

Developing a model of job crafting

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**ABSTRACT:** Developing a model of job crafting

Job crafting regards employees as active shapers of their own jobs to create an improved person-job fit. This paper presents a model of job crafting that advances understanding of the relationships between individual (psychological capital), relational (relationship with manager), and context factors (uncertainty and climate) in predicting job crafting. In addition to setting a research agenda, the proposed model provides a realistic framework for organisations and managers to promote job crafting, leading to improved employee engagement and its attendant benefits.

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## Developing a model of job crafting

It has long been recognised that employees in the same job can enact their work in different ways (Igen and Hollenbeck, 1991). Such self-initiated changes are known as job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), a concept which proposes that individuals use their own resources make changes to their job, their work environment or their perceptions of their work, to improve work meaningfulness. The underpinning idea is that an individuals' relationship with their job is dynamic and that individuals will actively and privately seek to shape their jobs to create an improved person-job fit. This places the employee in a much more active role than previously thought and can lead to a host of benefits for both the organisation and the individual employee.

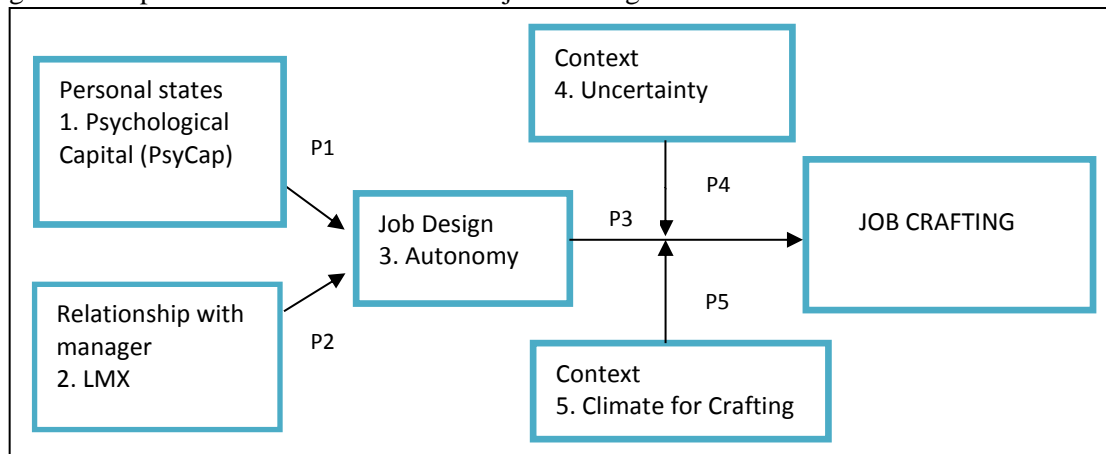
Antecedents of job crafting include a proactive personality (Tims et al., 2012), perceived control, readiness to change and self image (Lyons, 2008). Autonomy has been found to be a precursor to individual job crafting (Berg et al., 2010b, Leana et al., 2009, Petrou et al., 2012) as well as collaborative job crafting (Leana et al., 2009, McClelland et al., 2014). Findings suggest that employees job craft to align their job with personal value systems (Bakker et al., 2012, Berg et al., 2010b) to enhance enjoyment (Berg et al., 2010a, Petrou et al., 2012) or to increase control over their job (Berg et al., 2010b, Leana et al., 2009, Tims et al., 2012, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Moving on to outcomes, job crafting has been found to improve employee wellbeing through increasing job satisfaction and engagement and decreasing burnout (Tims et al., 2013). Findings suggest that it enables employees to mobilise structural resources through improving autonomy, work variety, and social resources such as social support and feedback (Tims et al., 2013), and also to enhance goal orientation and perceived performance (Van Dam et al., 2013). Furthermore, job crafting behaviours such as seeking out challenges and increasing social and structural resources have been found to correlate positively with colleague rated performance (Bakker et al., 2012). Lastly, team or collaborative crafting has been found to predict supervisor ratings of performance (McClelland et al., 2014). Accordingly, evidence indicates that job crafting can improve work engagement and meaningfulness for employees, benefitting employers also. We contend, therefore, that managers should therefore be aware of job crafting and promote it.

### Developing a model of antecedents of job crafting

Building on this body of research, Figure 1 presents a new model of job crafting that comprises five key propositions.

