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Job Crafting in Aging Employees

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Definition

Job crafting is defined as self-initiated behaviors displayed by employees with the goal to increase the fit between the individual and the job. Fit can be achieved by matching personal needs and abilities to work supplies and demands.

Definition and Predictors of Job Crafting

Person-Job Fit and Job Crafting

Job crafting is founded in the concept of person-environment fit (P-E fit; Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001), and more specifically, in the concept of person-job fit (P-J fit). This concept describes the fit or match between the needs and abilities of the person on the one hand and the supplies and demands of the job, respectively, on the other hand. Employees' *needs* reflect indispensable requirements, such as a sense of autonomy and competence, that are necessary in order to function and thrive. *Abilities* reflect personal resources, such as knowledge about a certain topic, that help individuals to effectively perform their work tasks and to cope with stressful work demands. *Supplies* refer to external resources that individuals receive from their job and working environment, for instance, support from colleagues. *Job demands* relate to occupational expectations and obligations that employees are confronted with, for example, time pressure. When these four factors are in balance, employees are likely to feel a good P-J fit between themselves and what their job offers and requires from them. P-J fit, in turn, is positively associated with job satisfaction and performance (Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001). However, employees do not always experience a good P-J fit between needs and supplies, or between abilities and demands. Job crafting is one type of proactive behavior that employees can engage in to modulate their job's supplies or demands (i.e., the J-side of P-J fit) in order to increase P-J fit (Tims and Bakker 2010).

The term job crafting was first introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). They defined job crafting as self-initiated behaviors displayed by employees with the goal to increase the meaningfulness of their jobs. Although these authors did not explicitly position the concept in the P-J fit framework, their definition fits well with the idea that job crafting is enacted to achieve a better fit between the need for a meaningful job and the job's supply of meaning. An important notion of the concept of job crafting is that individuals actively change the job (i.e., the environment) rather than themselves. By actively crafting their job characteristics and changing physical, relational, and cognitive boundaries of their work tasks, employees can fit environmental supplies and demands to their individual needs and abilities and achieve a better P-J fit.

Based on qualitative data gathered through personal interviews, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) concluded that job crafting can be observed in three different forms. From the *physical* perspective, job crafting involves changing the amount, scope, and type of the tasks the employee has to accomplish. The *relational* form of job crafting includes changing interactions with supervisors, colleagues, or clients by increasing or decreasing contact with certain people. Finally, employees can also make *cognitive* changes

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by, for instance, focusing attention on the positive outcomes of the job or reframing the job as more meaningful.

Grounded in the definition provided by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), Tims and Bakker (2010) enriched the theoretical background by framing job crafting in terms of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007) and P-J fit. Specifically, they defined job crafting as proactive behavior aimed at achieving a greater fit between employees and their work environment by increasing supplies (i.e., increasing structural and social job resources), decreasing hindering job demands, and increasing challenging job demands. This definition overlaps with the physical and relational forms of job crafting identified by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). However, in contrast to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), Tims and Bakker (2010) do not consider the cognitive changes in the perception of a job as a form of job crafting, given that job characteristics are not actually changed.

Motivation and Opportunities for Job Crafting

Job crafting behavior is initiated by the cognitive evaluation of a P-J misfit and the conclusion that job crafting would be possible and beneficial in reducing the misfit (Tims and Bakker 2010). According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), employees evaluate whether their job satisfies three basic human needs, the need for job control, the need for a positive self-image, and the need for affiliation. If these needs are not sufficiently met, the *motivation to job craft* arises. From the P-J fit perspective, the motivation to job craft can not only arise from a misfit in needs and supplies, but also from a misfit in abilities and demands. If the demands do not match the abilities, and supplies do not fulfill needs, the motivation to job craft grows, and employees are motivated to change physical and/or relational boundaries of their work environment (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001), or adjust structural and social job resources, decrease hindering job demands, and/or increase challenging job demands (Tims and Bakker 2010).

