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Job Crafting: A Potential Tool for the Proactive Employee and Employer

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In the ever changing world of business, companies are constantly trying to set themselves apart from their competitors. This means looking to the future and adapting to any challenges or coming changes to their field. Job crafting may be able to help an organization achieve this aim. Job crafting is an employee behavior that involves customizing their role to their own strengths and interests. As a result, it creates more satisfied and productive employees (van Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks 2017; Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, & Zacher 2017). It also fortifies a proactive attitude in the work place, encouraging employees to predict future challenges and adapt for them in the present. This allows a company to react quickly to any challenges in its field because, in contrast to traditional top-down job redesign, employees can be better equipped to adapt without specific instruction from their supervisor. Job crafting has numerous benefits for both employees and employers; moreover, it is already present in many organizations and can be incorporated further through a variety of interventions, so long as certain mitigating factors are considered.

Due to a recent increase in research about job crafting, its formal definition is still somewhat fluid as the term develops. Most commonly, job crafting is "proactive work behavior that involves employees actively changing the (perceived) characteristics of their jobs" as well as "the action employees take to shape, mold, and reduce their jobs" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001; Tims & Bakker 2010). It is important to note that most job crafting goes unnoticed by supervisors. In one study of 107 salespeople, the majority of supervisors were unaware of any change (Lyons 2008). Job crafting is usually a subtle change only noticeable to the employee making the change. It can take the form of asking a coworker for help and feedback or seeking more responsibility at work (Tims & Bakker 2010). However, it is a fairly common behavior. The same study of salespeople found that 78% of workers interviewed tried job crafting at least

once in the past year (Lyons 2008). Many employees may not even realize that their actions

qualify as job crafting; nonetheless, these small changes can have a significant impact on both

the worker and the organization.

In order to better understand and measure job crafting in the workplace, Tims and Bakker

applied the job demands resource model (JD-R) to the concept (2010). They posited that two

aspects frame job crafting. The first is job demands, which are job characteristics that, if they

exceed the employee's ability to adapt, can cause unnecessary strain on the worker. For example,

job demands can include work pressure, emotionally demanding interactions with customers, or

any other action that has "certain physiological and psychological cost," (Tims & Bakker 2010).

One such cost is the health impairment process, which can be damaged when excessive demands

and poor job design deplete employee physical and mental resources. This can eventually lead to

employee burnout, which may result in poor health and quality of life for the worker as well as

poorer quality work and higher turnover for the organization (Tims & Bakker 2010). Tims and

Bakker proposed that employees use job crafting to both increase and decrease their job

demands. A worker might increase job demands in order to be more challenged at work. This

may involve volunteering for extra projects of interest to the employee or taking on new

responsibilities. However, workers will only increase their job demands if there are proper

resources available to them. An employee will decrease job demands if they feel overwhelmed or

that the strain of their job is too much. This may take the form of asking other coworkers for help

or interacting less with negative customers (Tims & Bakker 2010).

The other aspect of the JD-R model is job resources, which are defined as anything that

help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth (Tims &

Bakker 2010). Tims and Bakker call the process through which job resources increase the level

of work engagement the motivational process; this mediates the relationship between job resources and positive outcomes such as work enhancement. An employee might use job crafting to increase their job resources as a higher level of job resources is linked to higher work engagement and a greater likelihood of taking on new challenges. A study of teachers showed that intrinsic motivation and work enjoyment at the end of the school year was predicted by the level of job resources they had at the beginning of the year (Salanova, Bakker, Llorens 2006). Tims and Bakker posited that workers will not use job crafting to decrease the amount of job resources available to them (Tims & Bakker 2010). It should be noted that some frames for job crafting include making a cognitive decision to give the work new meaning, such as Wrzesniewski and Dutton's "changing the meaning of the work," (2001). However, this was excluded from the JD-R model because this cognitive choice was considered more of a denial tactic than the proactive action necessary for job crafting. The JD-R model has been used in many other studies and can be very useful to identify and encourage job crafting in an organization.

