

# JOB CRAFTING AND CULTIVATING POSITIVE MEANING AND IDENTITY IN WORK

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## INTRODUCTION

The design of a job is deeply consequential for employees' psychological experiences at work. Jobs are collections of tasks and relationships that are grouped together and assigned to an individual (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992), and scholars have long been interested in the way these elements come together to constitute the experience of a job (Griffin, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Research in this area has traditionally built on a core assumption that managers design jobs in a top-down fashion for employees, which places employees in the relatively passive role of being the recipients of the jobs they hold.

More recently, "job crafting" has emerged as a theoretical approach that expands perspectives on job design to include proactive changes that employees make to their own jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is defined as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). By altering task and relational boundaries, employees can change the social and task components of their jobs and experience different

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Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology, Volume 1, 281–302

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ISSN: 2046-410X/doi:10.1108/S2046-410X(2013)0000001015

kinds of meaning of the work and themselves. From the most routine to the most complex jobs, and from the lowest to the highest tiers of an organization (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010), we argue that employees have some degree of latitude in how they craft their jobs. Thus, the potential for job crafting to alter the ways in which employees define the meaning of their work and their work identities is relevant across a broad range of job situations. Further, others have found that job crafting has positive effects on employees' degree of psychological well-being (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010) and work engagement and performance (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012), suggesting that job crafting matters for a number of key individual and organizational outcomes.

Job crafting offers two important contributions to positive organizational psychology. First, the process of job crafting puts the proactive, agentic behaviors of employees center-stage, conceptualizing and empirically exploring the creative and motivational bases of employees altering their jobs to improve their experience of work. Second, job crafting adds to our understanding of positive organizational psychology through its focus on the range of generative outcomes of job crafting – including the experience of positive meaning and sense of self, engagement, commitment, turnover, and performance. As the field of positive organizational psychology seeks to better understand employees' optimal functioning at work, job crafting helps to illuminate the job-related actions that employees engage in to move themselves toward more optimal functioning.

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly review the job crafting literature to date and to open up new theoretical opportunities for understanding how job crafting can help employees cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in their work. While Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) theorized that job crafting often has important implications for employees' sense of meaning and identity in their work, the original job crafting theory does not specify that job crafting is necessarily positive or negative for employees' sense of meaning or identity. As a result, we have little theory to explain the mechanisms through which job crafting is likely to cultivate a more *positive* sense of meaning and identity for employees on the job. Thus, in this chapter, we elaborate job crafting theory to guide future research on the links between job crafting and the cultivation of positive meaning and identity in work over time. In other words, this chapter reviews the “old” and introduces some “new” – all with an appreciation of the importance of job crafting to the blossoming domain of positive organizational psychology (Donaldson & Ko, 2010) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) more broadly.

## **JOB CRAFTING IN BRIEF**

Job crafting involves creating or initiating change to the job, as opposed to reacting or responding to change in the job (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). In essence, job crafting is the process of employees proactively changing the boundaries that comprise their jobs. Boundaries have been defined as “mental fences” (Zerubavel, 1991, p. 2) that people use to order and define limits around “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational” entities (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 474; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Job crafters shape the boundaries that define their jobs in three main ways. First, job crafters may change the physical or temporal boundaries around the bundle of tasks that they consider to be their job. We refer to this as “task crafting,” and it consists of adding or dropping tasks, adjusting the time or effort spent on various tasks, and redesigning aspects of tasks (e.g., a teacher who spends time learning new classroom technology to fulfill his passion for IT). Second, job crafters may redefine the relational boundaries that define the interpersonal interactions involved in performing their jobs. We refer to this as “relational crafting,” and it consists of creating and/or sustaining relationships with others at work, spending more time with preferred individuals, and reducing or completely avoiding contact with others (e.g., a marketing analyst forming a relationship with someone in sales to better understand the impact of his work on salespeople). Third, job crafters may reframe the cognitive boundaries that ascribe meaning or purpose to the tasks and relationships that comprise their jobs. We refer to this as “cognitive crafting,” and it consists of employees’ efforts to perceive and interpret their tasks, relationships, or job as a whole in ways that change the significance of their work (e.g., a custodian who thinks of his job as enabling education by providing clean, distraction-free classrooms for students).

