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Chapter · March 2017

DOI: 10.1002/9781119168058.ch3

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How Can I Shape My Job to Suit Me Better? Job Crafting for Sustainable Employees and Organizations ³

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Overview

Job redesign is the process through which changes in the jobs, tasks or conditions of individual workers are made with the aim of contributing to their work motivation and performance. Given the unique constellation of working conditions prevalent in each job, traditional top-down job redesign interventions often turn out to be partly ineffective. Currently, organizations recognize that these should be complemented by bottom-up redesign strategies initiated by the job incumbents themselves. This chapter focuses on job crafting as a proactive strategy for employees to 'shape their job to suit them better'. We begin by pointing out the need for sustainable innovation and sustainable employability of the workforce in present-day organizations, and by proposing job crafting as a socially innovative way to achieve both aims. Next, the main theoretical perspectives on job crafting and the measures that have been developed to assess different dimensions of job crafting are discussed. This is followed by an overview of empirical research on the predictors and outcomes of job crafting. In the final section, we explain how organizations can become more sustainable by stimulating the job crafting behaviour of their employees.

3.1 Introduction

Nowadays, business competition is more intense, and the business environment is more uncertain. Organizations are facing dynamic and changing environments that emphasize the importance of flexibility, adaptation, and innovation. Because of this, over the past 20 years, we have seen an increase in business and academic interest in building sustainable organizations that have the capacity to endure and simultaneously satisfy the bottom line of environmental, economic, technological and human performance. Yet, in comparison to the environmental, economic and technological dimensions of sustainability, substantially less attention has been focused on the human dimension (Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). This is quite surprising, as a recent Dutch study has demonstrated that only 25% of

innovation success can be ascribed to technological innovation and the remaining 75% to social innovation, i.e., to changes in the organization of work and working relations that enhance organizational performance and stimulate employee talent development. Socially innovative companies have a significantly higher percentage of radical (36%) and incremental (29%) innovations, and their market performance is 21% better compared to companies that focus exclusively on technological innovations (Erasmus Concurrentie- en Innovatiemonitor, 2015).

At the same time, in most industrialized countries, the retirement age of employees is high because of the proportional increase in the ageing population. So, the majority of employees will have to work until a later age whereas the influx of young workers in the labour market is declining. Lifetime employment is no longer guaranteed, as the qualifications that are required for jobs are becoming increasingly complex while, simultaneously, the relevance of these qualifications is becoming increasingly less. For all these reasons, the sustainable employability of the workforce nowadays is of vital importance for the economy of these countries as well as for the workers themselves. Sustainable employability implies that, throughout their working lives, workers are able to keep on working continuously while retaining health and well-being (Van der Klink et al., 2016). Highly innovative sectors of industry, such as knowledge-intensive firms that have to cope with frequent technological (and organizational) changes as well as fierce international competition, are particularly in need of a sustainably employable workforce (De Grip, Van Loo & Sanders, 2004).

Technological innovation is still of vital importance to help organizations survive and gain competitive advantage. However, sustainable innovation and sustainable employability can only be realized through complementary changes in the social organization of work that enable employees to utilize and develop their skills, knowledge and abilities more effectively. In this way, organizations can take full advantage of their employees' potential.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work coined the term 'workplace innovation', and defined it as 'strategically induced and participatory adopted changes in an organisation's practice of managing, organising and deploying human and non-human resources that lead to simultaneously improved organisational performance and improved quality of working life' (2012, p. 8). Thus, it refers to how people are deployed in order to improve performance while at the same time creating 'high quality' jobs. Second, workplace innovation is related to the development and implementation of coherent interventions in the areas of work organisation, control structure and employability of staff. These areas all deal with the design of the organisation, the design of management tasks, and the design of jobs, with the objective of simultaneous improvement of organisational performance and quality of working life.

