

26. Sustainable work through crafting

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INTRODUCTION

In today's knowledge and service economy and with the increasing trend towards multilocational work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, job redesign and self-management approaches (i.e. individuals actively shaping their own jobs) are increasingly important (Grant & Parker, 2009; Sjöblom et al., 2022). In this chapter, therefore, we focus on *crafting*, by which we mean individuals' proactive efforts to shape their own working conditions, the boundaries of their job, and also nonwork life domains to create healthy, motivating, and satisfying circumstances in which to live and work (de Bloom et al., 2020). The literature on crafting has its origins in *job crafting*, which refers to the proactive customization of working conditions that enables employees to adjust their work environment to suit their own preferences and abilities (Tims et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). However, since the theory and concept of crafting have recently evolved and broadened, our focus will be on these latest developments – namely, the integrative needs model of crafting (de Bloom et al., 2020) and on two new crafting constructs: *work–nonwork balance* and *off-job crafting*.

THE EARLIEST STAGES AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF CRAFTING

While crafting may appear a very timely research theme, capturing the *Zeitgeist* of modern working life, the concept was actually introduced in the 1980s. In their paper on work design and person–job fit, Kulik, Oldham, and Hackman (1987) reported that employees occasionally redesigned their jobs on their own initiative in order to achieve a better match between their skills, their needs, and their job. Surprisingly, it took several decades before the topic was taken up again and theoretically refined by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). The latter authors distinguish three different crafting strategies that

focus on, respectively, (re)shaping job tasks (is task crafting), relationships at work (is relational crafting), and ways of conceptualizing one’s work (is cognitive crafting).

Quantitative research on job crafting gathered momentum after Dutch researchers applied the well-known job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) to job crafting research. Specifically, Tims and Bakker (2010) proposed that job crafting is a bottom-up process whereby employees proactively align job demands and job resources with their own skills and preferences, with the aim of achieving a better person–job fit. The job demands-resources theory posits that job crafting involves increasing structural job resources (e.g. opportunities for personal development), increasing social job resources (e.g. asking for feedback), increasing challenging job demands (e.g. starting new projects), and decreasing hindering job demands (e.g. reducing cognitive or emotional demands) (Tims et al., 2012). Accordingly, the focus of crafting is on the real-life behaviors that workers apply in their jobs, but it provides limited information about people’s motivations for engaging in specific crafting behaviors. Consequently, a new theoretical framework known as the integrative needs model of crafting has been developed (De Bloom et al., 2020). The model proposes that crafting is grounded in and defined by the individual’s psychological needs, which underlie specific crafting behaviors. This integrative model enables researchers to widen the focus of crafting to life domains outside work, including the crafting of work–nonwork boundaries and off-job crafting, as demonstrated in this chapter.

The integrative needs-based model defines crafting as “substantial behavioral and cognitive changes [that] individuals deliberately apply to their roles to satisfy their psychological needs” (de Bloom et al., 2020, p. 1426). Drawing on the two-process model of needs (Sheldon, 2011), needs discrepancy and needs satisfaction are seen, respectively, as drivers and rewards of crafting behaviors. A needs discrepancy is what gives rise to any crafting episode (before crafting efforts are initiated), whereas the experiential reward of needs satisfaction is located in the concluding phase of a successful crafting episode (after crafting efforts). Actual crafting efforts are categorized into avoidance-focused (crafting aimed at avoiding or reducing the negative aspects of work or nonwork roles) and approach-focused (crafting aimed at approaching or adding desirable aspects of work or nonwork identities). According to the integrative needs-based model (de Bloom et al., 2020), crafting efforts which target unfulfilled needs are expected to be the most effective. For instance, if an employee is motivated to satisfy a specific psychological need (e.g. she perceives a discrepancy between her actual and ideal levels of relatedness) but directs her behaviors in a manner that is incompatible with satisfying that need (e.g. she engages in crafting centered around autonomy), she will not achieve optimal functioning. The model also enables an examina-

tion of the temporal unfolding and interactions of motives, crafting efforts, and optimal functioning over time. For instance, crafting is seen as a continuous process and a person's past experience of successful crafting reduces the need for future crafting efforts because needs satisfaction has already been achieved. Moreover, past successful crafting behaviors are assumed to be positively related to future crafting efforts; however, if crafting repeatedly fails and thus fails to fulfill needs, people may reduce or abandon crafting efforts (de Bloom et al., 2020).

