



## Outcomes of job crafting among flight attendants



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### ABSTRACT

Underpinned by Job Demands-Resources theory, our study proposes and tests a conceptual model that examines the outcomes of job crafting among flight attendants. Specifically, our study links job crafting, as manifested by increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands, to quitting intentions and service recovery performance through work engagement. Our study used a time-lagged design and multiple sources of data. The results from structural equation modeling reveal that job crafting fosters flight attendants' work engagement and service recovery performance. As hypothesized, work engagement alleviates quitting intentions. Consistent with our prediction, work engagement mediates the influence of job crafting on quitting intentions. Contrary to what has been hypothesized, the empirical data do not lend any support to the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between job crafting and service recovery performance.

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### 1. Introduction

In today's competitive aviation industry, flight attendants are a key input to delivery of exemplary services to passengers and passenger satisfaction. However, they are frequently beset with jetlag, role stress, long night shifts, dysfunctional passenger attitudes and behaviors, and/or burnout (e.g., Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2014; Kim and Back, 2012). Flight attendants do emotion work, are expected to work in teams effectively, and need to develop relationships with their colleagues for better service performance and respond to passenger requests promptly (Fu, 2013; Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2014; Park and Park, 2016; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). Since such customer-contact employees spend a great deal of time serving passengers, they may ask for an opportunity to be active job crafters or may be in need of job crafting for successful service performance (cf. Bakker, 2010; Weseler and Niessen, 2016).

Almost more than three decades ago, Kulik et al. (1987) underscored the significance of job crafting. They suggested that employees can make changes in their jobs on their own initiative. According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), job crafting is defined as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries in their work" (p. 179). Apart from

cognitive changes in work tasks and relationships, job crafting may also be considered based on job characteristics (Bakker et al., 2012). According to Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, job characteristics can be classified into two general categories, which are job demands and job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Using JD-R theory, job crafting can be defined as the changes employees may make pertaining to job demands and resources (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Increasing structural and social job resources as well as increasing challenging job demands represent job crafting (Bakker and Demerouti, 2016; Tims et al., 2012). Employees may redesign their jobs using job demands and resources and display work engagement that is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). They in turn may exhibit desirable outcomes (Bakker et al., 2012). In empirical terms, Van Wingerden et al. (2016) reported that the job demands-resources intervention in the form of improving personal resources and job crafting engendered work engagement and in-role performance. Brenninkmeijer and Hekkert-Koning (2015) found that both increasing structural job resources and increasing social job resources positively influenced work engagement.

Job crafting is a critical strategy for both managerial and non-managerial employees because the ones who craft their jobs "... are about changing the job in order to experience enhanced meaning of it" (Bakker, 2010, p. 239). Flight attendants may seek structural job resources to learn new things. For example, they may be in need of more autonomy and knowledge about the job. They

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may seek social job resources. Specifically, they may ask for support from their coworkers and pursers as well as feedback concerning their current job performance. They may also seek and accept more responsibility for personal growth and achievement (increasing challenging job demands). The ones who have the opportunity to make changes in their jobs are more engaged in their work, remain with the organization, and perform better at work (cf. Bakker, 2010; Bakker et al., 2012).

Grounded in this backdrop, our study develops and tests a conceptual model (Fig. 1) that investigates the outcomes of job crafting among flight attendants. Specifically, our study gauges the influence of job crafting, as manifested by increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands, on quitting intentions and service recovery performance. Work engagement is treated as a mediator in the aforementioned relationships.

**2. Relevance and contribution of the empirical study**

We intend to make several contributions to current knowledge on job crafting. First, employees who are able to optimize their work environment by redesigning their job demands and resources are more engaged in their work (Bakker et al., 2012). Changes in job resources activate employees' work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2009). According to Demerouti (2014), "...job crafting occurs in demanding, resourceful and changing work environments by employees who are proactive, motivated by growth, or who experience misfit between their motivational style and the environmental cues" (p. 241). Customer-contact employees, including flight attendants, try to fulfill the requirements of their jobs in such work environments. There seems to be convincing evidence regarding the impact of job crafting on work engagement (e.g., Bakker et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2015; Van Wingerden et al., 2017; Vogt et al., 2016). However, empirical research about the relationship between these two constructs among customer-contact employees is scarce (cf. Chen et al., 2014; Siddiqi, 2015). Work engagement is still

a critical topic in the airline industry since companies aim to retain flight attendants who can meet both management and passenger expectations (cf. Ilkhanizadeh and Karatepe, 2017; Karatepe and Talebzadeh, 2016). With this stated, our study gauges the association between job crafting and work engagement among flight attendants. This is relevant and significant because flight attendants' simultaneous focus on increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands will enhance their work engagement. Otherwise, emphasis on one of these indicators in the process of job crafting may give rise to failure.