Complementary to employers' investments in workplace innovation, we suggest that employees themselves could and actually also should take personal responsibility for keeping their staff's professional skills and competencies at an

optimal level. This is even more important because of the rapid changes in the nature of jobs over the past decades, including among others the use of new technologies and flexible work methods, and an increase in cognitive tasks and in pressure to provide high quality services in an effective way (e.g., in health care). Moreover, nowadays employees do not merely have to be adaptive (i.e., respond flexibly to job-related and/or organizational changes), but also must be proactive in initiating and co-creating these changes. Job crafting represents employee behaviour that has recently been recognized as something that organizations can stimulate to improve the working conditions for their employees by offering them the opportunity to do so for themselves (Demerouti & Bakker, 2013). It can be seen as a specific form of proactive behaviour in which an employee initiates changes in the level of job demands and job resources to make his or her own job more meaningful, engaging and satisfying. In this way, job crafting uses the potential of the jobholders' own knowledge as they know their job best. Job crafting can be used in addition to top-down approaches to improve jobs, to respond to the complexity of contemporary jobs, and to deal with the needs of the current workforce (Demerouti, 2014).

In this chapter we postulate that organizations and their employees can become more sustainable through job crafting. The chapter starts with a discussion of the main theoretical perspectives on job crafting and the measures that have been developed to assess different dimensions of job crafting. Next, we will zoom in on empirical research regarding its predictors and outcomes. In the final section, we will present some ways to intervene in order to stimulate the job crafting behaviour of employees, and we will link it with sustainable innovation and sustainable employability of the workforce as these represent enduring requirements for contemporary organizations.

3.2 What Is Job Crafting?

Job design describes 'how jobs, tasks, and roles are structured, enacted, and modified, as well as the impact of these structures, enactments and modifications on individual, group, and organizational outcomes' (Grant & Parker, 2009, p. 319). In contrast, job redesign is seen as the process through which something is *changed* in the job, the tasks or the condition of the individual worker (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Traditional job redesign approaches are usually top-down (Oldham & Hackman, 2010), i.e., the structure and content of the work are redesigned by the organization with the ultimate goal of enhancing favourable attitudinal and behavioural work outcomes such as work engagement, well-being and performance. However, most of these approaches have proved to be inadequate to serve the changing nature of current jobs, and therefore the 'one-size-fits-all' approach is no longer sufficient (Aust, Rugulies, Finken, & Jensen, 2010). This has led to the emergence of new, individualized, bottom-up job redesign approaches, such as job crafting that recognize the role of individual employees as proactive agents who

form their jobs and change their own job characteristics ([Fried et al., 2007](#); [Grant & Parker, 2009](#)). Job crafting has been defined and operationalized based on the perspectives of [Wrzesniewski and Dutton \(2001\)](#) and the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2007](#); [Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001](#)), respectively. Each of these conceptualizations will be explained in more detail in the following section.

3.2.1 Conceptualizations of job crafting

In 2001, [Wrzesniewski and Dutton](#) introduced the term ‘job crafting’ to refer to the process through which employees ‘shape’ their jobs, and defined it as ‘the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work’ ([Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001](#), p. 179). Changing physical task boundaries refers to altering the form, scope or number of work activities. That is, employees choose to do fewer, more or different tasks than prescribed in their formal job description. In addition, job crafting includes changing cognitive task boundaries, which refers to altering how one sees the job. For example, a cleaner in a hospital may view his or her job either as tidying or as making an important contribution to an agreeable stay for patients. Changing relational boundaries involves changes in the quality and/or the amount of interactions with people at work. For example, employees may avoid colleagues they do not like. By changing any of these elements, individuals themselves change the design of their job and the social environment in which they work.

According to [Wrzesniewski and Dutton \(2001\)](#) job crafting occurs on a daily basis. In order to better capture the ‘everyday’ changes that employees may pursue, some scholars have proposed conceptualizing job crafting as employee proactive behaviour that is specifically targeted at job characteristics, thereby framing its definition in the Job Demands-Resources Model. [Tims and Bakker \(2010\)](#) define job crafting as ‘the changes that employees may make to balance their job demands and job resources with their personal abilities and needs’. Rather than restricting job crafting to efforts aimed at altering tasks and relations (cf. [Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001](#)), they expand the conceptualization of task crafting and relational crafting. Whereas task crafting refers to job demands, i.e., changing one’s tasks by increasing challenging demands and/or decreasing demands that hinder, relational crafting refers to job resources, i.e., changing the available social (e.g., support, feedback) and/or structural (e.g., autonomy, variety) resources.