As described above, previous theorizing on crafting has usually focused on the work domain. However, life domains are increasingly inseparable and an exclusive focus on work would neglect other important aspects of a person's life. After all, workers have many identities besides their work roles. Actions and experiences in these roles can significantly affect people's experience at work and vice versa. Importantly, crafting efforts may occur within the domain of each (role) identity that an individual has. While certain needs are more relevant within certain life domains (e.g. mastery in the domain of work), the needs-based crafting model assumes that needs are relevant in all life domains and that inadequate need satisfaction in one domain can be balanced by crafting in another life domain. To illustrate, if a person has a job with few opportunities to interact with others, they may choose to engage in hobbies which provide ample opportunities for social interaction.

Digitalization, flexible work arrangements, and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to the increased intermingling of work and nonwork life domains for many employees (Allen et al., 2021), thereby also increasing the need for crafting efforts to balance work with other relevant life domains, and also the need to craft off-job time. Next, therefore, we will address the novel and highly relevant crafting concepts that capture the work–nonwork balance and off-job crafting.

WORK–NONWORK BALANCE AND OFF-JOB CRAFTING

The concept of work–nonwork balance crafting (WNBC) refers to “the unofficial techniques and activities individuals use to shape their own work–nonwork balance under consideration of their boundary preferences and their favored combination of work and nonwork roles” (Kerksieck et al., 2022, p. 4). WNBC aligns well with the integrative needs model of crafting, which shows that crafting efforts can also take place at the interfaces of an employee's life domains and role identities (de Bloom et al., 2020). This could include proactively separating or integrating life domains and the respective identities and roles, for instance.

WNBC is built on the pioneering qualitative study by Sturges (2012) and proposes three crafting strategies. Physical crafting includes time management, selection, and alternating between work locations, such as leaving work early to attend to personal chores, or leaving home early to attend to work. Relational crafting refers to managing the quality of relationships during working hours and in one's personal life, such as going out for a drink with colleagues after work to strengthen social relationships. Finally, cognitive/emotional crafting refers to framing and redefining the work–nonwork balance in personal terms, prioritizing work or nonwork at the expense of some other life domain, by compromising an ideal work–nonwork balance in return for long-term and short-term benefits. Work–nonwork balance also involves crafting relevant life-domain boundaries to successfully integrate and balance multiple essential life roles across work and nonwork. Although WNBC strategies are the same as those presented in job-crafting literature, for example, the new context gives rise to novel crafting behaviors.

A series of longitudinal studies of WNBC indicates beneficial consequences across life domains (Kerksieck et al., 2022). In the work–life domain, WNBC is positively associated with higher job performance, job satisfaction, and work engagement. In the nonwork life domain, WNBC relates positively to family role performance, life satisfaction, and subjective vitality. Importantly, it has also been shown to facilitate work–nonwork balance (Wayne et al., 2021), as expected on the basis of its theorization.

Beyond crafting in the work domain and at the boundaries between life domains, employees can also seek to proactively shape their nonwork life domains (e.g. crafting leisure, homecare and childcare, or voluntary work). According to the integrative needs model of crafting (de Bloom et al., 2020), employees engage in off-job crafting to reduce perceived need discrepancies (e.g. a mismatch between the actual and ideal level of an individual's relaxation). In turn, crafting efforts are expected to bring about needs satisfaction and optimal functioning in the off-job domain, with positive spillover effects on well-being in the work domain as well. In other words, off-job crafting can enrich employees' lives whether they are working or not working (de Bloom et al., 2020). Importantly, needs satisfaction is conducive to optimal and balanced functioning across life domains. Therefore, addressing a needs imbalance (i.e. a perceived need discrepancy) through off-job crafting will likely also improve perceptions of work–nonwork balance (Biron et al., 2023). Off-job crafting can thus be a proactive strategy for employees to optimize their off-job lives in order to achieve a better match between their needs and interests on the one hand and off-job activities and experiences on the other hand. This match, in turn, contributes positively to work–nonwork balance.

