



## Job crafting and job engagement: The mediating role of person–job fit



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### ABSTRACT

The focus of job design has shifted from the manager-initiated approach to the employee-initiated approach. Although scholars and managers have recognized the pivotal role of job crafting in the job design domain, certain unknown questions remain. We fill this void by examining the relationships among job crafting, person–job fit, and job engagement. Data were gathered from full-time frontline hotel employees in Taiwan. The findings show that both individual crafting and collaborative crafting are related to job engagement. Person–job fit mediates such relationships. Individual crafting is a better predictor of job engagement than collaborative crafting. The implications for theoretical and managerial job crafting research are provided.

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### 1. Introduction

Researchers and managers have recognized the importance of front-line hotel employees in organizational effectiveness (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Karatepe et al., 2012). Front-line hotel employees play a pivotal role in building relationships with guests, creating loyal customers, and transforming aggrieved customers into satisfied ones (Babakus et al., 2003; Gilly and Hansen, 1985). However, the job nature of front-line hotel employees (e.g., boundary-spanning jobs) makes them confront excessive workloads, role stress, and burnout (Karatepe et al., 2012; Karatepe and Sokmen, 2006). Hence, how hotel managers improve employee' job conditions through job design has become a primary focus in the hospitality industry.

Job design is an important issue in the management field and has traditionally adopted an up-bottom approach in which managers design employee jobs (Campion and McClelland, 1993; Tims and Bakker, 2010). However, because of limited time and organizational resources, not every employee can receive manager support and supervision (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011; Dienesch and Liden, 1986). Therefore, recent job design has focused on a new and important bottom-up approach in which employees play an active and proactive role in redesigning and changing certain aspects of a job

that falls within job tasks (Tims and Bakker, 2010; Tims et al., 2012). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) defined this employee-initiated job design as job crafting.

Job crafting is “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Tims et al. (2012) categorized job crafting into three different proactive behaviors: increasing job resources, increasing job challenges, and decreasing job demands. Previous studies have focused on the influence of these job crafting behaviors on job-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction, burnout, and cynicism (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012; Tims et al., 2012). In this study, we focus on the effect of job crafting on an important but neglected job attitude, namely job engagement, because of inconsistent results reported in individual studies regarding the relationships between different types of job crafting and job engagement. For example, increasing job resources has been determined positively related to job engagement by Tims et al. (2012), but unrelated to job engagement by Nielsen and Abildgaard (2012) and Petrou et al. (2012). Previous research has resulted in mixed support for the relationship between decreasing job demands and job engagement (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012; Petrou et al., 2012).

Bakker et al. (2012b) indicated that job crafting takes other behavioral forms. According to Leana et al. (2009), job crafting can be classified into two categories: individual job crafting and collaborative job crafting. Individual job crafting occurs when a person plays an active role in altering the boundaries of his/her job and shaping actual work practice. Collaborative job crafting refers to employees who jointly make an effort to determine how to change

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the task boundaries to fulfill their shared work goals (Leana et al., 2009). We adopt both individual job crafting and collaborative job crafting, because in boundary-spanning jobs, front-line hotel employees provide customers with services by themselves and also have the opportunities to coordinate and interact with other coworkers to deliver quality service. Framing job crafting in terms of individual and collaborative crafting facilitates observation of the work behaviors of hotel employees during working hours. Based on the above findings, we investigate whether these two job crafting behaviors have consistent or inconsistent relationships with job engagement.

Previous studies have indicated that additional information on job crafting characteristics and dynamics helps managers determine which behaviors are beneficial to organizations (Lyons, 2008). Examining whether individual and collaborative crafting are associated with employee engagement without understanding their important mediating role may be assertive and arbitrary. Because prior literature has indicated that P-J fit is an important antecedent of job-related attitudes (Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001; Saks and Ashforth, 1997), we also examine the mediating effects of P-J fit on the relationships between individual and collaborative job crafting and job engagement.

Our study contributes to the literature as follows: First, Bakker et al. (2012a) showed that the determinants of within-person job engagement slightly differ from those of between-persons job engagement. Petrou et al. (2012) examined the relationship between job crafting and job engagement from a within-person perspective, but did not offer a clear understanding of the relationship between job crafting and job engagement from a between-persons perspective. Current knowledge about how job crafting influences job engagement from a between-persons perspective is relatively inadequate. Therefore, this study is to examine the relationship between job crafting and job engagement from a between-persons perspective to complement the job crafting-job engagement relationship.