Whether or not the motivation to job craft is translated into actual job crafting behavior depends on *perceived opportunities for crafting*. Perceived opportunities are presumed to moderate the relationship between the motivation to job craft and job crafting behaviors, such that with increasing opportunities employees engage more in job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). Several job characteristics have been identified that promote or hinder opportunities for job crafting. One job characteristic that determines whether or not employees perceive job crafting opportunities is task interdependence, or the degree to which one employee's work task achievement depends on and feeds into other employees' work task achievement. Jobs with high task interdependence are considered as relatively less amenable to job crafting compared to jobs with low interdependence. Closely (and negatively) related to task interdependence is job autonomy, denoting the degree to which employees have discretion over the timing, location, and/or process to achieve their work tasks. When employees have low job autonomy, such that managers control time and location of work and strictly define tasks and responsibilities, job holders are less flexible in crafting their jobs to fit their personal needs and abilities than when employees have high job autonomy.

Job Crafting and the Aging Employee

Age-Related Differences Impacting the Motivation for Job Crafting

Job crafting may be particularly relevant and beneficial as employees get older. With increasing age, certain within-person changes take place that result in changing needs and abilities (the P-side), which – if not accompanied by changes in the job (the J-side) – can result in greater P-J misfit. Therefore, it is assumed that there is a higher necessity for older employees to engage in job crafting behavior than is the case for young employees. However, not all age-related changes are negative, and some may even

enhance P-J fit. An overview of age-related changes in different domains of functioning relevant to work functioning was provided by Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) and, more recently, by Ng and Feldman (2013) and (Truxillo et al. 2014). In the following, age-related changes that may enhance the motivation to job craft are categorized according to whether they primarily address changing needs or abilities.

Age-related changes in needs can be inferred from life-span variations in personality. *Personality changes* in relation to the Big Five traits include age-related increases in conscientiousness and agreeableness, coupled with age-related reductions in openness to experience, some facets of extraversion, and neuroticism (Roberts et al. 2006). These changes suggest that older employees may be less interested than young employees in learning new tasks in unfamiliar domains but more interested in executing familiar tasks and in having positive relations with coworkers. Age-related changes in needs can further be inferred from *changing goal orientations*, which are thought to emerge from the shifting balance of gains and losses as well as reductions in future time perspective across adulthood (Carstensen 2006). Typically, early adulthood provides abundant resources and opportunities to acquire skills and an extended future time perspective. With advancing age, however, resource limitations become increasingly salient and future time perspective more limited. Accordingly, goal orientation tends to shift with age from growth and development to maintenance and loss prevention. Additionally, a positivity maintenance orientation emerges such that aging people tend to strive for positive and meaningful experiences and to avoid negative experiences.

Age-related changes in abilities comprise physical, cognitive, and emotional domains. *Physical changes* that are typically observed with increasing age include losses in vision and hearing, muscle flexibility and strength, aerobic capacity and immune response. These changes suggest that older employees are less capable of executing physically demanding tasks compared to their younger colleagues. Consequently, aging employees might be more urged to adjust office equipment, such as screens or chairs, to their changing physical health. Age-related changes in *cognitive capacity* include declines in information processing speed or fluid intelligence. These cognitive changes may make it more difficult for older workers to retrieve information, acquire new job-related knowledge, and work under time pressure. It should be noted that not all aspects of cognitive capacity normatively decline with age. Crystallized intelligence or experience-based judgment are stable or even improve with age, often allowing older employees to maintain their level of work functioning (Salthouse 2012). Age-related changes in *emotional ability* include improvements in emotional understanding and regulation and decline in emotional perception and resilience in face of chronic stress (Walter and Scheibe 2013). These changes help older adults to circumvent many negative situations, neutralize interpersonal conflicts, or defuse negative emotions quickly (Scheibe and Zacher 2013). At the same time, age-related vulnerabilities emerge in face of intense and sustained stressors, due to difficulties regulating physiological arousal, as well as in the accurate perception of others' emotions. These changes suggest, for instance, that aging employees might be more suited for jobs that require positive customer interactions, but less suited for jobs that involve negative customer interactions on an ongoing basis.

