Job crafting and its relationships with person–job fit and meaningfulness: A three-wave study

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ABSTRACT

Although scholars imply that job crafting contributes to person–job fit and meaningful work, to date, no study examined the relationships between these variables. The present three-wave weekbook study was designed to gain more knowledge about the influence of job crafting on person–job fit and meaningfulness. We collected data among a heterogeneous group of employees (N = 114) during three consecutive weeks (N = 430 occasions). At the end of their working week, employees reported their job crafting behaviors, their person–job fit (demands–abilities fit and needs–supplies fit), and the meaningfulness of their work that week. Results indicated that individuals who crafted their job by increasing their job resources (e.g., support, autonomy) and challenging job demands (e.g., participate in new projects), and by decreasing their hindering job demands (e.g., less emotional job demands) reported higher levels of person–job fit the next week. In turn, demands–abilities fit related to more meaningfulness in the final week. No support was found for alternative causal models. These findings suggest that by crafting their job demands and job resources, individuals can proactively optimize their person–job fit and as a consequence experience their work as meaningful.

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1. Introduction

The organization of work has important implications for people's life and psychological health as work can provide resources to survive, access to relational connections, and the experience of control over one's life (Blustein, 2008). Work that is experienced as motivating and meaningful by employees is found to also contribute to the organization's core (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Not surprisingly, there is a robust knowledge base available for managers in order to design jobs that are likely to be experienced as motivating and meaningful by the workers (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). At the same time, scholars call attention to the fact that the job design is not only influenced by managers but by employees as well (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006; Staw & Boettger, 1990). Changes in the way work is structured and performed nowadays call for workers who take agency in influencing their work characteristics (Strauss & Parker, 2014). Generally speaking, proactive person–environment fit behaviors (Parker & Collins, 2010) may be key for individual workers to match their needs and abilities with the opportunities and demands of the work environment. The self-initiated changes that employees make in the design of their job are referred to as job crafting behaviors (Tims & Bakker, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

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Especially in the context of the changing nature of work, job crafting may be important. For example, when organizations restructure by means of outsourcing production processes or when they embrace the concept of new ways of working and allow employees to work from other places than the office, these changes are likely to affect the work environment. Meaningful work processes may be eliminated and also meaningful social connections may be less likely to occur without effort. Work environments that are characterized by such changes may become detrimental to employees' needs, values, and sense of organizational well-being (Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora, & Densten, 2002). However, when employees engage in job crafting, they can create ways to regain meaning in their work by changing tasks or creating opportunities for interpersonal contact. The goal of the present study is to examine whether job crafting indeed relates to meaningfulness, through person–job fit.

The present study contributes to the existing literature in several important ways. First, although Wrzesniewski and colleagues (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) proposed meaningfulness as an important reason for job crafting, research has mainly focused on other (albeit important) job crafting outcomes such as employee work engagement, job performance, and organizational commitment (e.g., Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013). This means that the way job crafting affects meaningfulness remains untested while it is important to see whether employees who take the initiative to change their work characteristics are indeed increasing the meaningfulness of their work (Kira & Balkin, 2014). Therefore, we empirically test the assumption of Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) job crafting model that job crafting is a proactive strategy to make work more meaningful.

A second contribution of the present study is that similar to the relationship between job crafting and meaningful work, the job crafting literature also refers repeatedly to increased person–job fit as an outcome of job crafting (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). To our knowledge, this relationship has not received much research attention as well. Only recently, Chen, Yen, and Tsai (2014) found support for a positive relationship between individual and collaborative job crafting and person–job fit in a cross-sectional sample of 246 Taiwanese workers. In addition, Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, and Bakker (2014) reported a two-wave study in which data was collected among 350 Chinese participants over a three-month time interval. These authors showed that increases in physical job crafting (e.g., autonomy, job variety) were related to increases in demands–abilities fit, while increases in relational job crafting (e.g., more contact with other people in the job) were related to increases in needs–supplies fit. Hence, there is preliminary evidence that job crafting is related to person–job fit, but the present study further accumulates knowledge on this issue by using a three-wave study design in which job crafting and person–job fit are temporally separated.

Thus, the third contribution is to examine the temporal order of the job crafting model proposing that job crafting first improves person–job fit, which then influences the meaningfulness of work. Because job crafting is found to occur even on a daily basis (e.g., Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2014), and individuals regularly evaluate the fit of their work with their own characteristics (Walsh & Gordon, 2008), we opted for a three-wave design with one week in-between the measurement occasions. This time frame allowed individuals enough time to craft their job and also to experience whether their job aligned with themselves and was meaningful.

1.1. Job crafting and person–job fit

Employee job crafting refers to changes employees make in their job on their own initiative. These changes can relate to the tasks individuals perform at work, to the social characteristics of the job, and to the way individuals think about their job (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Examples of task crafting are employees taking on additional tasks, changing ways in which tasks are performed, and reducing the scope of their tasks. In addition to changing job tasks, employees may also change the relational boundaries of their work by altering the number and quality of interactions with other people while working. Finally, individuals may alter their view of work using cognitive crafting.

Furthermore, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) argued that job crafting is different from job design perspectives that have dominated the organizational psychology literature. Job design perspectives assume that employees respond to the job as it has been redesigned by managers, while job crafting implies that employees continuously shape and influence the design of their jobs while performing their job. Adopting the view that job crafting complements job design (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), scholars have used the influential Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) as a framework for defining which aspects of the job employees can proactively change (e.g., Tims & Bakker, 2010). Instead of specifying beforehand which job characteristics are important for employee motivation and performance, JD-R theory states that there are two overarching categories characterizing each job.

Job demands refer to specific aspects of the job requiring effort from the employee (physical and/or psychological effort), and are therefore associated with certain costs for the individual. Job resources refer to specific aspects of the job that enable the employee to achieve work goals, reduce job demands and the associated costs, and stimulate personal development (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Based on JD-R theory, job crafting has been defined as the changes employees make in their job demands and job resources (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Job crafting can take four forms, namely (1) increasing structural job resources, such as autonomy, variety, and learning opportunities; (2) increasing social job resources, like social support, supervisory coaching, and feedback; (3) increasing challenging job demands, such as proactive involvement in new projects; and (4) decreasing hindering job demands, for example by decreasing the number of emotional interactions or cognitive tasks (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012). The job characteristics included in this operationalization of job crafting were identified to apply to almost every job nowadays (Kompier, 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Addressing job crafting this way differs from job design perspectives – that refer to perceptions of job characteristics – because it is about the *changes* (i.e., increases or decreases) employees make in their job characteristics.

When job characteristics are aligned with employees' personal needs and abilities, employees are most likely to experience good person–job fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Two types of fit can be distinguished (Cable & Judge, 1996). The first