In line with this conceptualization, [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#) defined job crafting as encompassing: (1) seeking challenges; (2) reducing demands; and (3) seeking resources. Seeking challenges refers to increasing challenging demands, i.e., looking for new challenging tasks at work, keeping busy during one’s working day, or asking for more responsibilities once one has finished with assigned tasks. This is done with the primary aim of maintaining motivation and avoiding boredom, and is in line with the proposition of [Karasek and Theorell \(1990\)](#)

that workers in active jobs (with high demands and high autonomy) are likely to seek challenging situations that promote mastery and learning. Reducing demands, on the other hand, refers to reducing demands that hinder, i.e., the emotionally, mentally or physically demanding aspects of one's work, in order to reduce one's workload and to make sure that working is not at the cost of one's private life. So, reducing demands can be viewed as a health-protecting coping mechanism when demands are excessively high. Seeking job resources can be viewed as a form of coping with job demands, or completing tasks and achieving goals that foster goal attainment and enhance performance. Examples are seeking feedback or asking for support from one's own direct supervisor or colleagues, and looking for the possibility of learning a new skill in the job. Note that decreasing resources has not been proposed as constituting a form of job crafting, as it does not seem to be a purposeful human behaviour ([Hobfoll, 2001](#)). In a diary study by 95 employees from different organizations [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#) confirmed the validity of conceptualizing job crafting in terms of the three specific behaviours of seeking challenges, reducing demands and seeking resources. Moreover, they found that job crafting indeed occurs on a daily basis, with daily fluctuations in job crafting ranging from 31% (seeking challenges), 34% (seeking resources) to 78% (reducing demands).

Table 3.1 compares the conceptualizations of job crafting of Wrzesniewski and Dutton and the JD-R model with respect to the definition, the purpose and motivation, the target, and the types of job crafting. The main difference between the two conceptualizations is that the JD-R perspective focuses on the behavioural component and excludes the cognitive dimension of job crafting, which results in differences in the targets and types of crafting that are distinguished. In the remainder of this chapter, the JD-R perspective on job crafting is followed because this perspective has stimulated much empirical research over the past decade.

3.2.2 Measurement of job crafting

The first instrument to measure job crafting assesses the three dimensions proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). Unfortunately, there currently is no published information about the psychometric properties of this instrument.

In line with the JD-R conceptualization of job crafting, [Tims et al. \(2012\)](#) developed and validated a scale to measure job crafting behaviour that has four independent job crafting dimensions: (1) increasing social job resources, (2) increasing structural job resources, (3) increasing challenging job demands, and (4) decreasing hindering job demands. The scale shows satisfactory convergent validity (compared to proactive personality, personal initiative and cynicism) and criterion validity (with colleague-ratings of work engagement, employability and performance). Additionally, self-rated job crafting behaviours correlated positively with peer-rated job crafting behaviours. So, job crafting behaviours are also observable by others in the work environment. Finally [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#)

Table 3.1: Comparison of two perspectives on job crafting

| <i>Job-crafting perspectives</i> | <i>Definition</i> | <i>Purpose and motivation</i> | <i>Target</i> | <i>Types</i> |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| | <i>Definition</i> | <i>Purpose and motivation</i> | <i>Target</i> | <i>Types</i> |
| Wresniewski & Dutton (2001) | ‘the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work’ (2001, p. 179) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assert control • To create a positive self-image • To connect to others • To increase meaning at work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task boundaries • Relational boundaries • Cognitive boundaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task crafting • Relational crafting • Cognitive crafting |
| Job Demands-Resources Model (Tims et al., 2012) | ‘the changes that employees may make to balance their job demands and job resources with their personal abilities and needs’ (2012, p. 174) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve person-job fit • To enhance work engagement • To avoid health impairment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job demands • Job resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking challenges • Seeking resources • Reducing demands |