The three types of job crafting are not mutually exclusive, and job crafters may exercise any combination of the three. For example, in joining a new social media group at a financial services firm, an employee may add tasks like planning learning events for members, thus altering relationships by meeting and collaborating with new colleagues, and begin to see her job differently because it allows her to pursue her passion for social marketing. The different types of crafting may occur quickly (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, & Schaufeli, 2012) or unfold gradually over long periods of time.

The following example provides a more in-depth look at the form and effects of job crafting on the work of an employee, which we refer to throughout the chapter.

Diane is an internal audit manager at a large manufacturing organization. Having joined the company 15 years ago, she now oversees a group of 30 Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) that conduct periodic audits of the organization's functions. While Diane is no longer poring over the business records herself, she decides when and where many of the audits are conducted. She monitors the progress of her teams and intervenes when they meet resistance from managers in other divisions. A lifelong fan of mystery and crime novels, it was the detective nature of audit work that drew Diane to the field when she was an undergraduate. She spent many years travelling the world, visiting the company's production plants, and investigating the large asset purchases that showed up on the bottom line back at headquarters. However, Diane can easily recall an important turning point in her career. When the accounting firm Arthur Andersen was indicted in 2002 for its handling of the audits at Enron, she was horrified by the financial losses incurred by thousands of innocent employees. Since that time, Diane has considered her division the most important protector of the company's future. Internal audit is an important mechanism for uncovering improprieties, and for acting as a deterrent to anyone who might consider engaging in them. Whether accidental or not, she has no intention of letting the actions of a few employees cause harm to the rest of the company. This cognitive crafting has fundamentally altered Diane's experience of her job. Her work identity, while still encompassing the detective role, has broadened to include the role of defender of the people in the organization. She feels connected to her coworkers, even those she has never met, and has infused her work with a positive meaning it did not have before.

When Diane started at the company, she was one of only two women in the audit division. Shortly after earning her CPA, Diane joined the local division of the National Society of Accountants in her city, and for the past six years has been leading its outreach efforts. Several times each month, she speaks at schools, ranging from middle school math to community college business classes. Sharing her personal stories and the opportunities she sees in accounting, Diane's goal is to get young people, especially young women, interested in the field. Over the years she has convinced her supervisors to see the visits not just as something meaningful for her, but as a way to build the firm's community reputation. By adding these tasks and relationships to her job, Diane has crafted her work to fulfill her desire to inspire the next generation of accountants. She feels a connection to the future of the profession, and through these changes to the task, relational, and cognitive boundaries of her job, her work and her identity as an accountant and organization member have taken on new meaning.

We provide the example of Diane to illustrate some of the many ways job crafters change the boundaries of their jobs and to describe the nature of the impact of job crafting on the employee and possibly on others. In the next section, we move from examples to data to consider what job crafting researchers have found in studies of this behavior in a range of settings.

## OVERVIEW OF JOB CRAFTING RESEARCH

Following the introduction of the job crafting model in 2001, empirical research has examined its prevalence and role in employees' work lives and its impact on organizations in which job crafting happens. Most of this research has focused on how job crafting transforms employees' performance and experience of their work. While very little of this work has directly considered the impact of job crafting on work meaning and identity, we highlight where we believe the research implications for meaning and identity are important and promising.

Most empirical job crafting research to date has focused on its relationship with individual job attitudes and performance. For example, in the first empirical study of job crafting, [Ghitulescu \(2006\)](#) surveyed engineers on autonomous teams in a manufacturing organization and special education teachers in a number of schools. She developed a job crafting scale and found that job crafting enhances individual job satisfaction and commitment levels, while increasing individual performance and decreasing absenteeism ([Ghitulescu, 2006](#)). In a study of outside salespeople for a large consumer products company, [Lyons \(2008\)](#) found that over three-quarters of the salespeople engaged in some form of job crafting, which was in turn positively correlated with quality of self-image, perceived control, and readiness to change. Lyons' study suggests that identity, operationalized as one's self-image, is related in important ways to job crafting activities. Utilizing a diary method to measure the daily experiences of engineers, [Ko \(2012\)](#) examined the role of flow experiences ([Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002](#)) during job crafting episodes and their effects on employees. She found that employees reported positive emotions after episodes of job crafting, which was partially explained by flow experiences that occurred during job crafting.

