How job crafting can make work more satisfying

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Job Crafting: How managers can help to make jobs more satisfying

It's difficult to overstate the importance of employee engagement for organizations. An estimated $500 million is lost annually in productivity as a result of disengagement. According to Gallup research, 70% of workers don't consider themselves engaged and want their jobs and current roles to be more satisfying, meaningful, and fulfilling. These alarming revelations are consistent with a series of recent studies completed by Edgecumbe, which conclude that employees are switching off because their skills aren't fully utilised; not challenged or stimulated, they lack flexibility and autonomy.

For managers, then, determining how to improve engagement and satisfaction is a mission-critical priority, particularly in a post-pandemic working world where uncertainty is rife. Job crafting is one approach being utilized to do so in the wake of COVID-19.

Job crafting is a proactive, often unsupervised, modern take on job re-design that empowers workers to transform the jobs they have into the jobs they want, by becoming design agents instead of passive recipients of job titles, responsibilities, and roles. Research on job crafting, which typically focuses on employees, already highlights considerable positive outcomes, including well-being, organisational commitment, perceptions of meaning and purpose of work, self and colleague ratings of performance, and adaptation to organisational change.

Given the significance of these findings, we
recently interviewed 1,000 business leaders and 2,000 of their workers around the world (67.1% from North America and 32.9% from the U.K. and Australia), to provide compelling evidence and guidance for managers wishing to encourage their team members to craft. Our questions assessed each organisation's readiness for the practice to commence, and identified the culture, process and people factors that make or break good-natured efforts to implement crafting successfully. Because it's a bottom-up approach, crafting can only be fully successful if it's supported and encouraged by all levels of management. Where instances of such committed existed, we found that job crafting:

1. Improved well-being: 92% of our participants engaged in crafting post-pandemic experienced a more satisfying work-life and increased personal satisfaction. This improved sense of well-being led to a 29% decrease in stress level.
2. Improved collaboration: 67% of our participants who crafted felt inspired to stretch past their comfort zones and engaged in active cooperation with other colleagues, leading to a more connected workforce.
3. Increased productivity: 77% of our participants who crafted were highly productive at work compared to those that did not.
4. Strengthened loyalty: staff turnover within organizations utilising crafting decreased by 29% because those seeking promotion looked internally first before pursuing roles externally. Active crafters were more likely to stay put and adjust their role rather than move elsewhere.

But the real question is, given the obvious benefits discussed, how do you encourage employees to pursue job crafting?

It's crucial that the practice is implemented and managed effectively; to do so, crafting must align with both the employee and the company's goals. That's because there are three main forms crafting-adjustments can take.

1. The first relates to changing the job's task boundaries, and is referred to as 'task crafting.' By choosing to do fewer, more, or different tasks than prescribed in the formal job listing, employees create a different job.
2. The second relates to changing the relational boundary of the job through either the quality or amount of interactions with others at work, and is referred to as 'relational crafting.'
3. The third relates to changing the cognitive task boundaries of jobs, and is known as 'cognitive crafting,' because it's about altering one's perception of the meaning of work.

We found that most crafting (76%) occurring post-pandemic has altered tasks, rather than relationships or cognition. This is because home-based work and the subsequent video-conference fatigue that's ensued has destroyed traditional ways of interacting with others at work, like watercooler and coffee bar chat. It's also hard at the moment to alter one's perceptions around the purpose and meaning of work, given that most people throughout the world are experiencing cognitive overload.

Managers, then, **need to make special interventions to help. We recommend** a 4-step framework based on our research findings.

1. Ensure employees know they have **PERMISSION** to craft: It's vital that employees have the autonomy and empowerment to adapt their job descriptions and responsibilities, thus creating work that is personally meaningful, engaging, and satisfying to them. While this does not entail changing of the job description or job role per se, it involves having the freedom to choose the means to the end.

2. Create a culture of **PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**: By creating an environment where employees feel comfortable and are not ridiculed for sharing innovative ideas, they can experiment with new methods and potentially even make mistakes without fear of judgement or scrutiny. To enhance the impact and implementation of employees' ideas, managers should ask the right questions to employees, such as "What are your strengths that the team can count on you for?" "What are some of your strengths that are currently underutilized by the team?" "What's a recent mistake that you made, but that you learned a lot from?" and "What skills or areas of improvement are you trying to develop?".

3. Grant employees the **CONTROL** they need to craft: Employees need autonomy, control, trust, and decision latitude over their workloads. Managers are often concerned that crafting provides employees with an excuse to drop their primary tasks and responsibilities, not realizing that crafting, if done well, aligns with employees' strengths, motives, and values. For example, managers can allow for employee discretion in designing day-to-day work and task activities around the fulfilment of work goals; the key is striking a balance between alignment and empowerment, so that managers become enablers rather than enforcers. We found that managers who remove impediments rather than create them through bureaucratic practices can ensure employees do not misuse crafting to drop their tasks and responsibilities but rather use it as an intervention in enhancing the achievement of their daily goals.

4. Give employees the **CAPACITY** to craft: This includes ensuring that employees' workloads are realistic, that they have clear role boundaries, and that they have

protected time to craft. For example, managers can actively provide for on-job-time for crafting by allocating an hour or two, daily or weekly, for employees to think out of the box, thus creating more capacity to craft. While this may create operational challenges, it enables opportunities to develop task, relational, and cognitive landscapes that bring meaning to work.

If managers hold the reins too tightly, employees may feel they lack agency and meaning in their work and become disengaged. Employees can drive the solutions regarding their disengagement – but will managers give them the space to implement them post-pandemic? Given the compelling positive impact of making thoughtful changes to the design of a job can have on both employees and managers, we certainly hope so. Particularly now, when the job structure for individual contributors is rapidly changing, it will benefit both managers and employees to place greater emphasis and responsibility on the individual to master the destiny of their work.

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