Second, studies considering how the P-J fit may mediate the relationships between individual/collaborative job crafting and job engagement are scant. Therefore, a clear understanding of how job crafting affects job engagement could be achieved by identifying the psychological mechanism that explains how individual and collaborative job crafting influence job engagement. This study responds to the suggestions of Oldham and Hackman (2010), who indicated that future studies need to investigate the dynamics of job crafting.

Finally, although job crafting plays a pivotal role in the organizational psychology domain, it has received little research attention (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Studies on job crafting in the hotel industry are also rare. However, hotel organizations are aware that front-line employees in contact with customers frequently play a pivotal role in delivering quality service to profitable and loyal customers (Karatepe and Uludag, 2008). Hotel supervisors must be concerned about the crucial role of their front-line employees who were engaged at work in maintaining superior service (Li et al., 2012). However, based on these findings, empirical studies of the relationship between job crafting and job engagement in the hospitality industry are scant. Therefore, the findings of this study could suggest useful and alternative business strategies for hotel managers.

## 2. Literature review and research hypotheses

### 2.1. The job environment of front-line employees in the hospitality industry

Hotel service is a people-oriented industry requiring regular and frequent contact with customers. Because front-line employees

encounter diverse customer needs, their jobs are considered unstructured and non-routine (Coelho and Augusto, 2010). To fulfill customer needs and enhance customer satisfaction, tasks become more flexible and hotel employees have the autonomy and responsibility of making decisions (Pavia and Pilepić, 2010). In addition, empowerment has been encouraged and viewed as an important strategy in the hotel industry (Erstad, 1997; Sparrowe, 1994), because employees with a high level of empowerment and discretion are autonomous and are able to facilitate organizational effectiveness and satisfy customers (Chiang and Jang, 2008). Therefore, the profession of front-line hotel service is characterized by unstructured jobs, discretion, and autonomy, which gives hotel employees opportunities to regularly adjust their task boundaries and work processes. Job crafting is important and popular in front-line hotel jobs.

### 2.2. Job crafting

The concept of job crafting was proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). Employees involved in crafting behaviors can change the scope, form, or number of jobs (physical changes), how people view their jobs (cognitive changes), and how often and with whom they interact at work (relational boundary changes; Bakker et al., 2012a; Tims and Bakker, 2010). Employees who change any one of these elements alter the job design and the social environmental in which they work. Such actions alter both the meaning of the work and an employee's work identity (Lyons, 2008).

Previous research has explored the determinants and outcomes of job crafting (Leana et al., 2009; Tims and Bakker, 2010). Job crafting is influenced by individual and job factors. Individual factors include cognitive ability, proactive personality, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Bakker et al., 2012b; Lyons, 2008; Tims and Bakker, 2010). Job factors include task interdependence, autonomy, supervisor support, and social ties (Bakker et al., 2012a; Leana et al., 2009; Petrou et al., 2012).

In addition, job crafting has been found to be significantly and positively related to the organizational attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employees (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims and Bakker, 2010). In a study of U.S. outside sales representatives employed in a consumer product company, Lyons (2008) found that job crafting increases self-image, perceived control, and readiness to change. Bakker et al. (2012b) demonstrated the positive association between job crafting and in-role performance. Leana et al. (2009) showed that collaborative crafting is positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Our study expands the research by examining the relationships between individual and collaborative crafting and job engagement.

### 2.3. Person-job fit

P-J fit refers to the relationship between employee characteristics and job characteristics (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Edwards (1991) outlined a two-dimensional conceptualization of P-J fit consisting of needs-supplies (N-S) fit and demands-abilities (D-A) fit. N-S fit means the congruence between employee needs, desires, and preferences and the rewards received for the job; D-A fit is the congruence between job demands and employee knowledge, skills and abilities (Cable and DeRue, 2002). Prior studies have supported the effect of both types of P-J fit on employee and organizational attitudes and behaviors (Edwards and Shipp, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, P-J fit increases job satisfaction and organizational commitment and reduces turnover intention (Hambleton et al., 2000; Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001). Therefore, P-J fit plays a critical role for organizational effectiveness.

Previous studies have sought to link the relationship between job crafting and P-J fit. Job crafting is a person's spontaneous

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