While most research on job crafting has maintained a focus on the individual, [Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk \(2009\)](#) introduced the concept of "collaborative crafting" to describe the group task crafting efforts of

early childcare teachers. Working together to customize how work was organized and enacted, educators who collaboratively crafted their jobs were rated by external evaluators as providing a higher quality of care. This effect was especially strong for inexperienced teachers. Additionally, collaborative crafting resulted in higher individual organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

In a qualitative study of employees in a variety of jobs, [Berg, Grant, and Johnson \(2010\)](#) investigated how employees craft their jobs in response to having unanswered occupational callings – that is, feeling drawn to pursue an occupation other than the one in which they work. They found that employees who incorporated the tasks of their unanswered callings into their current jobs experienced the sort of pleasant psychological states of enjoyment and meaning that they associated with pursuing their unanswered callings. However, when employees came up short of their crafting intentions, they reported experiencing long-term regret if they did not view their current occupation as a calling but only intermittent regret if they did, which joins other qualitative work [Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton \(2010\)](#) in highlighting the key role that time may play in determining the effects of job crafting. In this vein, [Wrzesniewski and colleagues \(2012\)](#) conducted a field quasi-experiment in a Fortune 500 technology company in which they compared the effects of engaging in job crafting versus engaging in job crafting in concert with skills development on employee happiness. They found that engaging in job crafting leads to short-term (6-week) boosts in happiness, while increases in happiness from job crafting in concert with skill development take longer to realize but have greater and longer-lasting effects (at least 6 months) than job crafting alone.

[Tims, Bakker, and Derks \(2012\)](#) have recently developed a scale to measure job crafting, using the framework of the job demands-resources model ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2007](#); [Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001](#)). Their scale measures job crafting by assessing the degree to which employees report increasing social job resources, increasing structural job resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands. In testing their scale, they also found that self-reports of job crafting correlate positively with colleagues' ratings of work engagement, employability, and performance. In other studies employing the job demand-resources model, Bakker and colleagues have linked job resources to reduced turnover intentions and higher levels of employee performance and engagement ([Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003](#); [Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004](#); [Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007](#)).

While these empirical studies have built important knowledge on some of the key antecedents and outcomes of job crafting for employees and their organizations, little theory or research has directly examined job crafting as a mechanism for employees to cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in work over time. Yet, these two outcomes may be at the center of why employees job craft and how job crafting can benefit them over time. Jobs as designed by managers tend to be “one-size-fits-all” and not customized to meet the particular needs, motives, and preferences of individual employees (cf. [Hornung et al., 2010](#); [Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006](#)). Typically, a job design is communicated to employees via a written job description, which is usually a static list of tasks, responsibilities, and reporting relationships, with all employees in the same job receiving the same list. In essence, job designs are traditionally seen and used as a means of top-down standardization and control – even job titles themselves have been construed as a means of bureaucratic control ([Baron & Bielby, 1986](#); [Strang & Baron, 1990](#)). However, employees often have a fundamental desire to find positive meaning in their work ([Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010](#)) and construct a positive identity within their organizations ([Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010](#)), but traditional job designs are unlikely to come preloaded with much opportunity for either of these highly personalized pursuits. By bringing a job crafting perspective to bear, job designs are no longer construed as a static source of constraint and top-down control, but rather, a starting place – or a partially blank canvas – from which employees can alter the content of their jobs in ways that cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in their work. In so doing, employees may move from a “one-size-fits-all” job description to an individualized enactment of the job that serves as a source of positive meaning and identity expression, both of which are conducive to psychological strengthening and flourishing ([Dutton et al., 2010](#); [Rosso et al., 2010](#)). In the sections that follow, we elaborate theory on job crafting to highlight the mechanisms that may link job crafting to the cultivation of positive meaning and identity in work.<sup>1</sup>

