



Fostering employee well-being via a job crafting intervention



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of an intervention based on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory. We hypothesized that the intervention would influence participants' job crafting behaviors, as well as their basic need satisfaction. Further, we hypothesized a positive impact on participants work engagement. In addition to the proposed intervention effects, we expected that job crafting would have a positive relationship with work engagement, through basic need satisfaction. The study used a quasi-experimental design with an experimental group and a control group. Teachers completed measures pre- and post-intervention. Results of analyses of variance were largely in line with our predictions. In the intervention group, job crafting, basic need satisfaction, and work engagement increased over time. In the control group, no significant changes were found on all variables. In addition, the results of the analysis confirmed the hypothesized mediation. We discuss the implications of these findings for both JD-R theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the pace of technological and economical change has been accelerating. These advances have an impact on the jobs of employees all over the world. Such changes may have both positive and negative implications for employees. On the one hand, it offers opportunities to develop new skills in their work environment. On the other hand, such changes may also be negative because of the increasing complexity of work (World Economic Forum, 2016). In work and organizational psychology, both positive (e.g., work engagement) (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Simbula, Guglielmi, & Schaufeli, 2011; Tadic, Bakker, & Oerlemans, 2013) and negative facets of work (e.g., job stress) (Garrick et al., 2014; Howard & Johnson, 2004) are subject of research. A theory that can help us understand and predict the impact of work on employee well-being is Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

JD-R theory provides a theoretical framework about how job demands, resources, psychological states and outcomes are associated. Further, the theory gives insights in how it can be applied in practice to foster employee well-being. Research has shown that engaged employees work harder and are more innovative than their non-engaged colleagues (Konermann, 2012). In addition, several studies have shown that engaged employees perform better (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). Because of these findings, organizations are interested in fostering employees' work engagement. Although the research evidence for the proposed relations within JD-R theory is accumulating, intervention studies that apply the theory to practice are still scarce.

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Can work engagement indeed be increased by interventions focused on optimizing job demands and (personal and work-related) job resources, as JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) suggests? The central aim of the present study is to assess the impact of a Job crafting intervention – aimed at optimizing job demands and resources – on participants' work engagement. This study aims to contribute to the literature on positive organizational interventions by testing an intervention using a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test control-group design. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to JD-R theory by examining whether work engagement can be promoted by a job crafting intervention embedded in the JD-R framework. Our investigation may illustrate how employees can stay engaged in their work by mobilizing their most important job resources.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Job demands-resources theory

With the turn of the 21st century, researchers in the field of organizational psychology became more and more interested in the positive side of work and no longer merely focused on negative work aspects like job stress and burnout. The positive psychology movement inspired researchers all over the world to develop new models and theories, including Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Over the past decade, JD-R theory has been used to understand and predict employee well-being in a wide range of occupations (for reviews, see Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). One key assumption of JD-R theory is that all work characteristics can be classified into two categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands are aspects of the job that require effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). In the context of teaching, work pressure, dealing with pupil misbehavior, and facing emotionally demanding situations are examples of effortful job demands. Job resources refer to those aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals. Therefore they can be used to reduce the impact of job demands and the associated costs. Besides, job resources also have the potential to stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Within the educational setting of this study examples of job resources are supervisory support (i.e., by the principal of the school), role clarity, social support from colleagues, and constructive feedback from pupils and/or their parents.

JD-R theory proposes that work environments elicit two independent psychological processes – a health impairment process and a motivational process. The health impairment process starts with high job demands that may exhaust employees' energetic resources and lead to fatigue and health problems (Hakanen et al., 2006). In contrast, the motivational process starts with job resources that have motivational potential and lead to high work engagement and low levels of cynicism (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Previous studies have suggested that several job resources like colleague support, performance feedback, and supervisory coaching lead to work engagement (Bakker, 2011). By optimizing job demands and job resources in the work environment, organizations can follow a top-down approach to facilitate and stimulate work engagement. However, using a bottom-up approach, employees may also take the initiative themselves to optimize their job. This proactive behavior is also known as job crafting.

2.2. Job crafting

Job crafting refers to the process by which employees change elements of their jobs and relationships with others to change the meaning of their work and the social environment at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The latter authors propose that employees can craft their job using each of three different strategies: employees can craft the amount or type of tasks; they can change their relations with other people (e.g. how often or how long they interact with colleagues and clients); and employees can change their cognitions about their job.

Following a job redesign perspective and using JD-R theory, Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012) proposed an alternative approach of job crafting. These authors conceptualized job crafting as the proactive, bottom-up changes individuals make in their levels of job demands or job resources. Through job crafting, employees can improve the fit between their personal needs and abilities on the one hand and their job characteristics on the other. Tims et al. (2012) propose four job crafting dimensions: increasing social job resources (e.g., seeking social support among colleagues); increasing structural job resources (e.g., creating opportunities to develop oneself at work); increasing challenging job demands (e.g., starting new projects); and/or decreasing hindering job demands (e.g., reducing workload). The bottom-up moulding of job demands and resources initiated by employees themselves plays a substantial role in the most recent version of JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Recent studies revealed that employees who take the initiative themselves to optimize their job demands and job resources in the work environment, facilitate and stimulate their own work engagement. A study by Bakker, Tims, and Derks (2012) among 95 dyads of employees working in various organizations revealed that employees' job crafting behavior was predictive of their work engagement. In addition, a recent longitudinal job crafting study (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2015) among 288 participants showed similar positive relations between employees' job crafting behavior and their work engagement.

Although job crafting concerns employee's self-initiated actions to adapt their job demands and resources, job crafting may be facilitated or supported by management. The feedback employees receive on their job crafting actions may either create more possibilities for job crafting or may inhibit job crafting to occur in the future (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Job crafting behavior can also be supported through interventions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Peeters, 2012; Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2017; Van Wingerden, Derks, Bakker, & Dorenbosch, 2013). Van den Heuvel et al. (2012) showed that a job crafting intervention could successfully stimulate police officers to proactively adapt their level of job demands and

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