Although any employee can utilize job crafting, certain factors increase the likelihood that they will. One of the most significant predictors of job crafting is the amount of autonomy and employee has (Tims & Bakker 2010). In a study of the likelihood that salespeople will engage in job crafting, a positive correlation was found between crafting and perceived control (Lyons 2008); therefore, an employee needs to feel that they have some control over their jobs before they will take the initiative to change it. Moreover, it is important that leaders and subordinates have the same expectations of autonomy. The research by Wong, Skerlavaj, & Cerne demonstrates that autonomy expectation congruence has a positive relationship with perceived competency mobilization, which was a predictor for job crafting (2017). Tims and

Bakker also posited additional predictors of job crafting, including low person-job fit, task independence, proactive personalities, high self-efficacy, and a promotion focus (2010). In addition, a meta-analysis of 122 independent samples composed of 35,670 workers discovered that demographics can also impact the likelihood of job crafting (Rudolph et al. 2017). Both age and tenure are inversely related to job crafting, however the correlation between tenure and job crafting was fairly weak. Education level and number of work hours had a positive relationship with job crafting. The analysis also found that women were more likely to utilize job crafting than men (Rudolph et al. 2017). When looking for pre-existing job crafting in an organization, these predictors may be useful to identify workers more likely to engage in crafting behaviors.

Job crafting can be exceptionally beneficial to both employees and their organizations. For the company, job crafting has a positive relationship with work performance and output quality (Ghitulescu 2006; Rudolph et al. 2017). It also has a positive correlation with work engagement, which is defined as an "active motivational state that is comprised of vigor, dedication, and absorption," all of which are exceptionally desirable qualities in an employee (Rudolph et al. 2017; Gordon, Demerouti, Le Blanc, Bakker, Bipp, Verhagen 2018). In a study of job crafting in flight attendants, a positive relationship was again found between job crafting and work engagement, and high work engagement was found to reduce quitting intentions, thereby creating a lower turnover for the company (Karatepe & Eslamou 2017). More productive and engaged employees as well as lower turnover could be beneficial to any company trying to staying competitive in the current market.

In addition to overall performance, job crafting has been linked to specific skills beneficial to an organization as well. A quasi-experiment with nurses exposed to a job crafting intervention specifically designed to encourage the use of checklists with elderly patients was

successfully able to target and improve this specific goal with job crafting (Gordon et al. 2018). Customer service can also be improved with job crafting. The previously mentioned study about flight attendants showed that job crafting had a positive relationship with service recovery, which was defined as "…employees' perceptions of their own abilities and actions to resolve a service failure to the satisfaction of the customer," (Karatepe & Eslamou 2017). Job crafting has also been observed improving customer service in other fields. For example, a doctoral dissertation done on midwives' coping techniques discovered a midwife who counseled a distressed patient based on a shared experience (Barker Caza 2007). Although counseling was not formally part of the midwife's job description, she changed the parameters of her responsibilities to help a patient in need, providing better care. Job crafting can be utilized to improve specific areas of weakness for an employee or organization in addition to overall general improvements.

In terms of employee benefits, job crafting is aimed entirely at improving the work life of the employee. It can be used to make work more engaging by tailoring the responsibilities of the worker to their interests. For example, a hair stylist who enjoys teaching could take the time to teach his clients important hair care techniques (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski 2007). This not only makes the work more enjoyable for the hair stylist, but also improves the experience of his customers. In addition, job crafting can be used to decrease job strain. This results in higher job satisfaction and less burnout (Rudolph et al. 2017; Tims & Bakker 2010). It also gives the employee a sense of control and meaning at work as well as a more positive self-image (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001; Lyons 2008). When considering the numerous employee benefits, it is evident why job crafting is so common.

Since job crafting can have so many beneficial effects, both for employees and employers, it is prudent to ask how organizations can encourage job crafting behavior.

Interventions specifically designed to increase job crafting have been successful in previous research. An intervention performed by van Wingerden et al. during their quasi-experiment on a sample of teachers resulted in a significant increase in job crafting (2017). The teachers placed in the intervention group participated in three training sessions. During the first two training sessions, the teachers completed personal, job and person-job fit analysis as well as made a plan to achieve a short-term change in their work using job crafting. Four weeks later, the intervention group had their final training, which included an evaluation of their job crafting attempt and making plans for future crafting. The quasi-experiment found that teachers that participated in the intervention increased their job challenges through job crafting significantly more in comparison to the control group (van Wingerden et al. 2017).