## **JOB CRAFTING AND POSITIVE MEANING OF WORK**

Job crafting alters the meaning of work ([Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001](#)). As Wrzesniewski and Dutton note, “Job crafting changes the meaning of the work by changing job tasks or relationships in ways that allow employees to reframe the purpose of the job and experience the work differently

(Tausky, 1995)” (p. 186). We define positive meanings of work as the associations, frames, or elements of work in use by employees that define work as representing a valued, constructive activity. For example, a landscaper who forms an association between her efforts on the job and the beautification of outdoor spaces has found positive meaning in her work (conversely, a landscaper who associates her efforts with damage to the environment through use of chemicals and pesticides has not). Likewise, an editor who defines the elements of his work involving critique and revision as valuable for the ways they improve the quality of discourse has found positive meaning in elements of his work.

We differentiate between the meaning of the work and the meaningfulness of work; as Rosso and colleagues (2010) point out (see also Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), the meaning of work concerns what it is that work signifies or represents, while the meaningfulness of work refers to how much purpose or significance work has. Research on job crafting refers to changes of both types, in which *what* the work means can change, as well as *how much* the work means to the employee (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The organizational behavior literature on the meaning of work tends to use both concepts interchangeably, usually referring to meaningfulness even when using the term “meaning of work” (Rosso et al., 2010). We primarily consider changes to the meaning of work that result from job crafting, rather than changes in meaningfulness alone, as meaningfulness by definition follows meaning, in that changes to the meaning of the work likely affect how much meaningfulness employees experience from it. Thus, a lens on employees’ sense of the meaning of their work offers a more fundamental perspective on their experience of work than a lens on meaningfulness alone.

In short, the meaning of work is at the core of employees’ experiences of their jobs. Whether employees believe that their work contributes to making the world a better place, or that it allows them to interact with people in ways that create important innovations, or that the work provides an opportunity to earn a living in order to support a family or various causes, work meanings act as lenses through which employees understand and respond to their work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).

Job crafting and the meaning of work are intimately connected with each other.<sup>2</sup> As employees introduce changes to the task and relational components of their jobs, the emphasis of their activities and interactions shifts in ways that can have profound impacts on their experience of the work and their understanding of the meaning of it. In our earlier example,



Diane incorporated regular speaker visits and public engagements into her job. She did so in order to increase the potential for accounting to inspire a new generation of employees, because she feels passionately about this work. While Diane may have felt that accounting work was inspiring prior to changing the focus of her job, her ability to see the connection between her work activities, interactions, and relationships and the desire she had to promote the accounting profession grew directly as a result of her job crafting. Thus, the elements, associations, and frames she created in her job as a result of job crafting fundamentally changed the meaning of her work. Rather than thinking about being a champion for accounting while she carried out her prescribed job duties, Diane redrew the boundaries of the job to fully realize the meaning she aspired to in her work. In this way, her job crafting activities changed the meaning of her work while making it more meaningful.

#### *The Self as a Source of Work Meaning*

Research on meaning of work enumerates a broad set of sources of meaning in work, as well as pathways through which the meaning of work can change (Rosso et al., 2010). Ranging from the values, motivations, and beliefs that define the self to the role of spirituality in life, a variety of meaning sources have been identified in an effort to understand what employees draw upon in their experiences to compose work meaning. Rosso and colleagues (2010) identify four major sources of meaning in work. The first is the self, and encompasses the values, motivations, and beliefs that employees draw on to understand the meaning of their work. In general, research in this area suggests that when work aligns with these self-attributes, it becomes more meaningful. Thus, job crafting that helps employees to shape their tasks and interactions in ways that allow for more expression of their values, motivations, or beliefs is likely to have a direct impact on the positive meaning of their work by creating a sense of alignment between the self and the work. In the case of Diane's job crafting in her accounting role, it was partly her ability to bring her motivation and passion to the fore as an advocate for the profession that guided her job crafting and changed the meaning of her work so that she saw her work as an accountant as taking on more valued and constructive activities. Thus, job crafting creates opportunities for employees to experience the meaning of their work differently by aligning the job with their values, motivations, and beliefs.