Age-Related Differences Impacting the Opportunities for Job Crafting

In face of these within-person changes in needs and abilities, aging employees can use job crafting as a strategy to fit supplies (i.e., resources) and demands to needs and abilities and turn their work setting into a resourceful environment. However, aging may not only be accompanied by within-person changes that can affect the motivation to job craft, but also by environmental changes that affect the opportunities to job craft. In general, life course variations in opportunities interact with the motivation to job craft and determine whether an employee actually engages in job crafting behaviors or not. As stated above, within-person changes affect personal needs and abilities. In contrast, environmental changes in crafting opportunities refer to changes in supplies and demands. Within person changes in crafting motivation

are rather generalizable to the aging workforce because they are highly related to physical aging processes in the human body. In contrast, environmental changes in crafting opportunities are predominantly dependent on the employee's specific work environment and can strongly vary between individuals, such that the same factors, for instance having more responsibilities at work, are perceived as supplies for one employee and as demands for another. In the following, the most prevalent environmental changes in crafting opportunities will be discussed in terms of supplies and demands.

Supplies are intrinsic or extrinsic vocational resources provided by the organization, the job, or the work group. Changes in supplies can comprise autonomy at work due to seniority, recognition due to higher organizational position, or increases in pay (Zacher et al. 2014). Older employees are often occupied in higher organizational positions which are usually also associated with greater *autonomy*. This enables the employees to act more freely and adjust their work conditions to their changing personal needs and abilities, for instance, in terms of working hours or location. A higher organizational position can further be associated with greater *recognition* from colleagues and supervisors. As mentioned above, learning new processes and engaging in highly cognitively demanding tasks can become more effortful with increasing age (Salthouse 2012). Knowing that these efforts are recognized by supervisors and peers can serve as a buffering supply in highly cognitively demanding situations. Organizational recognition can be expressed verbally and through personal interactions or it can be expressed officially through increased *pay*. Higher pay does not exclusively refer to higher monthly salary but also to increased organizational benefits, such as more vacation days or higher pension that can help the employee to match his private needs to the organizational supplies.

The benefits of aging notwithstanding, many employees are also confronted with higher demands as they achieve a certain age and get closer to retirement. Work demands are extrinsic work factors that can be a threat to occupational well-being if not matched by personal abilities. The main changing work demands associated with aging can be categorized in changing responsibilities and age stereotyping (Truxillo et al. 2014). On the one hand *changing responsibilities* can be associated with the aforementioned higher organizational position that often comes with increasing age. On the other hand, many aging employees are confronted with a decrease in responsibilities either because they are assigned less demanding tasks or because they deliberately withdraw from work responsibilities as a preparation for retirement (Salthouse 2012). Dependent on whether these changes in responsibilities are voluntary and in line with the employee's needs and abilities, they can either be perceived as a supply or a demand. Yet another demand that can decrease the opportunity for job crafting in aging employees is *age stereotyping* (Truxillo et al. 2014). Older employees are often believed to be slow learners, low performers, and resistant to change. In the face of these beliefs, the work environment of aging employees might provide them with less opportunities for job crafting and indirectly coerce them to stay within their environmental boundaries.

Consequences of Job Crafting

Recent research has shown that job crafting leads to a number of benefits for employees and organizations. For instance, job crafting has been associated with greater supply availability in the sense that people who actively engage in initiatives to increase social job supplies, such as feedback, or structural job supplies, such as autonomy, also report higher availability of these supplies after several months (Tims et al. 2013). Furthermore, crafting challenging demands has been shown to increase work engagement (Bakker et al. 2012), which in turn contributes to organizational goals. This is due to the fact that engaged employees are more likely to focus on their in-role tasks and also show more organizational citizenship behaviors (Tims et al. 2013). Other studies suggest that work engagement is an antecedent of job crafting

rather than an outcome. From this perspective, work engagement promotes physical and relational job crafting, and accordingly, increases the fit between the person and the job (Chen et al. 2014). Other aspects of occupational well-being have also been associated with job crafting in the past. More specifically, crafting more challenging demands has been shown to have negative effects on levels of burnout and therefore increasing effects on occupational well-being and health (Tims et al. 2013).

