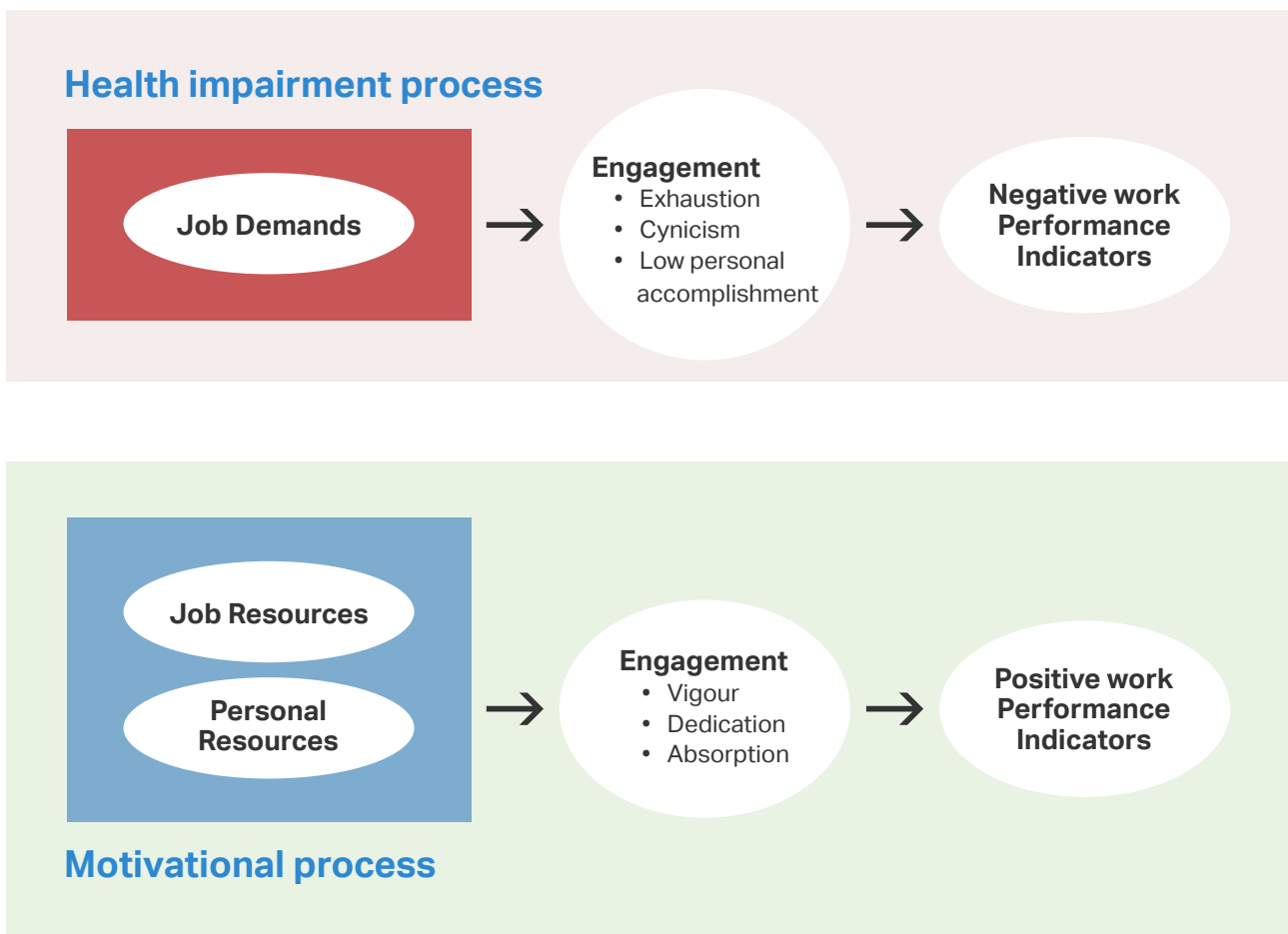


# Battling Burnout and Enhancing Engagement in Ministry

## 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**.

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

**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 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

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

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

**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. Examples include an active/problem-focused coping style, self efficacy, optimism etc.