Figure 1: Proposed model of antecedents of job crafting:



## 1. PsyCap

PsyCap is a recently developed construct (Luthans, 2002) concerning the personal strengths that an individual possesses to achieve and sustain competitive advantage in the work place. It is explained as a positive agentic capacity that recognises motivation to change alongside a cognitive appraisal of likely success of actions to create change (Luthans et al., 2011). PsyCap combines four different personality states, but is considered as stable and trait-like as it does not vary significantly over short time periods. PsyCap is defined as

*“an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by; (1) having confidence (self-esteem) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success”* (Luthans et al., 2007, p3)

Autonomy concerns the amount of discretion or choice employees have in how they do their jobs, schedule their work tasks, and have their work performance evaluated (Breugh, 1999). Proposition 1 contends that PsyCap will be positively related to autonomy: (1) Self esteem concerns an individual’s belief and confidence in their ability to change something, which comes from previous successes and further reinforces the idea the change or situation is within the control of the individual; (2) optimism is associated with a positive future outlook and an internal locus of control in relation to positive events (Luthans et al., 2007), and is linked to opportunity seeking behaviours (Luthans and Youseff, 2004); (3) hopefulness creates a sense of control and mastery, through being able to see a pathway towards achieving a goal (Snyder et al., 1997) and this can be developed through work practices which incorporate delegation and empowerment, leading to higher levels of perceived autonomy (Luthans and Youseff, 2004); and (4) resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity or conflict, which creates a bank of successful experiences that individuals can draw on when facing challenges or change. PsyCap has been found to be positively related to problem solving performance (Luthans et al., 2011) and creativity (Rego et al., 2012), and job roles with high autonomy require a high degree of problem solving skills and creativity (Luthans et al., 2011). Thus, individuals with higher levels of PsyCap will have more psychological resources to draw on, leading to them either being given or having more autonomy in their job role.

Proposition 1: PsyCap will be positively associated with autonomy

## 2. Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) concerns the relationship between a staff member and his/her leader, defined as *“an exchange relationship which develops over time during role making activities”* (Dansereau et al., 1975, p46). Underpinning this concept is the recognition that such relationships may vary in quality and depth over time, potentially influencing a range of performance measures such as creative work involvement (Volmer et al., 2012), job satisfaction and supervisor rated performance (Dansereau et al., 1975).

The relationship between autonomy and LMX has been specifically examined, on the basis that supportive and high quality LMX enables diversity in the relationships between leaders and members. Evidence shows that highly autonomous engineering and nursing professionals’ perceptions of autonomy are related to the strength of supervisor-subordinate relationships (Farr-

Wharton et al., 2011). Autonomy has been found to moderate the relationship between LMX and creativity (Volmer et al., 2012) and it is suggested that leaders who provide support for autonomy develop stronger relationships with their subordinates (Ilies et al., 2005). Furthermore, Van Dam et al. (2013) found a positive correlation between LMX and autonomy that is stable across varied job groups, such that individuals with high LMX will have higher perceived autonomy than those with lower LMX.

Proposition 2: High quality LMX will be positively associated with autonomy

### **3. Autonomy**

The prevalence of job crafting has been examined in jobs with higher levels of autonomy and also lower levels. An examination of crafting at different levels of hierarchy found that both high and low ranked workers job craft, but with different constraints on their ability to job craft. For example, higher ranking employees reported feeling constrained by the 'general' nature of their end goals and a lack of clarity in how to go about achieving these. Conversely, lower ranked employees reported feeling constrained by the tightly prescribed way in which they were expected to carry out their tasks. In addition, high and low ranked workers report different outcome expectations from job crafting, such that higher ranked employees both cognitively craft to change their own expectations of their potential and also use their autonomy to delegate, thus freeing up their own time to job craft (proactive crafting). By contrast, lower ranked employees use adaptive job crafting as a means of overcoming barriers to them being able to craft, such as developing relationships with others who can provide opportunities to job craft or building trust with managers.(Berg et al., 2010b).

Ultimately, for employees with low levels of autonomy, job crafting is used as a means of gaining more control over their work environment. There is conflicting evidence around team crafting, with initial findings suggesting that lower autonomy makes it more difficult for small teams to job craft (Petrou et al., 2012). However, more recent findings suggest that low autonomy teams within a call centre environment can and do craft, and this is positively linked to performance (McClelland et al., 2014). It is clear then that autonomy creates conditions for crafting, but that crafting activity is not restricted only to those with high levels of autonomy. Although job crafting does take place in job with low autonomy, on balance we might nevertheless expect higher levels of job crafting to be correlated with higher levels of autonomy due to the increased opportunities this creates for job crafting.