Second, Demerouti (2014) discusses that more research has focused on the association between job crafting and work engagement. Yet there are limited empirical studies on the consequences of job crafting (Demerouti, 2014). Similarly, what is known about the influence of job crafting on job outcomes among customer-contact employees is sparse (cf. Cheng et al., 2016; Siddiqi, 2015). Therefore, our study tests the influence of job crafting on quitting intentions and service recovery performance.

There are several reasons why our study chose propensity to leave and service recovery performance as the outcomes of job crafting. Specifically, the airline industry is still beset with the flight attendant turnover conundrum (cf. Chen and Kao, 2011). Ascertaining the factors that alleviate quitting intentions is important (Moon et al., 2013) because flight attendants with proclivity to leave the organization impede successful service delivery and engender poor services.

The definition for service recovery performance used in our study is as follows: "...frontline service employees' perceptions of their own abilities and actions to resolve a service failure to the satisfaction of the customer" (Babakus et al., 2003, p. 274). Service recovery performance is still a hot topic (Punjaisri et al., 2013; Van Vaerenbergh et al., 2014) and a critical outcome for ground staff and flight attendants (Karatepe and Choubtarash, 2014; Karatepe and Talebzadeh, 2016). Recent research reveals that there are limited studies on the influence of job crafting on different types of

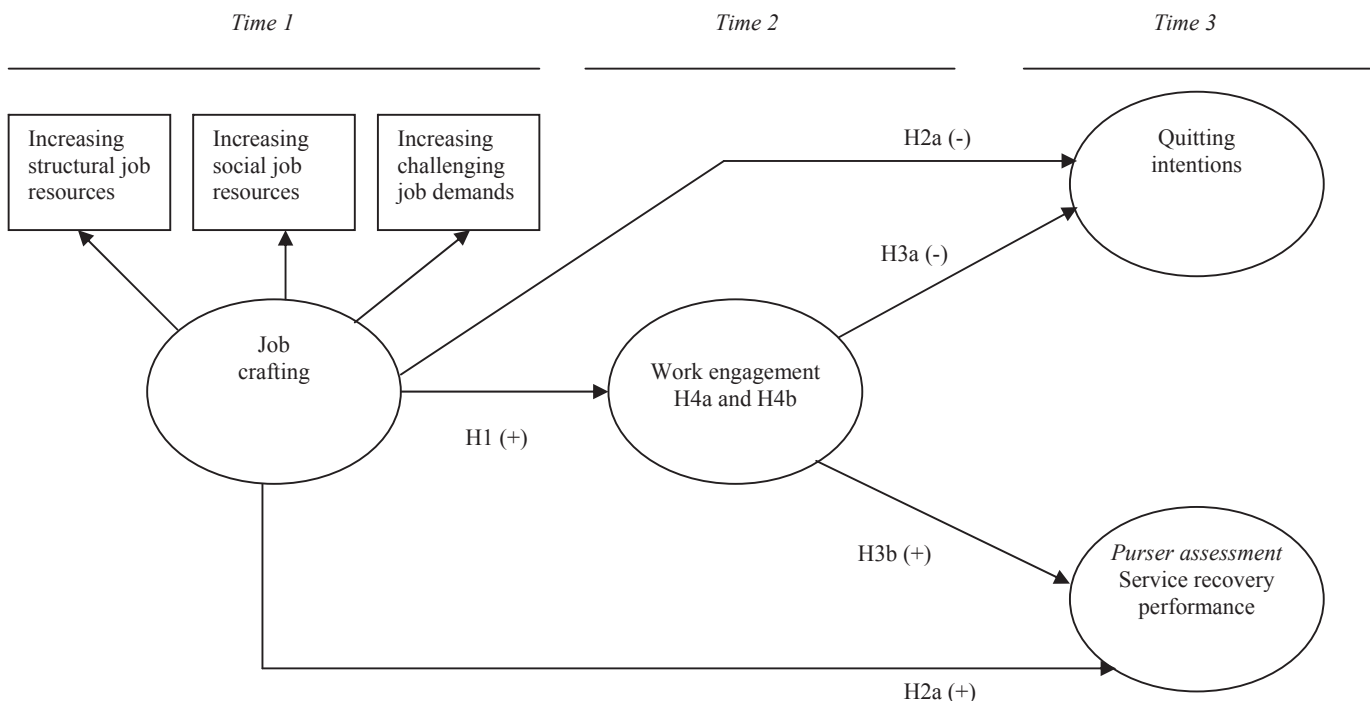


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

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