Chapter 1

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# Introduction

Stress and burnout are pervasive issues across professions in America, with work-related stress impacting a significant portion of the workforce. According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2021 Work and Well-being Survey, 79% of U.S. employees reported experiencing work-related stress in the month preceding the survey. Technological advancements have intensified this issue, contributing to employees' physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. Burnout, defined by Maslach and Leiter (2016) as the erosion of value, dignity, spirit, and will, is becoming increasingly common in a society that prioritizes profit and efficiency over well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting 'Great Resignation' have highlighted the problematic working conditions of the 21st century, prompting many to reevaluate the meaning of work. Higher education institutions (HEIs), in particular, have seen a growing reliance on adjunct faculty, who face heightened stress due to increased job demands, limited opportunities for advancement, low pay, and job insecurity (Spinrad et al., 2022; Spinrad & Relles, 2022; Danaei, 2019). The shift to remote work has further blurred the boundaries between work and home life, increasing the strain on these educators.

Organizational psychology offers two dominant models to address work engagement: the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model and the Job-Crafting Theory. The JD-R model balances job demands and resources from an employer's perspective. On the other hand, the Job-Crafting Theory empowers employees to reshape their work environment proactively. However, both models have limitations. The JD-R model presumes a top-down, employer-driven approach, often discounting the internal motivations of employees. The Job-Crafting Theory requires employees to be proactive; therefore, the theory is ineffective for employees lacking proactive personality traits. Additionally, job crafting opens employees to organizational exploitation (Kim et al., 2020).

Amid these secular approaches, there is a notable gap in integrating spiritual resources into workplace strategies. Spiritual engagement, mainly the Sabbath rest, can provide a unique means of recovery from work-related stress. Sabbath rest, a break from labor to focus on faith and family, offers a spiritual resource that could benefit adjunct faculty in higher education (Gallagher, 2019).

This study aims to fill the gap in research by examining the effects of spiritual engagement among adjunct faculty. While extensive research exists on the spiritual resources for clergy, similar studies for adjunct faculty are scarce. This research will explore how Sabbath rest, as a form of spiritual engagement, can help adjunct faculty manage work demands and recover from stress.

By integrating spiritual engagement into the workplace, this study offers an alternative to the dominant secular models, providing Christian employees with resources aligned with their worldview.

# Statement of the Problem

The problem is that adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions experience a high need for recovery from work and lack adequate spiritual rest (Varga & Denniston, 2022; Han et al., 2020; Bennet, 2003; Walker & McPhail, 2009; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2015).

# 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.

# Significance

This study aims to address a significant gap in research by examining the effects of spiritual engagement on adjunct faculty in higher education. While there is considerable research on spiritual resources for clergy (Büssing et al., 2013; Chandler, 2009; Chandler, 2010; Hough et al., 2019; Terry & Cunningham, 2020), similar inquiries have not been extended to adjunct faculty (Bolitzer, 2019). This lack of research leaves a notable void in understanding how spiritual practices, such as Sabbath rest, can serve as a resource for these professionals to recover from work demands.

Christian social researchers have not sufficiently explored the use of spiritual resources to help employees manage work-related stress, forcing many to rely on resources derived from incompatible worldviews. Over the past four decades, secular research has predominantly focused on material and temporal resources within a humanistic worldview, excluding spiritual resources. While some studies have shown the benefits of mindfulness on work engagement (Doig et al., 2023; Baker & Lee, 2020), rooted in pantheistic views, there is little investigation into the role of spiritual engagement for adjunct faculty.

Spiritual resources, which stem from a connection with the divine being, offer employees a different support dimension. Unlike workplace spirituality, which focuses on creating a supportive organizational environment, spiritual engagement emphasizes individual practices. For example, Sabbath rest involves taking a break from work, altering daily routines, and focusing on faith and family, providing a crucial means of recovery from work-related stress.

This study will contribute to understanding how spiritual engagement, particularly the practice of Sabbath rest, can aid adjunct faculty in managing work demands, thus filling a critical gap in empirical research and practical applications for integrating faith into professional settings.