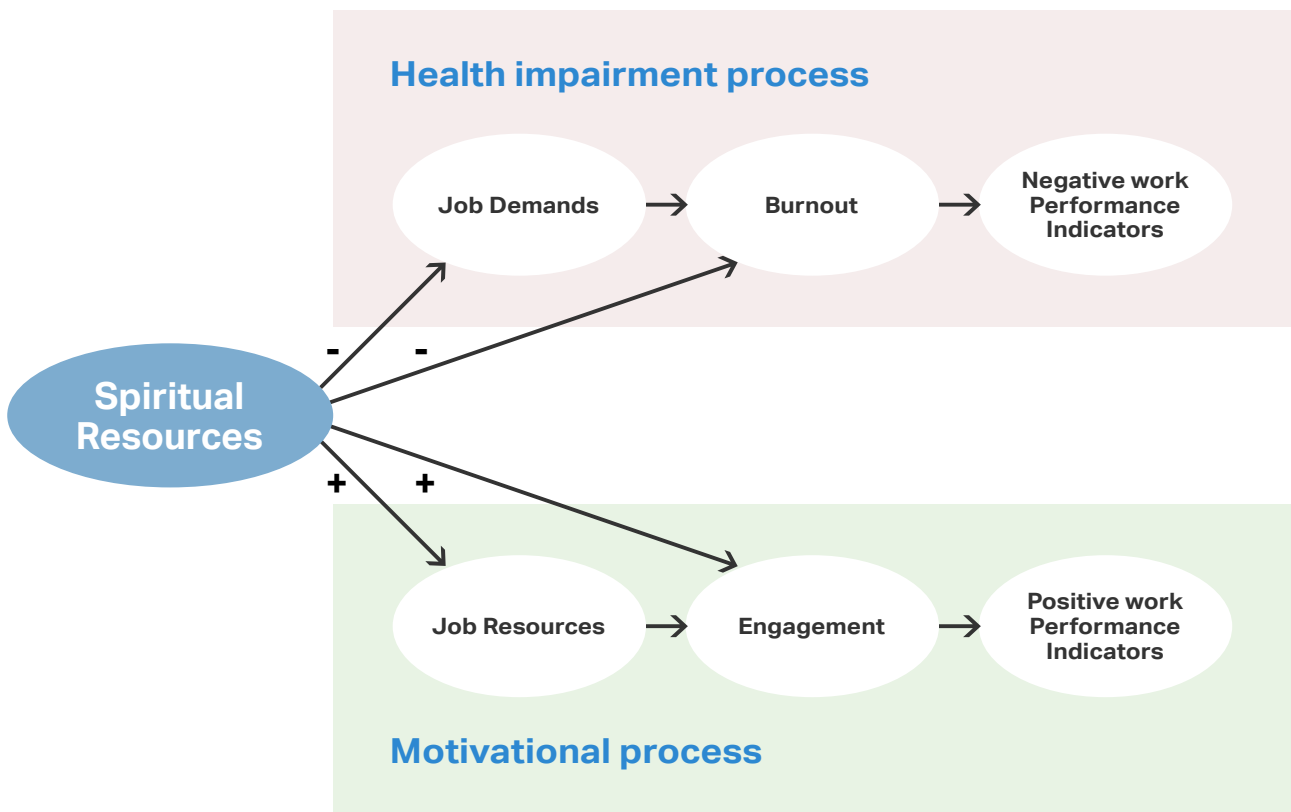
**Spiritual Resources** are a subset of personal resources that consist of spiritual beliefs and practices related to an interaction with God that are linked to resiliency and the ability to effectively influence and impact one's environment. For example:

- 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 engaged, committed and enthused about their job, which then flows on to positive work outcomes such as organizational commitment, goal accomplishment, increased initiative and creativity etc.

There is a *buffering effect* that resources have on the relationship between job demands and exhaustion. Under demanding work conditions, employees who hold high levels of resources are more capable of dealing with these demands. As a result, they experience lower levels of burnout. **Focusing on improving job and personal resources (or making the most of what is there) does more good than simply reducing job demands**

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



## Questions for Discussion:

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

Are there any other **job resources** you have experienced in other roles or workplaces you 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 your ministry previously?

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

## Conclusion: Tips for Battling Burnout and Enhancing Engagement

### Changing the Individual

One key is to generate a sense of personal agency and reduce helplessness. By taking some action one can offset the pervasive tendency to feel that "there's nothing I can do about it." Make someone aware, and seek to do one positive thing (i.e., that either re-energises or is related to self-care as mentioned below) each day.

- 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 a sense of 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 physical 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.
- Establish some aspects of home life that are a haven of rest from work (i.e., separated from work demands) and 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?

		Mode of Self: Anxiety about Abandonment	
		+	-
Mode of Other: Avoidance of Intimacy	+	<b>Secure</b> (Positive Other and Positive Self)	<b>Preoccupied</b> (Positive Other and Negative Self)
	-	<b>Dismissive</b> (Negative Other and Positive Self)	<b>Fearful</b> (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 (congregational?) interventions are usually necessary to change the mix of job demands and job resources, but are insufficient unless educational interventions convey the requisite individual skills and attitudes. Get to know what extra resources are out there to help you grow and develop provided by your Diocese, Synod, State body or organisation. Identify resources that would aid, and suggest those for your organisation’s consideration related to clergy development.

## 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 Work Environment

	<b>Simple plan to act</b>	<b>To whom I will be accountable</b>
<i>Key personal resources I can develop are:</i>		
<i>Key spiritual resources to develop are:</i>		