Note: Task crafting can be seen as changing job demands. Relational crafting can be seen as changing job resources.

adapted the scale of Tims et al. (2012), operationalizing it with three dimensions: (1) seeking resources, (2) seeking challenges, and (3) reducing demands. Thus, they did not differentiate between structural and social resources. Their findings confirmed the factorial validity and the reliability of the measure at both the general and the daily levels. As mentioned before, they also showed that job crafting behaviours varied significantly from one day to another. In the remainder of this chapter, job crafting will be understood in terms of the three dimensions distinguished by Petrou et al. (2012).

3.3 Predictors and Outcomes of Job Crafting

Before turning to a more detailed discussion of predictors and outcomes of job crafting, we will briefly address the question why individuals are motivated to engage in job crafting. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) state that by fulfilling the three basic human needs for control over their work, to express a more

positive sense of self, and to connect with others, job crafting enables workers to experience enhanced meaning in work and attain a positive work identity. In a cross-sectional study among 253 working adults, Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013) found that job crafting was related to the satisfaction of the intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness at work. According to Petrou et al. (2012) and Tims and Bakker (2010), individuals craft their jobs in order to create conditions in which they can work healthily and with motivation.

3.3.1 Predictors of job crafting

Generally, two approaches can be distinguished regarding research on the predictors of job crafting. In the first approach, situational factors are seen as stimulators of job crafting, whereas, in the second, the focus is on personal attributes as determinants of job crafting.

3.3.1.1 *Situational predictors of job crafting*

Job crafting represents discretionary behaviour on the part of the employee, therefore Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) suggested job autonomy was an important stimulating factor of this behaviour. Therefore, individuals who have jobs with more 'degrees of freedom' with respect to how they perform their tasks are more likely to engage in job crafting. Other studies showed that demanding aspects of the job, for example, task complexity (Githulescu, 2007), are positively related to job crafting too. On a daily level, [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#) found that on days when work pressure and autonomy were both high, employees showed the highest levels of seeking resources and the lowest level of reducing demands. They argued that jobs with high autonomy and high work pressure (i.e., active jobs) facilitate learning and development and therefore individuals are prone to keep their job stimulating. Consequently, these jobs make employees engage more in seeking resources and less in reducing demands. However, these jobs may already be too demanding for employees to seek (even) more challenges (Wang, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2016).

In addition, job crafting can be triggered by organizational change as a strategy to ensure that their job still fits their preferences after the introduction of change and to make meaning of the changed situation. In a qualitative study during a merger, Kira, Balkin and San (2012) found that relational crafting (e.g., asking for supervisory support) and task crafting (e.g., prioritizing) were used as strategies to deal with the new situation at work. [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#) found that changes involving new products were negatively associated with daily seeking challenges, while meeting new clients was positively related to daily seeking resources and seeking challenges. Moreover, employees may even be motivated to craft their jobs to proactively prepare for and cope with future job change and uncertainty. For example, they may expand their tasks and relational environments by increasing the scope of job responsibilities, or enhancing the amount of communication with people at work to get more information (Wang, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2016).

3.3.1.2 *Personal predictors of job crafting*

Job crafting has been linked to the individual characteristics of employees too, the first one being proactive personality. [Bateman and Crant \(1993\)](#) defined the prototypic proactive personality as one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change. Proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative, take action, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change. [Bakker et al. \(2012\)](#) found that proactive personality (as rated by one's colleagues) was associated with more employee (self-reported) seeking job resources and job challenges. This finding indicates that individuals with a proactive personality are inclined to change their work environment through job crafting.

In addition, daily fluctuations in personal resources, i.e., personal aspects that are generally linked to resilience and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully ([Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003](#)), may also cause daily fluctuations in job crafting behaviour. For example, on days when employees feel more efficacious about their work, they are more likely to change the characteristics of their job to attain their goals ([Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2014](#)).