Empirical studies support the idea that crafting in one's off-job time is conducive to optimal functioning in both the off-job and work domains. In

a seminal qualitative study, Berg et al. (2010) interviewed 31 employees in various occupations. Their work revealed that employees engage in crafting efforts during their leisure time, both to create meaningful experiences and to achieve a sense of a balanced life through their hobbies and other leisure activities. Quantitatively, weekly leisure crafting is positively related to weekly satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness (but not for competence) (Petrou & Bakker, 2016). More recently, a longitudinal study among Chinese employees showed that online leisure crafting during the COVID-19 outbreak contributed positively to the experience of thriving at home and career-related self-management (Chen, 2020). Similarly, examining off-job crafting using a needs-based perspective (Kujanpää et al., 2022), Brauchli et al. (2023) found that the quintile of employees that engaged the most in off-job crafting displayed higher job and home resources and life and job satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic than the quintile that engaged in the least off-job crafting. Taken together, the findings from these and other studies suggest that off-job crafting may be a viable and potentially efficient way of gaining new resources, satisfying psychological needs, enriching off-job and work life, and achieving a better work–nonwork balance (see also de Bloom et al., 2020).

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OF CRAFTING

This chapter demonstrates that although job crafting has been a popular topic in recent work–life research, there remains scope for new research perspectives. In order to fully understand the phenomenon of crafting, as noted in the integrative needs model of crafting (de Bloom et al., 2020), scholars must consider the specific need for crafting behavior. Furthermore, crafting behavior in life domains other than work – i.e. WNBC and off-job crafting – merits more attention because a large and ever-growing proportion of work is multilocal, knowledge-intensive, and highly autonomous in nature. Employees' skills in proactively managing both their work and other life domains are therefore crucial. This chapter also highlights that crafting behavior is strongly associated with several outcomes that help support a sustainable working life, such as employees' job-related attitudes, well-being and performance, satisfying the interface between work and other life domains, and increased contentment within each of these domains.

Due to the beneficial effects of crafting, interventions are encouraged. Crafting is initiated by employees, offering them a strategy by which to create a healthy and sustainable work–life balance, and more motivating and satisfying working conditions. Given the increasingly interwoven nature of workers' various life domains, organizational interventions that encourage crafting in multiple life domains would seem to be a promising tool in promoting

well-being and optimal functioning. In particular, interventions are needed that can help employees focus on improving their work–nonwork balance by identifying and addressing perceived need discrepancies related to both work and nonwork domains. Organizational practices such as flexible working arrangements and supportive work–family policies are also vital to facilitating job autonomy, which is known to facilitate crafting behavior (Rudolph et al., 2017). Individual-level crafting at work and outside work may complement organizational interventions aimed at reconciling work and nonwork domains, thereby making them more effective.

It may be useful for future research to focus on the relevance of antecedents to engaging in crafting as outlined here. For example, allowing for various individual, team, and organizational preconditions for job crafting (see Mäkikangas et al., 2017) may also reveal their relevance to broader crafting behavior. This focus will also help us to understand how WNBC-related crafting efforts are beneficial in proactively adapting to work/nonwork situations with meager resources. For example, a reduction in WNBC has been observed with increasing job demands, which has been counterbalanced by supervisor support and job autonomy (Haar et al., 2019), both of which may also be relevant for engaging in off-job and WNBC crafting. Moreover, little is known about the motivational process around initiating these new forms of crafting. Studying the antecedents of crafting will shed more light on the possible drivers of crafting behaviors, such as avoidance or approach motives (de Bloom et al., 2020). Collaborative crafting in various life domains and its consequences – both benefits and possible adverse implications – also merit attention in future research (see Mäkikangas et al., 2017). Future studies could also look more closely at the effects of job crafting at the interfaces between life domains and crafting in off-job time for work–nonwork balance in different cultures. Hopefully this chapter will encourage researchers to consider the ideas of the integrative needs model of crafting (de Bloom et al., 2020) and to utilize novel crafting constructs to steer future research on crafting.

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