**Omega Graduate School**

# Dissertation Research Prospectus Template (Pre-Proposal)

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# Problem Statement

The problem is adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions experience a high need for recovery from work and lack adequate spiritual rest ().

# Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

# Background of the Problem (1-2 pages)

According to the American Psychological Association’s (APA) 2021 Work and Well-being Survey of 1,501 U.S. adult workers, 79% of employees had experienced work-related stress the month before the survey. Nearly 3 in 5 employees reported negative impacts of work-related stress (APA, 2020). Increased technological advancements have significantly strained individual employees (Chen et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2022; Marsh et al, 2022). Capitalism as an economic system places an a heavy emphasis on productivity and efficiency, often at the expense of employee well-being (Daniel, 2019; Isham, Mair, & Jackson, 2020; Obrenovic et al., 2020). Western society locates the identity and worth of the individual on their contribution to economic gain. Consumerism has become the vehicle for social status and an external marker of well-being (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021). The ‘Great Resignation’ of 2021 accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic is a societal reaction to the problematic working conditions of the 21st century (Sheather & Slattery, 2021). Some interpret the workforce reaction as a refusal to work amid COVID-19 health risks (Tessema et al., 2022). Alternatively, it may be possible to classify the large-scale resignations as a reevaluation of the meaning of work for the individual in a post-pandemic era (Sull et al., 2022).

Against the backdrop of these societal conditions, higher education relies more on adjunct faculty to deliver course instruction than full-time tenured faculty (Murray, 2019; Spinrad & Relles, 2022). There is heightened stress and exhaustion experienced by adjunct faculty due to the increased job demands and reduced career advancement (Han et al., 2020). Adjunct faculty dissatisfaction has been linked to limited opportunity for advancement and job autonomy, in addition to low pay and job security (Maynard & Joseph, 2008; Bolitzer, 2019; Spinrad et al., 2022). Working remotely from home, telework presents online adjunct faculty with additional work strain by “blurring boundaries” between home and work life (Varga & Denniston, 2022). The advantages presented by telework may become counterproductive by increasing work-related stress (Widar et al., 2022). Moderate to high need for recovery results in burnout: a psychological condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

The two dominant work engagement models in organizational psychology are the Job-Demands Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Job-Crafting Theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The Job-Demands Resources theory views all job characteristics (i.e., psychological, organizational, physical, and social) from an organizational perspective as either demands or resources. Job demands such as high-pressure situations, and emotionally demanding work, among others, increase strain leading to cynicism, work-related stress, and potential burnout. Job resources help employees accomplish goals and mitigate the effects of job demands (Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2017). Job resources such as compensation, career advancement, and peer support, among others, lead to employee motivation, engagement, and productivity (Zhang & Parker, 2019). Employers use this top-down management approach to design jobs with an equitable balance between job demands and resources.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a dominant perspective in organizational psychology. The literature on JD-R is less about provoking strategies for employee agency and more about prescribing employer strategies for balanced job demands and resources. By definition, the JD-R model consists of all job characteristics from an organization’s perspective that categorize all characteristics as job demands or resources. Research demonstrates that individual employees may vary in classifying a job demand as positive (i.e., challenge demand) or negative. Therefore, how can a job characteristic be inherently categorized as a challenge or hindrance demand without factoring in the effect on the employee?

The Job-Crafting Theory is an employee-initiated approach to shaping the work environment to fit individual needs when and as the employee feels necessary (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012; Petrou et al., 2012). Employees engage in crafting through three domains, i.e., tasks, relationships, and cognitions. Job crafting presupposes an employee’s proactive personality to initiate the job crafting process (Niessen, Weseler, & Kostova, 2016). The job crafting process demonstrates positive benefits of employee work engagement, such as vigor, dedication, and absorption (Oprea et al., 2019). Some research suggests that job crafting has adverse side effects, such as misaligned goals, unequal access, overwork, and exploitation (Demerouti, Bakker, & Halbesleben, 2015; Hood, 2019; Boehnlein & Baum, 2022).

Several authors attempt to bring these two theories together. “Job crafting behaviors are characterized by four dimensions: increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands” (Ferreira et al., 2022, p. 9). However, the Job Crafting model (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and Job-Demands Resources model (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012) maintain significant differences. They differ in how they define crafting content, with Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) focusing on changes in task/relational/cognitive boundaries, whereas Tims et al. (2012) focused on changes in job characteristics. They also differ concerning the purpose or aims underpinning crafting, with Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) considering crafting as a way to improve meaning and work identity, whereas Tims et al. (2012) considering crafting as a way to balance job resources and demands to achieve person-job fit” (Zhang and Parker, 2019, p. 127).