[Petrou \(2013\)](#) found that employee regulatory focus, i.e., the way in which individuals regulate their behaviour so that they approach pleasure but avoid pain ([Higgins, 1997](#)), might influence the degree to which they craft their jobs. Employees with a promotion focus, who are driven by growth and challenges, were found to show more job crafting behaviour and to be more open to changes, irrespective of how these were presented by the organization. On the other hand, employees with a prevention focus, who are driven by obligations and security, crafted their jobs more when organizational change was communicated in an inadequate way. Thus, insufficient information provided by the organization regarding the change triggered the employees who are focused on security and obligations to craft their jobs in order to be able to fulfil their obligations.

Actually, the study by [Petrou \(2013\)](#) makes clear that, in addition to individual or situational characteristics in isolation, the person x situation interaction also influences job crafting. According to the Person Environment (PE)-fit approach ([Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998](#)), stress arises from a mismatch between workers' personal characteristics and the characteristics of the job or tasks that are performed at work. An example is a person with a high need for control who has low job control. [Tims and Bakker \(2010\)](#) argue that person-job mismatch particularly triggers job crafting behaviours. Job crafting might result in a better fit between person and job environment and thus reduce stress.

3.3.2 *Outcomes of job crafting*

The traditional top-down, 'one-size-fits-all' approach that has dominated the job redesign literature for decades has been shown to be partly ineffective in enhancing worker motivation and performance ([Grant & Parker, 2009](#)). Complementing

the traditional job redesign approaches with new, bottom-up, individualized approaches that employees may use to ‘shape their job to suit them better’ such as job crafting, may boost their effectiveness. The overall picture of research on the outcomes of job crafting confirms its beneficial effects on both individual and organizational outcomes. Ghitulescu (2007) found a positive link between job crafting and organizational commitment. Tims, Bakker and Derks (2013) found that employees who crafted their structural and social resources reported an increase in job resources, which in turn was positively related to increased job satisfaction two months later. However, crafting job demands (both challenging and hindering ones) was not found to lead to an increase in job satisfaction. In recent years, several studies have demonstrated that employees’ job crafting in terms of seeking resources and/or challenges is predictive of higher levels of work engagement, both in general (Bakker et al., 2012) as well as on different days (Petrou et al., 2012). Moreover, in a three-wave longitudinal study, Tims, Bakker and Derks (in press) found dynamic relationships between job crafting intentions, work engagement, and actual job crafting behaviour. Their results showed that job crafting intentions and work engagement were significantly related to actual job crafting behaviour, which in turn was related to higher levels of work engagement. However, in contrast to the other two types of crafting, decreasing hindering job demands was found to be unrelated (Tims et al., 2012) or negatively related to work engagement (Petrou et al., 2012). This might be explained by the fact that reducing demands leads to a less stimulating environment, and thus to lower engagement.

In addition, several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between job crafting and work performance. Leana et al. (2009) showed that collaborative crafting, i.e., groups of workers discussing and working together to customize how their work is organized and enacted, was positively related to the performance of employees of childcare centres. Bakker et al. (2012) and Tims et al. (in press) found that employees’ job crafting was predictive of in-role performance. Petrou, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2015) found that seeking resources predicted task performance one year later. Demerouti, Bakker and Gevers (2015) showed that seeking resources had a positive indirect relationship with supervisor ratings of contextual performance (such as voluntarily helping colleagues with their tasks when they have high work overload), through work engagement and with supervisor ratings of creativity through work engagement and flourishing. Reducing demands, however, was detrimental to both contextual performance and creativity, presumably also because of its negative effect on work engagement. On the daily level, Demerouti et al. (2015) found that seeking resources was positively associated with daily task performance; yet reducing demands was detrimental to task performance.

Taken together, the above studies suggest a favourable impact of seeking resources and seeking challenges and a negative impact of reducing demands on individual and organizational work-related outcomes. However, it is important to realize that the effects of job crafting are also contingent upon situational factors.