# Background of the Problem

Work-related stress is at an all-time high across various professions in America. According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2021 Work and Well-being Survey, 79% of U.S. employees experienced work-related stress in the month preceding the survey, with nearly 60% reporting negative impacts. Maslach et al. (2001) define burnout as a severe disruption between individuals and their work roles, eroding employee value, dignity, spirit, and will.

Several social and economic factors contribute to the current state of high work-related stress. First, modern American society, prioritizing profit and efficiency over well-being, has heightened the prevalence of burnout (Gallagher, 2019), particularly among Millennials and Generation X employees. The capitalist economic system in Western societies emphasizes productivity and efficiency, often at the expense of employee well-being (Obrenovic et al., 2020). This focus on economic gain ties individual identity and worth to their economic contributions, with consumerism becoming a key marker of social status and well-being (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021). Second, decades of technological advancements have further exacerbated the strain on employees, leading to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion and, ultimately, burnout (Marsh et al., 2022). Third, the 'Great Resignation' of 2021, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects a societal reevaluation of work's meaning, with many employees resigning to avoid health risks and reassess their work-life balance.

Trends in higher education have complicated the situation for adjunct faculty. Higher education increasingly relies on adjunct faculty rather than full-time tenured professors for course delivery (Murray, 2019; Spinrad & Relles, 2022). This trend results in heightened stress and exhaustion among adjunct faculty due to increased job demands, low pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and job insecurity (Han et al., 2020). Adjunct faculty also face additional challenges when working remotely, as telework blurs the boundaries between home and work life, further increasing work-related stress (Varga & Denniston, 2022).

Two dominant models in organizational psychology address work engagement: the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model and the Job-Crafting Theory. The JD-R model categorizes job characteristics as either demands or resources, with job demands increasing strain and potential burnout and job resources fostering motivation and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Zhang & Parker, 2019). On the other hand, the Job-Crafting Theory emphasizes employee-initiated changes to their tasks, relationships, and cognitive boundaries to enhance work engagement (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Oprea et al., 2019). Both models have limitations, particularly from a Christian worldview perspective, where the JD-R model presumes a discrepant employer-employee relationship, and the Job-Crafting model relies on a proactive employee disposition.

Recent research suggests categorizing spiritual resources as a subset of personal resources within work engagement models (Bickerton et al., 2014). Spiritual resources, such as attachment to God, collaborative religious coping, and a sense of calling, significantly impact work engagement and can buffer against job demands (Hashemi et al., 2017). Studies show that these spiritual resources enhance employee well-being and job satisfaction, reducing burnout (Arokiasamy & Tat, 2020; Nwanzu & Babalola, 2021; Hashemi et al., 2017; Roof, 2015; Roof, 2016; Roof et al., 2017). However, traditional JD-R models do not include personal resources like spirituality, focusing instead on organizational characteristics (Demerouti et al., 2001). At best, research by Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) show a dynamic, but not causal, relationship between work and personal resources. Therefore, it remains inconclusive to suggest that personal resources could be integrated into the Job-Demands Resources model.

Given adjunct faculty's high stress and burnout levels, particularly in online environments, HEI administrators should consider promoting spiritual engagement to improve well-being and reduce burnout. Spirituality in the workplace fosters a sense of connection, meaning, and hope, which can positively impact work engagement and satisfaction. Emphasizing spiritual resources can offer adjunct faculty an additional tool for recovery and resilience, addressing the gap in the literature on adjunct faculty's spiritual engagement and its effects on work-related stress.

# Research Questions

This study will examine the relationship between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work. The following quantifiable research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: What 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 experience 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?

This study formulates specific hypotheses to guide the investigation of the relationships between spiritual rest, the need for recovery from work, and teaching experience among adjunct faculty in online HEIs. These hypotheses aim to determine whether statistically significant relationships exist between these variables, thus providing an understanding of the potential impacts of spiritual rest on faculty need for recovery from work. This study seeks to generate empirical evidence that can inform faculty practices, HEI policies, and support systems designed to enhance the overall work experience for adjunct faculty. The following section details the hypotheses to be examined.

# Hypotheses

The hypotheses are aligned with the study's research questions. The following hypotheses will be examined in this study:

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.

