

Exploring the practice of job crafting and its impact on perceived job quality in the NHS, UK.

Joshi Jariwala

Liverpool Business School/Liverpool John Moores University, Institute, Address
E-mail address: j.j.jariwala@ljmu.ac.uk

Research question

To what extent can HR practitioners and associated HR policies facilitate job crafting to enhance perceived job quality in the contemporary workplace?

Objectives

- Explore the role of HR practitioners to enhance perceived job quality in the workplace through the lens of job crafting theories.
- Critically examine the theories of job crafting practice and related antecedents and their relationship with perceived job quality in the workplace.
- Critically analyse the influence of organisational HR policy narratives on the impact of job crafting to enhance perceived job quality.
- Develop a framework for people practitioners to aid sustainable job crafting to enhance perceived job quality in contemporary workplaces.

Justification for why and whom the research is important

Racing in to attend a mandatory consultation meeting, responding to emails, whilst balancing the pass on the lanyard to access all doors, missing lunch again and have munched the last mint. The presentation opens, a welcome and gratitude for attendance and assurance that jobs are safe. With composed disposition, the presenter showcases the artistic charts full of colours and numbers highlighting the organisational mantra. “We need to do more with less”. A single thunderbolt shrill laden with nervous laughter meanders through the once silent crowded room, lamenting the united feeling, “wanting us to do more, nothing new here then”. A swarm of mutterings fill the room, and a louder voice follows. “There is always too much to do”. The presenter is faced with a roomful of deep glazed enquiring stares. “We have many policies in place to support you, such as the open-door policy, health and well-being, and regular appraisals”. The presenter pauses and stares back expressionless, with a million thought bubbles hovering above; “how can HR and policies make a difference?”. Personal reflections conclude: the challenges and complexities of designing jobs with supporting policies to engage and motivate the workforce whilst meeting organisational goals continues to be a perennial conundrum for HR practitioners.

As one of the world’s largest employers, the NHS acknowledges people are placing a greater importance on the purpose of their jobs, and desiring greater autonomy with trust, (NHS England, 2021). With 46% of the NHS budget allocated to wages in 2022/23, (The Kings Fund, 2024), there is an ambition for its people practitioners to plan practices which allow people, to work differently, in a compassionate and inclusive culture by 2030, (NHS England, 2022). Hence, the focus of this study is the exploration of the role of people practitioners in executing job crafting theory into practice, and the associated relationship with the related HR policies to achieve the 2030 NHS vision. It seeks to offer valuable practical usability of

job crafting practice and development of work-related policies and interventions for the current day HR practitioner guided by contribution to job crafting theory.

Literature review

Job quality in the UK continues to be in decline, with people at work feeling less engaged, less fulfilled, and viewing work as a transactional role to earn money, (Young, 2024). One of the recommendations for practice by this recently published CIPD report suggests employers and people professionals should design jobs that are interesting, meaningful and enable employee autonomy to engage and motivate their workforce. In support, there have been calls to develop fair and decent work which promotes greater autonomy, employee engagement and voice, and control over work, concepts which align with the principles of job crafting, suggesting that enabling employees to have more autonomy can facilitate job crafting, (Taylor, 2017).

Blustein et al. (2023) suggests there is scope to explore the interplay between meaningful work which is potentially deemed as aspirational, and decent work which incorporates the basic needs of fair wages, safe conditions, and rights at work. Furthermore, the challenges and opportunities of enhancing performance and productivity lie in the support provided by organisations to provide autonomy and flexibility in work practices, (Alfes et al., 2022).

In support, Hu et al. (2020) concluded there appears to be a positive relationship between high commitment HR practices and job crafting. Through job crafting, by aligning roles with strengths and preferences, it is suggested that HR could create a motivated workforce through effective performance, engagement, and wellbeing policies within the organisations, (Baker, 2020).

However, despite empirical studies suggesting a direct link between opportunities to craft roles, and work engagement and performance, (Wingerden and Peoll, 2017), literature fails to address the gap of recognising which factors are linked with effective and/or desired job crafting interventions, (Roczniewska et al., 2023). There also appears to be a dearth of focus on the influence of HR practitioners and policies on job crafting, (Lee and Lee, 2018).

Presentation of the theoretical basis for the work.

Job crafting refers to the practice by employees to proactively reinvent and change their work in a constructive, pleasant, and efficient way, (Berg et al. 2013). Wrzesniewski and Dutton, (2001) found employees largely changed three elements of their roles being: Task crafting (changes made by employees in the job tasks); Relational crafting (relationship, who they work with); and Cognitive crafting (what the job means to them).

Description of the research design.

Current literature around job crafting is largely quantitative in nature providing statistical relationships between the factors being analysed. This inductive study seeks to adopt the interpretivism research philosophy recognising the ontological stance of socially constructed multiple social realities and interpretations. Dialogic interviews (Way et al., 2015) will be conducted with a sample of HR practitioners working at mid to senior level selected by purposive sampling and criterion-based snowball sampling, (Patton, 2002) to explore broad themes related to job crafting in practice, focusing on the opportunities, and drawbacks. Interview data will be analysed applying the thematic analysis framework, (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Current related HR policies will be analysed applying content analysis with

pre-determined codes from the themes developed from the interviews to explore the influence of organisational HR policy narratives on the impact of job crafting to enhance perceived job quality.

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