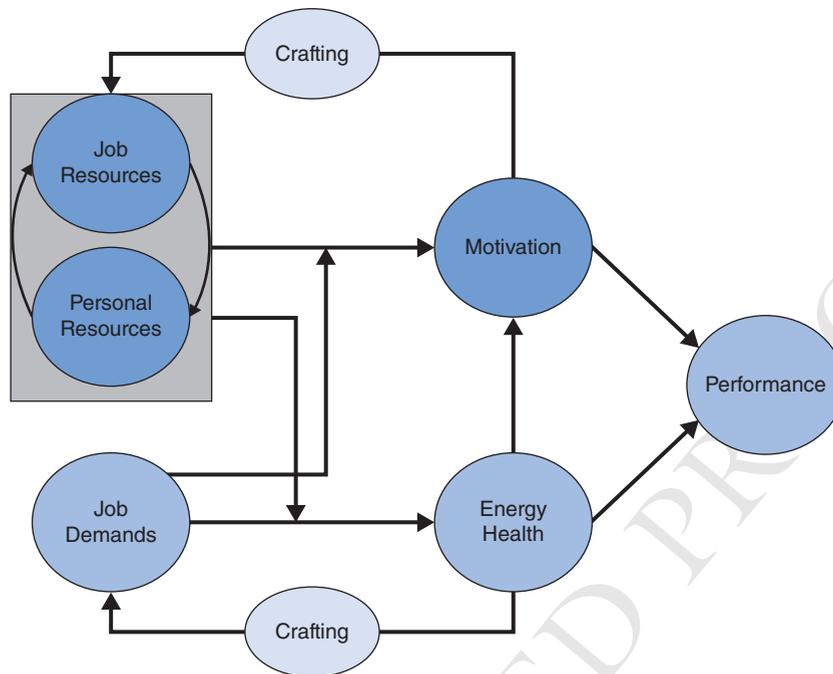


Figure 3.1: Job crafting within the Job Demands-Resources Model

For example, in situations of high task interdependence where colleagues have to work closely together to accomplish their tasks, the job crafting behaviour of individual employees is likely to affect their colleagues. This might not always be positive or desirable, e.g., in the case when an employee reduces his/her demands by lowering the number of tasks (s)he performs, which implies that one of his/her colleagues will have to do extra work. Figure 3.1 depicts the role of job crafting within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model.

3.4 Job Crafting Interventions

As mentioned before, the majority of job redesign interventions that are described in the literature use a top-down approach that addresses the same job characteristics for all employees, regardless of the difference in importance each of them attaches to these characteristics. Job crafting, in contrast, can be considered a bottom-up approach that begins specifically from the needs of individual employees. The net result is that each employee might change different job characteristics depending on his/her personal needs, resulting in a better PE-fit and higher level of well-being as well as individual and organizational performance. So both individual workers and their organizations may benefit from interventions aimed at stimulating job crafting.

In the literature, only a few studies on the effectiveness of job crafting interventions are available. All of these interventions scope individual workers. Van den Heuvel, Demerouti and Peeters (2012, 2015) developed a training programme to increase the awareness of employees in different layers of the organization regarding the ways in which they could adjust their job to their own needs so that they experience more pleasure, engagement and meaning in their work. The adjustments refer to the specific job demands and job resources, the two categories of job characteristics that are described in the JD-R Model. That process begins with awareness of the current working situation and the freedom that they have to make those adjustments. In this way, it becomes clear to employees what are job demands and job resources they need to adjust or create.

The job-crafting training aims to increase participants' motivation and engagement through two different routes: (1) through promoting the self-directed behaviour of employees; and (2) through the strengthening of personal resources. It consisted of the following elements: (1) a job crafting workshop; (2) a weekly job crafting assignment/logbook; and (3) a reflection meeting. During the workshop, employees got acquainted with the JD-R model and with the concept of job crafting. They learned to draft a Personal Crafting Plan (PCP), which consists of crafting actions, set by the employees themselves, that participants plan to undertake for a period of four weeks. In the second phase, employees kept crafting logbooks, i.e., detailed reports of their crafting activities of each week. During the final reflection meeting they discussed the success they had achieved, the problems they had encountered and the solutions they had found. Thus, the training combines learning about what job crafting is and what happens when employees themselves craft their jobs, executing self-specified job-crafting assignments/actions for a period of several weeks and reflecting on the experiences of these job-crafting actions after they have been completed. In this way, individuals are encouraged to integrate job crafting into their daily work by learning to choose and to execute small job-crafting actions. Compared to a control group, it was found that participants in the intervention group showed increased well-being (i.e., more positive and less negative emotions), more job resources (i.e., better contact with the supervisor, more work-related opportunities for development), and higher levels of self-efficacy (Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Peeters, 2012).