### *Others as a Source of Work Meaning*

The second source of meaning involves other people, both on and off the job, including coworkers, managers, and leaders, communities to which the employee belongs, and family. Research in this domain suggests that the ways in which employees experience membership in, communication with, social cues from, and contributions to these various groups and individuals in their work, affects the meaning of work. The implications for relational job crafting are powerful when employees view their jobs in terms of the role that other people play in their work (e.g., Grant, 2007, 2008). By reshaping with whom one is connected at or through work, whether in actual interaction or just in how employees think about their connections to these others, the meaning of the work is likely to change. For example, Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe (2003) describe the relational crafting undertaken by hospital cleaners who choose to interact with, care for, and provide comfort to patients and their families, even though this work is not part of their jobs. They note the impact that these interactions can have on transforming the meaning of their work in positive ways. Through changing the relational boundaries of the job to include interactions with these groups, these cleaners had a positive impact on the meaning of their work by tying it more explicitly to caring for others, thereby creating meaningful opportunities to benefit others (Grant, 2007).

### *Context as a Source of Work Meaning*

The third source of meaning involves the context of the work itself, including the design of job tasks, the organizational mission within which the job happens, one's financial circumstances, and the role of nonwork domains, including the national culture that shapes narratives of work. While context may be seen as a constraint on job crafting, employees' contexts may also provide them with resources to use in crafting their jobs to cultivate positive meaning (e.g., Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010). This source of meaning runs the gamut from rather direct and concrete aspects of the work to much more diffuse sources. The impact of job crafting on the design of the job is clear; task crafting involves making direct changes to work tasks, which has a direct impact on work meaning. Beyond task crafting, an employee can also craft aspects of the job to help the organization focus on activities or causes that the employee believes in

deeply, possibly changing the employee's experience of the mission of the organizations as a result. For example, Diane's advocacy work helped to position her organization and its involvement in the cause of changing the accounting profession in ways that, while not changing the mission of the firm, changed aspects of its focus that likely created positive changes in the meaning of her work. Thus, job crafting helps employees transform the meaning of their work by altering aspects of the context in which work happens, creating opportunities to introduce elements to the design of the job or the mission of the firm that facilitate positive meanings of work.

### *Spirituality as a Source of Work Meaning*

The fourth and final source of meaning identified by Rosso and colleagues involves spiritual life and the sense of having a sacred or spiritual calling (Rosso et al., 2010). In general, research in this area suggests that when individuals frame their work as a service to or expression of religious or spiritual aims, the work is infused with religious or spiritual meaning that employees experience as deeply important. In addition, individuals who believe that their occupation is a vocation that expresses the will of a religious entity experience what scholars would define as a sacred calling (Hardy, 1990; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004). The connection between spiritual or religious meanings of work and cognitive crafting is clear – for job crafters who frame the execution of whatever work they are doing as a gesture toward (or deriving from) sacred sources, the work itself is likely to take on different, and positive meaning. For example, a banker who believes that his occupation was chosen by the religious entity in which he believes and that his work is a contribution to that entity (either literally or figuratively) has subscribed to a belief system that creates powerful implications for the cognitive crafting of the work. In effect, the work is a direct service to the religious entity, which ties the work to a focus and source of ultimate positive meaning.

Here, we have highlighted the sources of some of the positive meanings that can result from job crafting, and suggest that job crafting that produces these meanings is likely to deepen the meaningfulness of work as well. Along with a positive meaning of work, the quest for a positive work identity is likely to drive employees' job crafting, and possibly be the outcome of it. Below, we discuss the ways in which job crafting may cultivate positive work identities.

## JOB CRAFTING AND POSITIVE WORK IDENTITIES

Job crafting is a potent mechanism for altering how one defines who one is at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). One important form of work identity is a person's organizational identity. An individual's organizational identity captures who one is and who one is becoming at work (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Other possible work-related identities include one's professional identity, role identity, job identity, or team identity.