Job Demands-Resource theory advocates borrow and conduct research that measures personal resources such as self-efficacy and optimism. Xanthopoulou et al.’s (2007) study, working with the JD-R theory, demonstrated that job resources tend to increase personal resources, thus, resulting in positive individual and organizational outcomes. As job resources are more accessible to employees, then employees will sense greater personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism) and remain engaged in the organization. Xanthopoulou et al.’s (2007) study claims to confirm the JD-R model and expand the model by locating personal resources within the framework. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) argue for including personal resources with the JD-R model based on Xanthopoulou et al.’s (2007) study. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) argue that “personal resources partly mediated the relationship between job resources and work engagement, suggesting that job resources foster the development of personal resources” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 323). In another study, Bakker & Demerouti (2008) explain the reasoning for expanding the JD-R model is based on Xanthopoulou et al.’s (2007) study showing how personal resources affect work engagement and that personal resources and job resources are interrelated. Nevertheless, the authors then recommend further research to establish the inclusion of personal resources in the JD-R model. The fact that personal and job resources are related to increased work engagement and decreased exhaustion is clear. However, the question is whether the JD-R model is designed and intends to incorporate personal resources. Though the original studies in Job Demands-Resource theory excluded personal resources, more recent studies have expanded the model to be more inclusive. Their preference for resources to be exclusively organizational rather than personal. Bakker & Demerouti (2017) allow the JD-R model to encompass personal resources and job crating.

The two dominant work engagement models in organizational psychology previously mentioned are the Job-Demands Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Job-Crafting Theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Each model has significant inadequacies from a Christian worldview perspective. The theoretical model of the Job-Demands Resources theory is based on a unidirectional relationship between the employer/employee. As a top-down approach to organizational behavior, employers are responsible for designing jobs with a proper balance of demands and resources. Job resources are believed to help employees accomplish goals and mitigate the effects of job demands (Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2017). Job demands lead to eventual burnout, and job resources lead to work engagement. This dynamic presupposes a nonmutual, even adversarial, relationship between employer and employee. In this model, there is no room to recognize the potential of employees to have internal motives for productive work and accountability. The burden of accountability is placed on management, and the employee is considered a passive player in the relationship. This model does not allow for mutual goal setting and alignment between management and the employee.

Though Job-Crafting takes an opposite bottom-up approach to organizational behavior, it is incompatible with a Christian worldview perspective on work and employee well-being. First, the Job-Crafting theory presupposes a proactive employee to begin the process of job crafting (Teng & Chen, 2019; Vermooten et al., 2019). The outcomes of job crafting could lead to greater work engagement and job satisfaction or potentially overwork and exploit the employee at the cost of the employee’s well-being (Bolino et al., 2016; Harju, Kaltiainen, & Hakanen, 2021). Experts identify the potential for employee exploitation as the ‘dark side’ of Job-Crafting; however, there is not an adequate explanation for how to avoid this downside (Demerouti, Bakker, & Halbesleben, 2015; Hood, 2019; Boehnlein & Baum, 2022). The Job-Crafting model prioritizes work productivity as the Job-Demands Resources model over employee well-being. The burden of responsibility for rectifying an imbalance of demands and resources is left to the proactive employee. Employees without a proactive personality cannot access the Job-Crafting model’s benefits (Niessen, Weseler, & Kostova, 2016; Vermooten et al., 2019). Studies show conflicting evidence about the ability of employees to job craft in all occupations. Some authors argue that specific work environments and industries may be hostile or incompatible with a proactive employee seeking job crafting (Rudolph et al., 2017), whereas Petrou et al. (2012) stated that job crafting can occur in any occupational context.

Bickerton et al. (2014) was the first study to operationalize spiritual resources as a subcategory of personal resources within Hobfoll’s (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Spiritual resources, defined as beliefs, practices, and experiences that result from a connection to the divine, include a secure attachment to God, collaborative religious coping, and calling (Bickerton et al., 2014). Atttachment to God is considered a personal resource at work because it buffers work demands; however, the authors do not define secure attachment to God. Collaborative religious coping is an “active coping style that combines self-help with seeking the support and involvement of God,” and calling is defined as a “summons to a particular work activity that originates from a transcendent sacred source” (Bickerton et al., 2014, p. 372).