Gordon et al. (2014) expanded upon their job crafting intervention by making it less demanding for participants and by integrating a new 'thinking-in-action' approach with so-called Situated Experiential Learning Narratives (SELN). The SELN helped participants to create their own job crafting goals more easily, by allowing individuals to learn from their own or others' real-life experiences through sharing stories of how proactive behaviour had changed their thoughts, feelings, or relationships with their jobs. After these reflections, participants were better able to assign their behaviours to specific job crafting strategies. In a study of medical specialists, positive effects of the modified intervention on job crafting behaviors, well-being (i.e., work engagement, health, and reduced levels of

exhaustion), and job performance (i.e., adaptive, task, and contextual performance) for the participants in the experimental (vs. control) groups were found.

Based on these two studies, it can be concluded that job crafting behaviour can be stimulated by targeted interventions and that this can have positive effects on employee well-being and performance. However, more research is still needed on how to most effectively stimulate job crafting behaviours leading to favourable outcomes. This research could also be aimed at uncovering the process through which job crafting is related to favourable outcomes: is it because of substantive changes in the work – i.e., job characteristics – itself or does it come from the involvement in the process of making these changes? Or is it a combination of both?

3.5 Building Sustainable Organizations Through Job Crafting

Throughout this chapter, we have attempted to demonstrate that organizations can benefit from job crafting as a means to strengthen the sustainability of their organization as a whole and of their employees in particular. Job crafting can contribute to organizational and employee sustainability in at least three different ways (Demerouti, 2014). First, job crafting can be used as a supplement to more traditional top-down, ‘one-size-fits-all’ redesign approaches to enhance workers’ well being and performance. In this way, job redesign efforts can become more successful as they are better tailored to individual needs, and the improvement of jobs can be a continuing process creating sustainable changes. Second, job crafting represents a means that can be encouraged by organizations to keep their employees enthusiastic for and engaged in their work. For example, managers may motivate their subordinates to craft their jobs and give them the freedom to do so. Thus, organizations can achieve competitive advantage in attracting and retaining employees. Third, job crafting can be a valuable means to adjust jobs according to the needs of specific groups of employees, e.g., older employees, employees with disabilities or health problems, or parents with young children.

A fourth way in which job crafting can add to employee and organizational sustainability, which is particularly relevant in today’s transformational work environments, is in successfully dealing with tasks and roles that are ‘in flux’ (Demerouti & Bakker, 2013). It adds to employee sustainability by enhancing the ability to adapt to the demands that are posed by these environments. Examples of proactive actions that can be useful during organizational change are (1) maximizing the pool of job resources that help employees to deal or cope with change, (2) keeping the work pressure associated with change at an optimal level, and (3) seeking challenges that will transform change to an engaging and efficacious experience (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008). These three behaviours are part of job crafting, and thus they form an ideal strategic advantage for employees in the context of change (Petrou et al., 2012).

The results of several studies suggest that job crafting can make individual employees more responsive and adaptive to the context of change and thus facilitate the successful implementation of organizational change and innovations. In a qualitative study during a merger, Kira, Balkin and San (2012) found that, among other activities, relational crafting (e.g., asking for supervisory support) and task crafting (e.g., prioritizing) were used as strategies to deal with the new situation at work. Petrou, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2015) conducted a study during the reorganization of a police department and found that seeking resources was positively associated with work engagement, while reducing demands was negatively associated with work engagement. Moreover, seeking resources and seeking challenges were positively associated with adaptation to change as reported by police officers, whereas reducing demands was negatively related to adaptation. Finally, the health care organization in the above-mentioned study by Gordon et al (2014) was involved in different forms of change. Results show that by encouraging employees to self-initiate their adaptations to the changes, by providing them with opportunities to self-regulate (gain control) in uncertain, changing environments, and by crafting their changing job, they remained healthier and performed optimally.