For purposes of building understanding about job crafting and identity, we focus on how job crafting affects various forms of positive organizational identities. By positive organizational identities, we mean the set of self-conceptions that are part of individuals' self-definitions as organizational members that are experienced as beneficial or valuable in some way (Roberts & Dutton, 2009). The belief that individuals desire to construct positive identities is a pervasive and enduring assumption of most identity research in sociology and psychology (Gecas, 1982). With the advent of positive organizational psychology and positive organizational scholarship more generally, there is interest in more precisely understanding how and what kinds of positive identities are possible in work contexts (Roberts & Creary, 2012; Roberts & Dutton, 2009).

Past research suggests there are at least four different ways that an individual's organizational identity (or any other work identity) can be positive, each focusing on a different feature of identity; specifically, its content, evaluation, development, and structure (Dutton et al., 2010). In the sections below we explore how job crafting is an important process through which individuals construct different kinds of positive organizational identities by altering the task, relational, and cognitive boundaries of their work.

### *Job Crafting and a Virtuous Organizational Identity*

When individuals define themselves as organizational members who have attributes associated with people of good character then the kinds of qualities that are part of their identity content (e.g., wisdom, care, courage) make their organizational identity positive. We call this kind of positive identity virtuous because the self-attributes are qualities that are associated with virtue (Weaver, 2006) or moral character (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002). In this case, individual organizational identity is positive simply because individuals have infused their self-definition with qualities that philosophers

have long associated with a good life (Aristotle, 1984; MacIntyre, 1981). In fact, there is striking consistency across religious and philosophical traditions about the kinds of qualities that define a person who is of good character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Members can use various forms of job crafting to create virtuous organizational identities. In Diane's case, she uses two job crafting moves that help her to see herself as a more virtuous employee. The cognitive crafting that allowed her to see herself as a defender of the firm's honesty and fair practices infused her self-definition as organization member as a person who has integrity and is morally just. In addition, when she relationally altered her job through taking on more volunteer outreach to women in the community, she infused her self-definition with qualities such as courage and humanity. In both cases, altering the way she sees and acts in her job provides the seedcorn for transforming how she sees herself as an organization member. In this case, her self-definition moves in the direction of a more moral organizational identity, which is positive because of the inherent goodness this self-definition implies. Thus, job crafting is a means by which organizational members can become more virtuous organizational selves by thinking and acting in ways that evidence good, moral character.

#### *Job Crafting and an Esteemed Organizational Identity*

A basic assumption of most identity theories is that individuals want to be regarded as persons of significance and worth (Gecas, 1982). A second form of positive organizational identity captures the positivity that arises because one's social group (in this case one's work organization) is evaluated positively by the self or others (Dutton et al., 2010). If an organization is esteemed by the self and others, then individuals can bask in this reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976) and through a process of organizational identification, infuse these valued attributes into their self-definitions (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Job crafting affords employees with numerous ways to infuse the self with positive meaning through connecting themselves with sources of positive regard for the organization. For example, an employee could alter the task and relational boundaries to allow immediate contact with customers who have positive impressions of the organization, perhaps because the organization has had a beneficial impact on their personal or work lives (Grant, 2007). Crafting one's job to allow one to experience others' positive

regard for the organization can also be a collective crafting endeavor. Schoolteachers who craft their jobs as a group to alter opportunities to learn how parents appreciate the school are evidencing collective job crafting (Leana et al., 2009). They are using collective job crafting as a means for defining their organizations more positively by collecting feedback that suggests their organizations (and hence themselves as members) are doing good work, and therefore are valued and esteemed people.

### *Job Crafting and a Progressive Organizational Identity*

A third form of positive identity focuses on the dynamic nature of social identities and how an individual's identity content changes over time. A progressive identity captures the idea that individuals can define themselves positively by seeing themselves as changing or evolving toward a desired self (Dutton et al., 2010). This form of positive identity is rooted in theories of human development that suggest it is desirable for individuals to progress and adapt toward a more evolved and desired self (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1986). When applied to an organizational member's sense of self, a progressive organizational identity allows a member to define oneself as evolving, changing, or growing toward a more desired or imagined self.