Job crafting has further been associated with greater job enjoyment at a day-to-day level. Job enjoyment, in turn, has been associated with better job performance. Hence, through job enjoyment, job crafting also promotes better occupational performance and is therefore also interesting from an organizational perspective (Tims et al. 2014).

A question that still needs to be addressed in the field of job crafting research is whether benefits of job crafting can be achieved through different job crafting behaviors at different ages. Based on the theoretical background discussed above, it can be assumed that there are indeed differences in the types of job crafting behaviors, and in their outcomes, between older and younger employees. Kooij et al. (2015) recently suggested that future research should take into account employee age, focusing on age-specific job crafting activities and their effects on successful aging in the work context. Additionally, future research should focus on a broader set of job crafting outcomes such as job stress, work-life balance, and retirement intentions. Until today the main focus has been on employee attitude and affect which might not reveal the whole scope of the job crafting framework. These issues in the rather young field of job crafting also apply to job crafting measurement instruments which will be discussed in the following section.

Measurement of Job Crafting

The bulk of the existing research has defined job crafting as a rather static, trait-like concept, and the existing measurement approaches reflect this view. More recently, it has been suggested that job crafting also has more dynamic, state-like components and as such, is subject to daily fluctuations. Accordingly, new state-level measures of job crafting are beginning to emerge.

The basic assumption underlying early measurement approaches is that job crafting is a trait that some employees generally engage in more than others. When Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) first introduced the concept of job crafting, they exclusively founded their model on qualitative research conducted through behavioral observations and personal interviews with job holders in different sectors. As described above, these methods resulted in a taxonomy of three forms of job crafting behaviors namely, changing task boundaries, changing relational boundaries, and changing cognitive boundaries. In an attempt to expand the possibility for research on job crafting and supplementing the qualitative data, Tims et al. (2012) developed and validated a 21-item Job Crafting Scale (JCS), which operationalizes the four dimensions of job crafting emerging from the JD-R framework. The JCS comprises four subscales: increasing social job resources, increasing structural job resources, increasing challenging demands, and decreasing hindering demands. As part of the validation process the authors also compared self-rated job crafting behavior with peer-rated job crafting, showing that there is indeed a positive correlation between self-rated and peer-rated job crafting activities. The finding that job crafting can reliably be observed by others supports the validity and relevance of the observational studies conducted by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). The JCS is especially useful for researchers who are interested in individual differences in job crafting behaviors based on the most common supplies and demands mentioned in recent literature (feedback, social support, autonomy, etc.).

There are two alternative measures to assess job crafting, both grounded in the JCS and the definition of job crafting provided by Tims and Bakker (2010). The first one, developed by Nielsen and Abildgaard

(2012), also considers job crafting as static and trait-like but not universal across different professions. Emphasizing that blue-collar jobs are characterized by a special constellation of high demands and low supplies, these authors developed and validated a five-dimensional job crafting questionnaire representing more dimensions of demands and less resources relative to the JCS (Tims and Bakker 2010). These five dimensions, each measured with two to four items, are: increasing challenging demands, decreasing social demands, increasing social job resources, increasing quantitative demands, and decreasing hindering demands.

The second alternative measure of job crafting grounded in the JCS is developed by Petrou and colleagues (2012) and reflects the dynamic character of job crafting. Rather than looking at individual differences in the tendency to use certain job crafting behaviors, this measure rests on the assumption that job crafting behaviors are dynamic and that their expression varies on a daily basis and therefore cannot be measured at only one point in time. This state-level job crafting scale, which was validated in a 5-day diary study, contains three subscales: seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands. It should be noted that although Petrou and colleagues (2012) based their questionnaire on the JCS, their conceptual definition of job crafting is slightly different. That is, Tims and colleagues (2012) categorize supplies (i.e., resources) as social and structural, and demands as either being challenging or hindering. Fit can therefore also be achieved through challenging demands because they satisfy certain needs but do not exceed the employees' abilities. In contrast, Petrou and colleagues (2012) define demands as generally negative environmental characteristics that should be reduced in order to achieve greater P-J fit.