H02a: No statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and faculty length of employment among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha2a: A statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual rest subscale scores and faculty length of employment 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.

H03a: No statistically significant relationship exists between recovery from work scores and faculty length of employment among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha3a: A statistically significant relationship exists between recovery from work scores and faculty length of employment among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

## Hypotheses for "Other Findings" (Indirectly Related to RQs)

The following hypotheses, though not directly related to the research questions, will be examined for other findings:

H04: No statistically significant difference exists in spiritual rest subscale scores between retired and non-retired status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha4: A statistically significant difference exists in spiritual rest subscale scores between retired and non-retired status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

H05: No statistically significant difference exists in spiritual rest subscale scores between full and part-time status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha5: A statistically significant difference exists in spiritual rest subscale scores between full and part-time status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

H06: No statistically significant difference exists in recovery from work scores between retired and non-retired status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha6: A statistically significant difference exists in recovery from work scores between retired and non-retired status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

H07: No statistically significant difference exists in recovery from work scores between full and part-time status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

Ha7: A statistically significant difference exists in recovery from work scores between full and part-time status among adjunct faculty in online higher education institutions.

The following section outlines the research methodology and design that will be employed to investigate these relationships. This study adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing correlational methods to analyze the data gathered from adjunct faculty in online HEIs. By employing validated instruments and statistical techniques, the study aims to investigate the potential connections between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work and how the length of teaching experience may influence these variables. The following section will elaborate on the quantitative methods and specific design elements used to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

# Research Methodology and Design

This study will utilize quantitative research methods to gather and analyze data, focusing on the relationship between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work among adjunct faculty in online HEIs. The study will employ the Spearman rank-order correlation to examine the relationships between these variables, measured on an ordinal scale. Spiritual rest is the predictor variable, while the need for recovery from work is the outcome variable.

Quantitative correlational research seeks to establish relationships between variables within a population by using numeric data to describe attitudes, behaviors, or opinions. This approach emphasizes objectivity and independence from the subjects, ensuring that the theoretical framework accurately reflects the examined constructs. Using validated and reliable instruments ensures that the variables are measurable and the results are statistically robust.

The target population comprises adjunct faculty in online HEIs in the United States. These part-time faculty members often work at multiple institutions to achieve full-time workloads. Convenience sampling will ensure participants meet specific criteria: part-time, non-tenure track faculty teaching exclusively online. The study excludes those teaching hybrid, blended, or on-campus formats and those employed outside of higher education or with tenured/tenure-track status. A sample size of 55-100 participants will be targeted, with recruitment permission obtained from the institutional review board.

The study will use two validated instruments: the Spiritual Engagement Instrument (SpEI) and the Need for Recovery Scale short-form (NFR). The SpEI measures spiritual engagement across four dimensions: worship, meditation, fasting, and spiritual rest. This study will focus on the spiritual rest subscale, which captures perceptions of spiritual practices within a participant's faith tradition. The NFR instrument assesses employee exhaustion and the need for recovery from work, consisting of three items that measure aspects of post-work fatigue and recovery.

The research questions align with the constructs measured by these instruments, seeking to determine the relationships between spiritual rest, need for recovery from work, and years of teaching experience. The validity and reliability of the instruments are supported by high Cronbach alpha values, indicating strong internal consistency and construct validity.

Data will be collected via an online survey over a six-week period, with participants completing demographic and assessment surveys through Survio survey software. Unique identifiers will ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Data preparation will involve cleaning and organizing quantitative data, followed by statistical analysis using the Spearman rank-order correlation to test the hypotheses and explore the relationships between variables.

This methodological approach allows for a rigorous examination of the theoretical relationships between spiritual rest and the need for recovery from work, contributing valuable insights to adjunct faculty's well-being and job satisfaction in online higher education settings.

# Operational Definitions

Definitions are provided for the study's variables, key terms, and concepts. The following definitions are referred to throughout the study:

*Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)* – Higher educational institutions include not only universities and colleges but also various professional schools that provide preparation in such fields as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art, as well as teacher-training schools, junior colleges, and institutes of technology" (Britannica, 2024).

