allow you to emotionally re-charge following peak periods of work. Get to know the rhythms of your working day, week, and indeed year, so that you can seek to find sustainable rhythm of acute workload being balanced with “Sabbath” periods.
- Take good care of yourself. People who are strong in both physical health and psychological well-being are in a better position to handle sources of stress and to be of maximum help to others. Five essential things to attend to is an adequate diet, exercise, relaxation time, average of 8 hours sleep, and watching carefully your thinking habits.
- Establish some aspects of home life that are a haven of rest from work – that is, separated from work demands and can include relationships and activities that are positive and rewarding in themselves.
- Another aspect of self-care is to know your strengths, weaknesses, and what you are passionate about in life and work. If people can make a realistic appraisal of their abilities, limits, desires and ‘callings’, they can recognise the times when they should say “no,” take a break, or get help from others.
- Consider how you involve your faith in your work stress (self-directed, deferral, collaborative). What is your overall tendency? Do you recognise one practice in some situations, but other circumstances are triggers for another? What does (or could) it mean in practice to collaborate with God in your daily situations?
- Central to the above two points is your experience of God. Does either of the two dimensions of anxiety about abandonment or avoidance of intimacy resonate with you? Where would you position yourself on the table below?

Model of Self: Anxiety about Abandonment		
Model of Other: Avoidance of Intimacy	+	-
	Secure (Positive Other and Positive Self)	Preoccupied (Positive Other and Negative Self)
	Dismissive (Negative Other and Positive Self)	Fearful (Negative Other and Negative Self)

- How can you continue to grow in paying attention to God’s personal communication to you, respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of that relationship? Supervision? Engaging a spiritual director? Spiritual disciplines? Personal retreats/conferences etc.

Changing the Organisation

It is essential to focus on the job environment as well as the person in it to battle burnout and promote engagement. Managerial or organisational interventions are usually necessary to change the mix of job demands and job resources, but are insufficient unless individuals take up the resources and opportunities provided. Get to know what extra resources are out there to help you grow and develop provided by your organisation or team. Identify resources that would aid, and put together a proposal for consideration by your leadership.

Workshop “take homes”

My Work Environment

My key Job Demands are:

My key job resources are:

Insights to aid in managing demands and accessing available resources:

Behaviour changes I can enact to manage stress related to the above job demands, and draw on the job resources available:

My Personal Resources

	Simple plan to enact	To whom I will be accountable
Key personal resources I can develop are:		
Key spiritual resources to develop are:		