One of the more significant conclusions Bickerton et al. (2014) found was that spiritual resources had a more significant effect on work engagement than job resources among religious workers. This finding supports personal resources within the conceptual framework of Job-Crafting and agrees with Demerouti et al.’s (2001) insistence that Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) should only include organizational resources job control, autonomy, promotion, and task variety. Though the Bickerton et al. (2014) study offers significant advancement of spiritual resources to manage job demands, personal resources are not conceptually part of the JD-R model. The Job Demands-Resources model identifies job characteristics as demands on the employee or a resource the employee can leverage against the demands. However, the founding authors explicitly state that the demands and resources are considered inherent in the job design and cannot include individual employee characteristics (Demerouti et al, 2001). As a result, employees can leverage spiritual resources to improve work engagement. This study would have better fit spiritual resources within the Job-Crafting model since it provides employees the capacity to achieve work engagement from a bottom-up conceptual approach.

Bickerton et al. (2014) inaccurately cites Demerouti et al.’s (2001) founding study on JD-R model as claiming that job resources and personal resources promote work engagement (Bickerton et al., 2014, p. 371). However, Demerouti et al. (2001) take the position that “in our study, we focus on external resources because there is no general agreement regarding which internal resources can be considered stable or situation independent - and which can be changed by adequate job design” (p. 501). The full scope of job resources included feedback, job rewards, job control, participation, job security, and supervisor support (Demerouti et al., 2001) which are strictly confined to job characteristics rather than personal resources.

Spirituality is defined as the “human craving for connection with the transcendent, the desire to integrate the self into a meaningful whole, and attaining one’s potential…” (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2021, p. 127). Mitroff and Denton (1999) also emphasize spirituality as being connected with others in the universe. Three factors compose spirituality: connecting to the work community, finding significance at work, and accessing individual hopefulness (Arokiasamy & Tat, 2020). Cavanagh (1999) defined the concept as “the desire to find ultimate purpose in life, and to live accordingly.”

The literature makes a distinction between workplace spirituality and employee spiritual engagment. Workplace spirituality focuses on the overall environment cultivated by the organization that enable employees to experience a sense of connection with others, transcendence, meaning, and inner satisfaction (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Shankar Pawar, 2008). Enhancing workplace spirituality allows employees to feel connected to the organization, increase work engagement and a sense of belonging to the organization (Arokiasamy & Tat, 2020). “This suggests that higher levels of work engagement could lead to higher levels of workplace spirituality. As such, organisations could potentially promote work engagement (vigour, dedication & absorption), by focusing more on workplace spirituality” (Arokiasamy & Tat, 2020, p. 861). Studies that address spirituality in the workplace are done at an organizational level, yet little research exists on addressing individual employee spiritual engagement (de Diego-Cordero et al., 2021).

Focusing on spiritual engagement as a resource for employee work engagement may enable adjunct faculty working in an online environment to experience recovery from work and relief from work-related stress leading to decreased burnout. Current literature on adjunct faculty promotes negotiating job demands and resources to achieve job satisfaction and well-being (Eagan Jr., Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Bolitzer, 2019). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning spiritual engagement of adjunct faculty to reduce the need for recovery from work (Kühnel, Sonnentag, & Westman, 2009; Büssing et al., 2013; Roof et al., 2017). Spiritual resources are a class of personal resources resulting from a connection with the divine being (Hashemi et al., 2017).

[discuss spiritual resources – sabbath rest, worship, etc]

As faculty experience a need for recovery, university administrators should be looking for new ways to offer or promote spiritual resources. Spirituality plays an additive role in employee well-being. Increasing spiritual engagement positively affects employee well-being and job satisfaction and decreases burnout (Hashemi et al., 2017).

Hashemi et al. (2017) demonstrated that spiritual resources improve employee well-being, reduce turnover intention by positively affecting an employee’s perception of control, the sense of meaning and calling and flexibility.

# Significance

This study will contribute to the gap in research among Christian social researchers studying the effects of spiritual engagement on non-ministerial professions (Büssing et al., 2013; Kühnel, Sonnentag, & Westman, 2009; Roof et al., 2017) by identifying sabbath rest as a spiritual resource for adjunct faculty in need of recovery from work demands. A handful of studies exist on the spiritual resource constructs among clergy (Büssing et al., 2013; Chandler 2009, 2010; Hough et al., 2019; Terry & Cunningham, 2020). However, the same research questions are not being conducted for adjunct faculty in higher education institutions (Bolitzer, 2019). As well as the significant gap in empirical research, social researchers are not integrating faith into the workplace, leaving many Christians to rely on resources based on incompatible worldviews such as atheism, humanism, and pantheism.