A recent study of how organizations shape the ways employees see themselves as growing provided numerous examples of employees crafting their work so that they could grow themselves (and their self-conceptions) in a desired direction (Sonenshein, Dutton, Grant, Spreitzer, & Sutcliffe, 2013). Sonenshein et al. describe how in a social service agency providing a range of programs for elderly citizens, members of the administrative and support staff routinely altered the relational and task boundaries of their jobs so they could have more contact with seniors and provide help if needed. In one instance of this help-giving, a maintenance worker described himself as a "nurse" in recounting the help he gave to an elderly man in desperate need of care. By crafting his job to help someone in desperate need, this employee was able to define his identity in the organization in different and positive terms. Several members of this organization crafted their jobs to allow them to become the helping selves that the organization valued and desired. Thus, job crafting can be a pathway through which employees experiment with initiating job changes that allow them to grow toward having the qualities and characteristics they most desire.

*Job Crafting and a Complementary Organizational Identity*

A fourth way an individual's identity can be positive focuses not on the content, evaluation, or progression of one's self-definition, but instead on the relationship between the different aspects of one's identity (Dutton et al., 2010). Researchers suggest that it is beneficial for individuals to maximize the compatibility between their various role and social identities (Thoits, 1991). Accordingly, a more complementary organizational identity is one where individuals experience greater compatibility and consistency between who one sees oneself to be as a member of the organization and as a member of other social groups and roles.

A recent job crafting move by one of this chapter's authors illustrates the potency of this kind of proactive job change as a means for constructing an organizational self that is psychologically beneficial. Jane was invited to give a talk to an alumni group of her university about her research. Because both of her daughters are now living in the town where her work is located, they were able to attend. For the first time in 30 years she asked her daughters to attend her talk (the small job crafting move). During the public discussion of the research, both daughters made comments and added ideas, with the audience's recognition that they were related to the speaker. During this exchange, Jane experienced a powerful sense of integration between her role and membership as professor in the local university and her role as mother. For that moment, and lasting for some time afterwards, joy and contentment arose from the experienced compatibility between sometimes highly conflicted role identities and from the satisfaction of being able to authentically connect the two selves that represent mother and university faculty member. Indeed, researchers have noted the positive identity benefits of this kind of connection and integration of aspects of the self (Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009).

Across the four positive meanings and four positive identities discussed above we can see the variety of ways that employees can use job crafting as a means for constructing work meanings and identities that are valued, significant, changing, and structured in ways that yield psychological and social benefits, thereby moving beyond Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) conclusion that job crafting changes work meanings and identities in general. By delineating the different kinds of positive meanings and identities that job crafting may produce, future research can more fruitfully examine which particular forms of job crafting are likely to bring about these different meanings and identities. Further, we can begin to imagine how different organizational contexts affect the kinds of positive meanings

and identities employees construct because of how the context limits or enables job crafting. However, questions remain about the nature of the causal links between these positive meanings and identities and job crafting – namely, when are these meanings and identities motivational drivers of job crafting, and when are they outcomes of job crafting? In the section that follows, we address this question in an effort to provide further guidance for future research in this area.

### **THREE PATHWAYS TO POSITIVE MEANING AND IDENTITY THROUGH JOB CRAFTING**

We propose that the four sources of positive work meanings and four types of positive work identities discussed above can be motivational drivers of job crafting, outcomes of it, or both, depending on how employees view the meaning of their work and themselves at the outset of job crafting. To capture the key ways in which the temporal relationship between these positive outcomes and job crafting may differ between employees, we characterize three different archetypal types of job crafters to highlight pathways through which job crafting may link to one or more of these meanings or identities.