*Academic capitalism* – Academic capitalism is the application of capitalism within higher education institutions (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

*Adjunct faculty* – Any faculty member, instructor, or lecturer who is part-time and off the tenure track. Adjunct faculty are defined as part-time employees who are classified as nontenured or non-permanent, paid per a yearly contract or by course (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Kezar, 2012). This may include part-time non-tenure track faculty and lecturers.

*Spiritual resources* – Spiritual resources are beliefs, practices, and experiences resulting from a connection to the divine, including a secure attachment to God, collaborative religious coping, and calling (Hashemi et al., 2017; Bickerton et al., 2014). Spiritual resources are a subcategory of personal resources within Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory.

*Sabbath rest* - Sabbath rest is a spiritual discipline practiced daily to "create space for God" and as an "attitude of orientation towards the living God in each day, and as a sacred time to pursue God in each week" (Gallagher, 2019, p. 143). Sabbath is a preparation for eternity that involves mystical, spiritual discipline separate from regular activity, aligning oneself to God's timing (Heschel, 1951; Gallagher, 2019). Sabbath involves family worship, remembering God's nature and activity, and appreciating the connection between God, self, and others. This study views Sabbath rest as spiritual rest firmly within the Judeo-Christian context.

*Recovery from work* - Recovery refers to "unwinding and restoration processes during which a person's strain level that has increased as a reaction to a stressor or any other demand returns to its prestressor level" (Sonnentag et al. 2017, p. 366). Job strain symptoms include anger, distress, anxiety, fatigue, exhaustion, and a depressed mood.

*Stress* – In a generic sense, stress is defined as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand," and more specifically, within the behavioral sciences, stress is the "perception of threat, with resulting anxiety, discomfort, emotional tension, and difficulty in adjustment" (Fink, 2010, p. 5).

*Burnout* – "Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397).

*Self-Determination Theory (SDT)* – Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivation theory that focuses on the individual's ability to remain motivated at work within specific environmental factors such as management style and support (Rigby & Ryan, 2018).

*Effort recovery model* – The Effort Recovery Model (ERM) provides another theory of human motivation that connects physiological and psychological systems. Three components of the Effort-Recovery Model: 1) employees use psychological resources to deal with work-related activity; 2) resource usage leads to task performance and resource decline; and 3) recovery can begin when the work-related demands end (Meijman & Mulder, 1998).

*Theology of work* – A theology of work is a theological framework built on the concept that God designs human work to bring restoration to all of creation (Volf, 2001; Diddams & Daniels, 2008; Griesinger, 2010).

# Scope and Delimitations

This study will examine the impact of spiritual engagement, particularly Sabbath rest, as a spiritual resource for adjunct faculty in higher education institutions in the United States. The primary focus will be on understanding how spiritual engagement can serve as a mechanism for recovery from work-related stress and burnout. The study is grounded in adjunct faculty who often face challenges such as low pay, lack of job security, and insufficient institutional support.

The objectives of this study will be to:

* Investigate the relationship between spiritual engagement and the need for recovery from work among adjunct faculty.
* Identify the role of Sabbath rest in mitigating work-related stress and enhancing overall well-being.
* Contribute to the existing body of literature by integrating faith-based perspectives into work engagement and recovery discussions.

Data will be collected through surveys with adjunct faculty members currently employed at various higher education institutions across the United States. The study will utilize quantitative methods to understand the research problem. The time frame for the study includes data collection over six weeks, followed by analysis and interpretation of results.

This study is delimited to adjunct faculty in higher education institutions within the United States, excluding full-time, tenured, or tenure-track faculty. The focus on adjunct faculty is due to their distinctive employment conditions and the heightened stress they experience compared to their tenured counterparts. The study will explore the practice of Sabbath rest as a form of spiritual engagement, excluding other forms of spiritual practices that may also contribute to stress reduction and well-being. This choice is justified by the need to focus on a single, well-defined spiritual resource.

The study is further delimited by not aiming to compare the effectiveness of Sabbath rest with other secular or religious stress management techniques, nor does it address broader organizational strategies for reducing work-related stress. Instead, it concentrates on the individual practices of adjunct faculty and how these practices influence their recovery from work demands.

