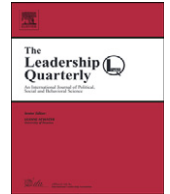




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Crafting one's job to take charge of role overload: When proactivity requires adaptivity across levels

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates employees' job crafting behavior in the context of perceived role overload, and identifies employees' perceived ability to deal with work change (i.e., "perceived adaptivity") and leaders' need for structure as moderators positively influencing this relationship. A two-wave panel field study of 47 leaders and 143 employees in a Norwegian manufacturing firm found that perceived role overload related negatively to employees' job crafting, as hypothesized. Employees' perceived adaptivity alone did not increase job crafting in role overload situations, as predicted. Rather, the relationship between perceived role overload and job crafting was only positive when employees' perceived adaptivity was high and their leaders' need for structure was low. Thus, employees' job crafting in role overload situations depends on the interactive fit between employees' and leaders' adaptive capabilities. Implications for the socially embedded theory of job crafting and leadership practice are discussed.

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In addition to the top-down prescription of job characteristics and content, work design scholars increasingly acknowledge the influence of emergent processes in which employees proactively "craft" their jobs by changing the task, relational, and cognitive boundaries of work (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Job crafting can serve aspirational purposes, such as deriving more meaning from one's work (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). It can also serve more productivity-oriented purposes. Notably, proactively altering aspects of one's work can help employees deal with challenging job demands (Daniels, Beesley, Wimalasiri, & Cheyne, 2013; Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Heland, 2012; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012) and "take charge" to improve work practice (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009). In this line of research, job crafting has been linked with several beneficial outcomes, including effective problem solving (Daniels et al., 2013), work engagement (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2012), and employee performance (Leana et al., 2009; Tims et al., 2012). Thus, while employees might engage in job crafting for a variety of reasons, there is particular value in promoting this behavior among employees engaged in demanding work situations where job functioning could be improved.

On the other hand, we know little about what facilitates job crafting (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Tims et al., 2012), particularly in work situations where job demands actually hinder employees' ability to perform effectively. While qualitative research emphasizes adaptivity as a key enabler of job crafting (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010), no known research has examined if employees' adaptivity facilitates job crafting in the context of hindering job demands. Further, while employees' job crafting efforts are held to be shaped by the leaders they are assigned to work with (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton,

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2001), little empirical research has addressed job crafting as a socially embedded phenomenon. Efforts to take charge of hindering job demands relies on viewing these demands as obstacles that can be overcome through self-initiated effort (Eatough, Chang, Miloslavic, & Johnson, 2011; Gilboa, Shirom, & Fried, 2008). It is likely that both individual- and leader-related factors influence such perceptions. Accordingly, the present research investigates aspects of employee- and leader-level adaptivity as individually-held and socially-embedded factors, respectively, that interact to enable employees to craft their jobs in the context of hindering job demands.

Specifically, we examine job crafting in role overload situations where the amount of work demanded from employees greatly hinders their ability to perform effectively (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). Based on the findings of meta-analytical research, we expect that perceived role overload should relate negatively to employees' job crafting behavior, as job crafting should be viewed as having a low probability of success or sapping the basic resources employees need to deal with this hindering job demand (Crawford, Lepine, & Rich, 2010; LePine et al., 2005). However, taking an interactionist perspective of employee behavior, we identify employee- and leader-level factors that facilitate job crafting by altering this assessment. Specifically, we argue that employees' perceived ability to deal with change (their "perceived adaptivity") provides them with the confidence to carry out the job crafting that could improve their work situation. Further, we propose that leaders' need for structure (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993), as it reflects a preference for predictable and unambiguous environments, indicates a form of inadaptivity that gives rise to work contexts where employees will have less opportunity to job craft. Thus, we hypothesize a three-way interaction between perceived role overload, employees' perceived adaptivity, and leaders' need for structure, in which the relationship between perceived role overload and job crafting is strongest when employees' perceived adaptivity is high and leaders' need for structure is low.

Given this agenda, the intended contribution of our research is threefold. First, we seek to extend our understanding of what facilitates job crafting in role overload contexts where this activity could be particularly beneficial for improving job functioning. To date, the only known research taking this perspective has focused on job crafting in the context of challenging work demands, but not hindering demands such as role overload (Daniels et al., 2013; Petrou et al., 2012). Second, we seek to extend both the "proactivity requires adaptivity" thesis and the socially-embedded account of job crafting advanced by Berg, Wrzesniewski, and colleagues (2010) by investigating the interactive impact that employees' perceived adaptivity and leaders' need for structure has on employees' job crafting behavior in the context of hindering job demands. To this end, we also contribute to both the job crafting and leadership literatures by advancing our understanding of how leaders influence job crafting. Prior research has focused on the structural aspects of work that shape leader behavior and, in turn, employees' opportunity to job craft (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Our study indicates that leaders' need for structure also influences employees' job crafting behavior, conceivably by shaping leader behavior and, in turn, a work context that constrains employees' opportunity to job craft. Thus, our findings contribute to the literature identifying how leaders' preferences can shape their behavior and, in turn, a work context that influences consistent employee behavior (Dragoni, 2005; Dragoni & Kuenzi, 2012). Implications of our findings for theory and practice are discussed.

Job crafting in the context of role overload: a conditional response

Job crafting describes the changes that employees make to the task, relational, or cognitive boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and includes activities such as redefining the scope of one's work responsibilities, altering work procedures, and seeking out new work relationships (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010). Job crafting is often classified as a proactive behavior as it reflects a self-initiated effort to bring about change. However, unlike other proactive behaviors, job crafting is not necessarily anticipative (c.f., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010). In fact, most conceptualizations of job crafting view the behavior as a response to one's present work situation. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), for example, originally described job crafting as something employees undertake to create a better fit between their prescribed job and their own preferences, needs, and aspirations. Other scholars view employees' self-initiated efforts to alter aspects of their task and relational responsibilities at work as a means to deal more effectively with current job demands (e.g., Daniels et al., 2013; Petrou et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2012). Similarly, Leana et al. (2009) compare job crafting to "taking charge" (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), referring to the voluntary, constructive changes employees make to improve unproductive aspects of their work. In their research, job crafting includes changing unproductive work procedures, introducing new approaches at work to improve effectiveness, and changing the way work is done to make it easier to carry out.

As a self-initiated effort to change one's job, job crafting is distinct from other responsive work behaviors such as adaptive performance, which reflects employees' adjustment to externally initiated work changes (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). While adaptive performance requires employees to change plans, goals, actions, or priorities to deal with changing work situations (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000), these changes are driven by external, organizational requirements and not the desire to create a better personal fit or more productive functioning. In fact, adapting to changing work situations could require giving up work tasks that one finds enjoyable (c.f., Oreg, 2006) or adopting new methods or systems that add unnecessary, and perhaps hindering, complexity to one's work. However, adaptive performance and job crafting, while distinct, are likely interrelated processes (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010). Employees' efforts to change the task, relational, or cognitive boundaries of their work could be driven by a desire to resolve problems brought about by an externally-initiated change. Alternatively, successful displays of adaptivity performance could provide employees with the resources needed to engage in future proactive behavior (Strauss, Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2013). We come back to the latter process in later sections of our hypotheses development.

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