#### *The Alignment Crafter*

Alignment crafters seek to align their jobs with a preconceived positive view of their work meaning or identity. In other words, they engage in job crafting to fix a misalignment between their current job and its implications for their work meaning or identity and what they want and expect their work meaning or identity to be. As Bakker and his colleagues report, employees' ability to sense or create alignment between the demands of their jobs and the resources they have to meet these demands has positive implications for their engagement at work (Bakker et al., 2003, 2004, 2007). These findings are suggestive of the benefits employees reap when they experience or create alignment in their work. For example, an auto mechanic who sees himself as having an esteemed organizational identity but does not have opportunities to realize this identity in his work could seek direct interaction with customers in order to get it. In this way, the quest for a certain positive work meaning and/or identity that employees' jobs currently do not enable is what drives them to job craft. As a result of



this orientation, these employees may only accrue the psychological benefits of experiencing a positive work meaning or identity if they succeed in crafting their jobs to facilitate their desired meaning or identity, otherwise they may experience frustration (Barlas & Yasarcan, 2006) or disappointment (Bell, 1985) as they fail to meet their crafting intentions.

### *The Aspirational Crafter*

While alignment crafters have a preconceived vision of a positive work meaning or identity that is not fulfilled by their current job, aspirational crafters craft their jobs in order to develop their work and self into a desired future state that they do not currently experience. For example, an attorney who desires more emphasis on meaning in her work that is based in service to the community may put more time and energy into her existing pro bono cases while pursuing new ones, thus developing an identity in her work that did not exist before. In this way, aspirational crafters operate by recognizing opportunities to job craft in order to develop new work meanings and aspects of identity that they wish to create, while alignment crafters create new opportunities within the job to pursue the positive meaning or identity they do not currently experience at work. For this reason, alignment crafting may take longer to unfold than aspirational crafting, but alignment crafters may stand to benefit more in the long run because creating new opportunities may enable greater change over time than just exploiting existing opportunities. The actions that aspirational crafters take to realize desired “future work selves” (Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012) and to create or experience more of the kinds of meanings they want from their work ((Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010)) help to seed the conditions in their jobs that allow for growth and development.

### *The Accidental Crafter*

Accidental crafting occurs when employees unintentionally discover a positive meaning or identity through job crafting. For example, a hospital cleaner who helps a patient fetch an item from across the room may discover that this task allows him to experience a more virtuous organizational identity. In this way, accidental crafting involves unintentionally discovering opportunities for cultivating one or more positive meanings or identities within the job that employees did not consider before engaging in job

crafting. While the positive work meanings and identities are drivers of both alignment and aspirational crafting, the positive meanings and identities are solely outcomes – not drivers – of accidental crafting. Because accidental crafters unlock opportunities for completely new types of positive meaning and identity, they may be well positioned to experience relatively quick and intense boosts in psychological flourishing as a result of their crafting as compared to alignment and aspirational crafters, whose job crafting is more intentional.

Taken together, these three archetypal pathways provide a preliminary framework for understanding how, over time, job crafting may be driven by the aforementioned positive meanings and identities (alignment and aspirational crafting), as well as how job crafting may drive the discovery of these meanings and identities (accidental crafting). By painting a picture of how and why employees might engage in job crafting to seek alignment, meet aspirational aims, or simply by accident, we hope to enliven the ways researchers think about and study job crafting. In the future, research on job crafting should more fully consider how this activity is rooted in a motivated and creative space in employees' lives, in which they are proactively seeking and designing into their work those elements that enable them to experience the meaning of their work and selves as enduringly positive (or encountering them by accident). We hope this framework will help guide future research on the temporal dynamics between job crafting and important psychological outcomes such as positive meanings and identities.

## CONCLUSION

Recalling the purpose of this volume, researchers in positive organizational psychology seek to understand the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and organizations to thrive (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Job crafting offers an important contribution to this field by envisioning employees not as passive recipients of job characteristics, but as active participants in the construction of the meaning of their work and themselves. In this chapter, we proposed a set of sources of positive work meanings and types of positive work identities that are likely to be a part of the job crafting process, as well as three archetypal pathways through which these meanings and identities may drive – and be driven by – job crafting over time. In so doing, we hope we opened up new questions and lines of research about the ways in which job crafting can strengthen employees and the organizations in which they work.

## NOTES

1. While job crafting may negatively affect employees' sense of meaning and identity in their work, we focus in this chapter on the ways in which job crafting may be positive for work meaning and identity.

2. While the kind of meaning employees make of their work is likely to have implications for how they enact and craft their jobs, here we focus more on the impact of job crafting on job meaning.

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