Furthermore, the study is constrained by the availability and willingness of adjunct faculty to participate in the research. The findings may be influenced by self-reporting biases and the specific characteristics of the sampled population, which may limit the generalizability of the results to all adjunct faculty members in the United States.

# Limitations

This study was limited due to the sampling technique and study design. Convenience sampling may not represent the population sample; therefore, generalizability will be limited. Also, the sample size is limited to adjunct faculty from a select number of higher education institutions in the United States, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other career fields. The self-reported nature of the survey data introduces the potential for response bias, where participants might provide socially desirable answers rather than their true experiences. Additionally, the study focuses specifically on the practice of Sabbath rest, excluding other spiritual practices that could also impact work-related stress and recovery. The reliance on self-reported measures for assessing stress and spiritual engagement may lead to subjective interpretations of these constructs.

Another limitation is the study's cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time and does not account for changes over time or long-term effects of spiritual engagement. Finally, the study's findings are context-specific and may not apply to adjunct faculty outside the United States in different cultural or institutional settings.

Finally, this study acknowledges the potential limitations in integrating faith-based perspectives into broader organizational and psychological theories, recognizing that the findings may primarily resonate with those who share similar theological beliefs.

# Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie this study on the effects of Sabbath rest as a spiritual resource for adjunct faculty. First, it is assumed that participants will provide honest and accurate responses to the survey questions regarding their experiences with work-related stress and spiritual engagement. This assumption is critical, as the reliability of the data depends on the truthfulness of the participants' self-reports. Second, it is assumed that participants understand the survey questions and have the ability to reflect on and report their experiences accurately. This assumption is important to ensure that the data collected is meaningful and interpretable.

Third, the instruments used to measure stress, burnout, and spiritual engagement are assumed to be valid and reliable. These tools have been previously validated in similar studies, and their use in this research assumes that they accurately capture the constructs of interest. Fourth, the study assumes that the Self-Determination Theory's framework and the Sabbath rest are appropriate for examining the relationship between work-related stress and spiritual engagement among adjunct faculty.

Finally, it is assumed that the conditions under which the study is conducted are stable and not significantly influenced by external factors such as institutional policies or economic changes that could impact the participants' experiences of stress and spiritual engagement.

# Summary and Conclusion

This chapter establishes the foundation for investigating the role of Sabbath rest as a spiritual resource for adjunct faculty experiencing work-related stress and burnout. The pervasiveness of work-related stress is evidenced across various professions in America (APA (American Psychological Association), 2020). Notably, there are heightened stress levels among adjunct faculty in higher education (Varga & Denniston, 2022; Han et al., 2020). Work-related stress significantly impacts mental and physical health, decreasing productivity and increasing medical costs. The problem is further aggravated by the growing reliance on adjunct faculty, who often face job insecurity, low pay, and limited career advancement opportunities (Spinrad et al., 2022; Spinrad & Relles, 2022; Danaei, 2019).

The study's theoretical frameworks are the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Effort-Recovery Model (ERM). SDT emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It provides a lens to understand how adjunct faculty can achieve greater work engagement and satisfaction through these psychological needs. On the other hand, the Effort-Recovery Model focuses on the balance between work effort and recovery, highlighting the need for adequate recovery periods to prevent stress and burnout (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Both models, however, have limitations in addressing spiritual resources and personal agency from a Christian worldview perspective.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the gap in research on the effects of spiritual engagement on adjunct faculty. While there is extensive literature on workplace stress and recovery, most of it is framed within secular worldviews that do not consider spiritual resources. This study aims to integrate faith into the discussion by identifying Sabbath rest as a valuable spiritual resource for adjunct faculty. Sabbath rest, defined as a commitment to stop work and focus on faith and family, is suggested to help mitigate work-related stress and burnout, thereby enhancing overall well-being.

This study will delve deeper into the literature on work-related stress, burnout, and recovery strategies in the following chapters, explicitly focusing on adjunct faculty. It will then present the research methodology, including the design, sample selection, and data collection procedures. The results of the study will be analyzed and discussed, highlighting the impact of Sabbath rest on reducing work-related stress and burnout among adjunct faculty. Finally, the dissertation will conclude with implications for practice, recommendations for higher education institutions, and suggestions for future research.

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