Overall, job crafting (i.e., seeking resources and seeking challenges particularly) is the way through which employees become more engaged, responsive and adaptive. In turn, this contributes to the sustainability of employees themselves as well as the organizations they work for.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented job crafting as a socially innovative approach to proactively involve employees in ‘shaping their job to suit them better’. Employees who seek resources and challenges in their job will be better able to fit their job to their preferences so that they can be more motivated and function optimally. Job crafting can also be stimulated through training that helps employees to gain insight into mismatches between their current work situation and their personal needs and preferences, and to tailor their job to better fit these personal needs and preferences. As was shown, job crafting occurs in small steps and is targeted to optimizing the prevailing job demands and resources. Therefore, it can help employees deal with the challenges that they experience in their jobs such as dealing with innovations and organizational change in a sustainable way, i.e., a way that helps them to remain healthy and perform optimally. However, job crafting should not be considered a substitute for but rather as a complement to the more traditional, top-down approaches for job redesign. Though job crafting is not the answer to all challenges that present-day organizations are facing, it is important to realize that individual employees themselves are the real experts regarding their own jobs and ways to improve these ‘to suit them better’.

Summary

The traditional top-down, 'one-size-fits-all' approach that has dominated the job redesign literature for decades has been shown to be partly ineffective in enhancing worker motivation and performance. Complementing the traditional job redesign approaches with new, bottom-up, individualized approaches that employees may use to 'shape their job to suit them better' can boost their effectiveness. In this way, the unique constellation of working conditions prevalent in each job is taken into account. One of these new approaches is job crafting, i.e., the physical and cognitive changes that employees make in their task or relational boundaries by optimizing the level of their job demands and job resources. Recent studies have demonstrated that job crafting can have positive effects on employee motivation and performance. Job crafting can be considered 'everyday' behaviour that many employees display more or less spontaneously already. However, organizations can stimulate this behaviour by explicitly recognizing its existence and by creating conditions that facilitate it. For example, they can offer training to employees to teach them to 'shape their jobs to suit them better' in ways that benefit themselves as well as the larger organization. When organizations successfully promote beneficial job crafting and avoid costly or dysfunctional job crafting, their employees become more responsive and adaptive to change. In turn, this will not only enhance employee sustainable employability but also support sustainable innovation processes of the organizations they work for.

Discussion Points

- 1 Job crafting is, by definition, self-initiated behaviour that is not part of a given job description. However, organizations could signal to their employees that this type of proactive behaviour is welcomed. In what ways could organizations stimulate or facilitate employees to craft their jobs?
- 2 Like employees, students are involved in structured, coercive activities (e.g., attending class) that are directed toward a specific goal (e.g., passing exams). Think about the different ways in which students could shape their studies to suit them better by crafting specific demands and/or resources.

Suggested Further Reading

Demerouti, E. (2014). Design your own job through job crafting. *European Psychologist*, *19*, 237–247. This article presents an overview of the literature on job crafting and how job crafting can help organizations deal with issues related to specific groups of employees.

Petrou, P., Demerouti, E., Peeters, M. C. W., Schaufeli, W. B., & Hetland, J. (2012). Crafting a job on a daily basis: Contextual correlates and the link to work engagement. *Journal of*

Organizational Behavior, *33*, 1120–1141. This is the first diary study on job crafting which presents insights and an instrument to capture it on a daily level.

Tims, M., & Bakker, A.B. (2010). Job crafting: Towards a new model of individual job redesign. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *84*, 268–278. This article presents a theoretical overview on job crafting and its relation to existing constructs.

Online Resource

United Nations, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sustainablefuture/jobs.asp#facts> This website presents the UN vision on sustainability in relation to work.

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