Secular scholars have built an extensive research base over the past four decades addressing work engagement, recovery from work, stress, and burnout. There are two primary worldview perspectives in the current established research. First, a humanistic worldview limits the employee resources and work demands to material objects such as compensation, promotion, and benefits or temporal circumstances such as supervisor feedback, environmental pressures, emotional demands, and so forth. Within the humanistic framework, there is no acknowledgment of spiritual resources available for the employee to mitigate work-related stress and burnout. Employers and employees are relegated to negotiating between material, tangible resources and demands to improve work engagement and productivity. Pantheism is a second existing worldview with research support in employee work engagement. Several studies have demonstrated the positive effects of mindfulness on relieving work-related stress and increasing work engagement.

However, there is a gap in the literature concerning spiritual engagement of adjunct faculty to reduce the need for recovery from work (Bolitzer, 2019; Büssing et al., 2013; Kühnel, Sonnentag, & Westman, 2009; Roof et al., 2017). Spiritual resources are a class of personal resources derived from a connection with the divine being (Hashemi et al., 2017). Spiritual engagement differs from workplace spirituality by focusing on individual practices rather than the organizational environment. “Spiritual rest or the practice of Sabbath involves a commitment to a break from labors, rest, and alter daily habits to focus on faith and family” (Chandler, 2010; Gallagher, 2019; Hartman, 2011; Roof et al., 2017).

# Research Questions

RQ1: What is relationship exists, if any, between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions?

RQ2: What relationship, if any, exists between spiritual rest and years of teaching experiecne among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions?

RQ3: What relationship, if any, exists between the need for recovery from work and years of teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions?

# Research Methodology

This study will utilize a quantitative methodology because hypotheses derived from research questions will be tested using statistical analysis.

# Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by Deci and Ryan’s (1980) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which offers a more robust understanding of human motivation in the workplace than the dominant Conservation of Resources theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Gagne et al., 2022; Hobfoll, 1989; Rigby & Ryan, 2018).

This study is framed by Bateman and Crant’s (1993) Proactive Personality theory which offers a systemic “triadic reciprocal causation” perspective on the relationship between the person, environment, and behavior. Proactive behavior directly alters environments with personal and situational causes (Lewin, 1938). Proactive Personality is a disposition toward proactive behaviors (i.e., scan for opportunities, shows initiative, takes action, and perseveres until change or closure occurs) and as such, situational forces unconstrain this personality and who effects environmental change (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

# Instrumentation

This study will utilize the Need for Recovery Scale short-form (NFR) instrument, which measures employee exhaustion and the need for recovery from work (Stevens et al., 2019). The instrument consists of three items.

This study will also utilize the Spiritual Engagement Instrument (SpEI), which measures factors of spiritual engagement in four dimensions, i.e., worship, meditation, fasting, and spiritual rest (Roof, et al., 2017). This study will focus on the spiritual rest subscale consisting of five items.

# Research Design

Correlational: examine the relationship between two continuous variables within the same group from a validated instrument (quantitative, deductive)

This quantitative study will utilize a correlational design because it will examine the relationship between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work among adjunct faculty in online colleges.

# Population and Sampling

The target population for this study will be adjunct facutly in online colleges from the midwestern United States.

Random sampling will ensure eligible participants meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria of part-time non-tenure track faculty teaching college-level courses solely through an online instructional delivery format. The exclusion criteria for this study would be individuals who teach college-level courses in hybrid, blended, or on-campus formats for any of their teaching load. This study would also exclude individuals employed outside of higher education. This study excludes individuals who have retired and since returned in an adjunct status. The random sampling will continue until a sample size of 381 is attained. Permission to recruit participants will be secured from the institutional research board.

# Hypotheses

## Correlational

H01: No statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and the need for recovery from work scores among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha1: A statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and the need for recovery from work scores among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

H02: No statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and years of adjunct teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha2: A statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and years of adjunct teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

H03: No statistically significant relationship exists between recovery from work scores and years of adjunct teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha3: A statistically significant relationship exists between recovery from work scores and years of adjunct teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

# Data Analysis Plan

## Quantitative

This study will test data for normality and relevant assumptions of appropriate statistical procedures.If data do not meet assumptions for parametric procedures (results apply to the population), nonparametric procedures (results apply only to the sample) will be utilized.

This study will utilize Pearson’s Product Moment of Correlation (parametric) or Spearman’s Rank Correlation (nonparametric) to test the hypotheses for statistically significant relationships.

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