While there have been some first attempts to create a job crafting instrument that consider different work groups and different definitions of job crafting, age group differentiations are still missing. Future research should aim at adjusting the current measure to aging employees and further specifying whether job crafting should best be measured as a trait, a state, or both.

Future Directions

Developing Age-Differentiated Taxonomies of Job Crafting

In the previous sections, job crafting has been defined as proactive employee behavior that is aimed at increasing the meaningfulness and the feasibility of the jobs through a greater fit between the employees' needs and abilities and the job supplies and demands, respectively. This definition is rather general and applicable to different age groups and different jobs. However, Kooij et al. (2015) suggest that job crafting behaviors may differ between young and older workers. They introduce three major forms of job crafting which slightly differ from the definitions given above. The authors base their assumptions on the life-span model of selection, optimization, compensation (SOC; Freund and Baltes 2002) and on age-related intra-individual changes in needs and abilities as reviewed above. *Accommodative crafting* refers to crafting activities that are targeted at regulating age-related demands and changing supplies. This includes the delegation of responsibilities or looking for alternative ways to achieve goals and satisfy needs. *Developmental crafting* is targeted at increasing activities that promote personal growth and the acquisition of new abilities. *Utilization crafting* comprises the application of existing abilities and knowledge. This can be achieved by seeking tasks that require unused supplies and are attainable with current personal resources (Kooij et al. 2015).

In further developing age-differentiated job crafting taxonomies based on the SOC model and other lifespan theories, it will be important to ensure that identified behaviors aim indeed at changing the job – and not the individual – in order to increase P-J fit. Developmental crafting, for instance, only fits the definition of job crafting to the extent that the focus is on work tasks and characteristics, such as asking for challenging work assignments, rather than personal resources, such as enhancing personal skills and

knowledge. In the latter case, employees would craft themselves rather than their jobs. Future research may pay closer attention to job crafting in aging employees and specify whether crafting among older workers entails the same dimensions, motivations, and opportunities as crafting among younger workers.

Distinguishing Job Crafting from Related Concepts

Tims and Bakker (2010) suggest that there are several concepts similar but not identical to job crafting. Job crafting entails unsupervised, spontaneous, self-initiated, voluntary, and sometimes short-term changes in the work environment (Tims and Bakker 2010), whereas related concepts typically depend on employer approval, are supervised, and result in objective, long-term changes which are in line with the organizational mission (Demerouti 2014). For example, *idiosyncratic deals* (i-deals) are defined as agreements negotiated between the job holder and the employer in order to improve work and/or payment conditions (Demerouti 2014). *Role innovation* denotes actions where employees proactively and in discussion with the supervisor redefine their role in order to reduce a mismatch between the role definition and the actual working situations. *Personal initiative* is associated with occupational behavior through which an employee aligns goals and actions with long-term organizational goals. Initiatives that are rather directed at organizational goals might not satisfy individual needs as much as job crafting because job crafting is exclusively focused on the individual. Additionally, supervised adjustments to the job might decrease the sense of autonomy that especially aging employees require to increase their P-J fit and experience greater occupational well-being. Future research should investigate whether job crafting does indeed differ from related concepts such as I-deal, role innovation, and personal initiative in terms of antecedents and job related outcomes.

In conclusion, job crafting appears to be a fruitful strategy for aging workers to actively change their job when experiencing age-related changes in needs and abilities, in order to maintain P-J fit at later stages of their career. At the same time, more research is needed to define whether job crafting behaviors differ between different age groups, and whether job crafting behaviors lead to different work outcomes for different age groups. At this point, there are specific definitions and validated measures of job crafting available which allow extended research on job crafting in aging employees.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Age and Blended Working](#)
- ▶ [Age-Related Changes in Abilities](#)
- ▶ [Crystallized Intelligence](#)
- ▶ [Life Span Developmental Psychology](#)
- ▶ [Selection, Optimization and Compensation at Work in Relation to Age](#)
- ▶ [Strategy Use](#)
- ▶ [Work Design and Aging](#)
- ▶ [Work Motivation and Aging](#)

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