Proposition 3: Autonomy will be positively associated with job crafting

### **4. Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is defined as changes to the predictability of work tasks and work processes (Wall et al., 2002). The impact of uncertainty is that solutions to challenges are difficult to analyse and solve because the causes of these challenges do not follow a set pattern (Wall et al., 2002). There is evidence that uncertainty has the potential to stimulate job crafting, as employees seek to gain greater control over their working conditions. Petrou et al. (2012) found that job crafting was more likely during times of uncertainty associated with organisational change as a response to changes in work roles and tasks and the opportunity this created for altering work meaningfulness. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2009) suggest that successful individuals in an uncertain environment job craft, although this was based on the assumption that individuals who work in a dynamic environment must be job crafting in order to succeed, rather than on evidence of crafting.

The rationale for this follows Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001), and later Leana's (2009) explanations of job crafting behaviours. When tasks are unpredictable, it is plausible that an employee's response to this may be to either seek to change the tasks (task crafting) or seek to change work relationships such that they have a greater bank of social resources to draw on to address the task (relational crafting). When work processes are unpredictable, it is feasible to suggest that employees will change their work relationships (relational crafting) to build their social resources, or think about the process in a different way if these are unable to be changed (cognitive crafting). When challenges are difficult to solve due to unpredictability, it is not inconceivable that employees will seek to build their own skill base to gain greater control over their work (self initiated skill development (Leana et al., 2009)). Thus, each of the three challenges created by uncertainty can be related to job crafting behaviours. Therefore, we suggest that when the work environment is stable and predictable, whilst job crafting may take place to create more stimulating work, times of uncertainty provoke job crafting to a greater extent. Building on this, we propose that under conditions of high uncertainty the relationship between autonomy and job crafting is stronger than under conditions of low uncertainty.

Proposition 4: Uncertainty will moderate the relationship between autonomy and job crafting

## **5. Climate for crafting**

Organisational climate is defined as “*shared perceptions of and the meanings attached to policies, practices and procedures employees experience.....and the behaviours they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected*” (Schneider et al., 2013, p362). In effect, a climate is the creation of a series of social norms around a particular action or behaviour. Social norm theories suggest that behaviour has its roots in conformity, and that an individual's or a group's behaviour is shaped by an understanding of what other people do (Burchell et al., 2012). Reasons for conformity are explained as either an agreement with and approval of others' decision making, or because individuals want to be liked and accepted by others, or because individuals want to avoid negative social consequences of non-conformity (Azar, 2004). Therefore, actions and behaviours at work will be shaped by perceptions of how acceptable those actions might be.

Organisational climates have been widely researched and found to exert an influence on work behaviours. For example, a supportive organisational climate has been found to mediate the relationship between PsyCap and performance (Luthans et al., 2008), and a climate for autonomy has been found to be positively related to performance and negatively related to stress for a sample of UK employees (Hirst et al., 2008). However, many existing climate measures contain dimensions such as leadership (Gershon et al., 2004) (Brown and Leigh, 1996) and supervisory support (Patterson et al., 2005) that are not necessarily compatible with the self-initiated and private nature of job crafting. We contend that a ‘climate for crafting’ may exist that is conceptually distinct from other existing climates.

A climate for crafting is defined as one where crafting behaviours are enacted and able to be observed, where job diversification arising from crafting is expected and accepted, and where the outcomes of job crafting are perceived to be beneficial. Such a climate conforms with Schneider et al's (2013) definition of a climate and is context specific. We adopt Thumin and Thumin's (2011) experiential perspective on climate in that climate is individually perceived and experienced. We

are developing a measure of climate for crafting and our proposition is that the relationship between autonomy and job crafting will be more positive under conditions of a strong climate for crafting than under conditions of a weak climate.

Proposition 5: Climate for crafting will moderate the relationship between autonomy and job crafting.

**Conclusion:** Data are currently being collected from a diverse sample of staff across the UK university sector. It is anticipated that initial findings will be available for discussion by September 2014. Comments and suggestions are invited from conference delegates on the choice of key antecedents and on the concept of climate for crafting as distinct from other climate types.

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