A similar style intervention was used in a study about job crafting in healthcare. Both nurses and medical specialists went to a training session that began with an introduction to the concept of job crafting (Gordon et al. 2018). The participants then participated in experimental learning narratives, which consisted of finding ways to use job crafting in given scenarios. The sessions concluded with participants creating their own plan to use job crafting in the near future. Once again, the intervention was positively related to an increase in some job crafting behaviors; the medical specialists sought more challenges and the nurses sought more resources (Gordon et al. 2018). Both successful intervention methods involved practicing job crafting analysis on practice situations and creating a personal plan for crafting. Therefore, organizations that hope to increase job crafting behaviors in their employees through training may want to include these elements in their training sessions.

If an organization wants to increase job crafting behavior without committing to an entire training session, there are other smaller measures that can encourage the behavior. For starters,

managers can try to design jobs that leave room for crafting (Berg et al. 2007). While it is still possible to customize a rigid job, it is far more challenging. In addition, employees might take the severe structure as a sign that job crafting is discouraged in the organization (Lyons 2008). Another method is ensuring clear communication between leaders and subordinates about autonomy expectations, especially when leaders utilize coalition tactics (Wong et al. 2017). Coalition tactics could be supporting a coworker of the subordinate who exhibits the desired behavior or enlisting another worker to speak to the subordinate about a particular issue. In the study by Wong et al., the positive relationship between perceived competence mobilization and job crafting was moderated by the leader's use of coalition influences. In fact, subordinates not exposed to leader coalition tactics were less able to realize the value of autonomy in their jobs (Wong et al. 2017).

Another requirement for job crafting is trust (Berg et al. 2007). Employees need to feel that their supervisors trust them in order to take a risk or challenge the status quo. Without the confidence to do either of those things, job crafting is less likely to occur. Moreover, employees only engage in job crafting when they consider their jobs to be worth the effort. This is demonstrated in the positive relationship between job crafting and perceived competency mobilization (Wong et al. 2017). Workers only utilized job crafting when they believed that a higher level of competency would allow them to advance further in the company. Therefore, organizations could try to ensure that, not only do deserving employee progress in the company, but it is clear to workers that this advancement is possible for anyone who demonstrates their competence and initiative (Wong et al. 2017).

There are some important factors companies planning to encourage job crafting should consider. First, the main purpose of job crafting is to benefit the employee, not the organization.

It usually does benefit both parties; one study found that "virtually all episodes reported focused on performance improvements that seemed to benefit the customer, the…representative, and/or the company," (Lyons 2008). Nonetheless, organizations should take care to encourage job crafting that aligns with their values and goals. This can be accomplished by having managers model company approved crafting (Berg et al. 2007). It is also possible that job crafting training sessions could include information about using job crafting to help the company as well as the employee, however this has not been tested. In addition, it should be noted that job crafting depends on the existing work culture. For example, when both nurses and medical specialists were trained to use job crafting, the crafting of the medical specialists manifested as seeking challenges significantly more than seeking resources (Gordon et al. 2018). Gordon et al., noted that this was likely due a pre-existing culture amongst the medical specialists that discouraged seeking assistance from colleagues. Therefore, if a company decides to encourage job crafting amongst its employees, it should take note of the existing work culture and ensure that job crafting is used to benefit both the employees and the organization.

Job crafting is still an emerging topic in industrial and organizational psychology, therefore, significantly more research must be done about the subject. Nonetheless, the research so far supports it as a beneficial tool for both employees and organizations. It allows employees to have more meaning and satisfaction through their work and organizations to have more productive and proactive employees. Job crafting is likely already present in many organizations, especially amongst autonomous, proactive employees; however, it can be encouraged further through training sessions as well as smaller changes such a supervisor leading by example. This technique can also be useful to demonstrate desirable job crafting behaviors that benefit the

employer and the employees. Job crafting is a promising method of job redesign that stimulates

proactive behavior in employees to actively adapt in the ever changing market.

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