JOB CRAFTING

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JOB CRAFTING
The Art of Redesigning a Job

BY

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EPIGRAPH

Abbiamo voluto cambiare il mondo
e ci siam ritrovati con la vita disfatta
ma la notte è stata bella
chi dice che l'amore è a perdere
ha già perso l'amore.

— Jacques Prévert (1949)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Davide de Gennaro is an expert in the field of Business Organization. He is Professor of Business Administration at the Italian National School of Administration (SNA) in Rome, he collaborates with the University "Parthenope" of Naples, through teaching assignments aimed at students of the three-year and master's degrees, and he works as Research Fellow at SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan. Davide de Gennaro deals with issues concerning business administration and organizational behavior, with an approach oriented to the evaluation and the assessment of skills and competencies. He holds a PhD in Business Organization and Organizational Behavior at the University "Parthenope" of Naples; during his PhD, Davide held a Visiting Scholar position at the Kedge Business School in Bordeaux, France, for the realization of are search project and for refining his technique and skills in the teaching and academic fields.

Davide is gaining credibility into the international scientific scenario thanks to his growing network of scientific relationships with both national and international scholars. He is a Member of the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS), also participating at the annual conferences of the Italian Association of Business Organization (ASSIOA), the annual Italian Workshop of Business Organization (WOA), the International Forum on Knowledge Asset Dynamics

(IFKAD), and the Italian Chapter of AIS (ItAIS) and he is an Ad hoc Reviewer for Academy of Management (AOM), *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (JVB), and *Health Services Management Research* (HSMR). In 2017 he has also been chair of the "Job insecurity" session at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in Atlanta, USA.

His research interests include the analysis of individual strategies and organizational levers that can promote employees' well-being and job satisfaction, such as job crafting behaviors. Other research interests also focus on public management competencies and administrative leadership. Davide de Gennaro published several articles and chapters in scientific journals (e.g., *Journal of Vocational Behavior*), books (e.g., edited by Springer International Publishing), and conference proceedings (e.g., Academy of Management). Furthermore, despite his young age, Davide has participated to more than 20 international conferences as a speaker.

PREFACE

Has your job started weighing you down? Is it a source of discomfort; don't you like it as much as you used to? If so, your first thought should probably be: "I'm looking for a new job". In reality, there is a less drastic solution: to work to redesign some of job's aspects, so as to better shape it on your interests, abilities, needs, and − consequently − return to appreciate it and being more efficient.

This DIY, spontaneous, and proactive approach has a name: job crafting, which can be translated as "work personalization" or "individual job redesign." It is not synonymous with revolution, but with evolution: the basic idea is that individual initiative can produce small but decisive changes in carrying out one's work. This is the case, for example, of a teacher who gets bored explaining the lesson always in the same way, so he or she uses songs or videos to make teaching more enjoyable. The result? Less boredom and more time to devote to stimulating tasks.

Indeed, thinking about it, the perfect job does not exist. What do you like about your job, what do you enjoy? At least twenty seconds of silence. The answers are there, I know, but sometimes they are hidden by fatigue, by the need to change something, by habit, by the feeling that it could always be better. In fluid times like modern ones, in which there is this difficulty in appreciating all the features of a job, sometimes you have to invent it − you have the possibility to look at things differently.

The job crafting expression was proposed in 2001 by two psychologists – Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane E. Dutton – in an attempt to describe a possible magic: that of transforming the work you have into the work you love (also said: if you can't do the work you love, at least try to love the work you do). Therefore, if you don't like the work you do but the prospect of leaving it still seems too far away, three simple rules could change your (work) life: task crafting (reconsider the things you do), relational crafting (reconsider your colleagues, supervisors, and clients), and cognitive crafting (reconsider the way you think about your work). In other words, doing job crafting means trying to align one's inclinations and passions with job demands. Job crafting already exists in every work environment, or rather in any stimulating work environment.

Therefore, job crafting is not just about the most obvious aspect: that of modifying the proposed task, the nature of one's work, and the way in which it is carried out. Indeed, it would be a matter of reviewing the tasks and the daily activities in order to give more importance and devote more time to those we like, carefully choosing priorities, redefining work styles and processes, and questioning everything. There is more. There is also a cognitive modification, that is to change the way in which one's work is perceived, and a relational modification, for which the style and frequencies of work-related interactions change. By reviewing the perception you have of your job role, being able to better withstand the negative aspects of your work, improving your self-perception, and also relating to positive and cheerful people, distancing yourself from those who despise or envy you, selecting the people to take an example from. In practice, job crafting is about redesigning your work as a whole to make it more fulfilling.

The old organizational approaches to work have always stated that this ability to recur proactively was a prerogative

of managers, but they were often wrong, or at most not entirely true. Do you know why? Managers coordinate the work of others and are in a position to try to reorganize the contents of tasks, but only those who actually carry out the aforementioned tasks can really rework and re-propose them in an evolved key. Job crafting means for a worker to take proactive behavior so as to make his or her own work more satisfying and consistent with one's personal inclinations and abilities. It is a matter of re-elaborating, perhaps with a good dose of creativity, one's own role and tasks, making them take on new, more challenging, more visible, and more satisfying connotations. This behavior experienced a boom during the last recession in the United States, when there were not many jobs available and job crafting became the easiest way to pleasantly accept one's own work.

This book has been imagined and designed with the aim of investigating the phenomenon of job crafting, in the light of almost 20 years of studies on the subject, through a thorough investigation and trying to bring order to the various often disconnected studies. It is important to specify, however, that this book does not provide an exhaustive summary on the subject, given that this would have been extremely complex and of little use; on the contrary, the objective of this work is to provide a cognitive basis to encourage further developments in scientific research on the subject of job crafting. The goal is to allow an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon that naturally and spontaneously occurs within organizations and in the working life of all individuals, but which can be fostered and guided by creating suitable organizational and contextual conditions for its development in synergy with the organization's objectives. Indeed, job crafting has been widely recognized as being able to generate better results in terms of engagement, satisfaction, motivation, performance, and positive thinking.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO JOB CRAFTING

1.1. INSIGHTS ON THE PHENOMENON

"Organizational researchers care about what what composes the experience of a job": with a printing error, an involuntary repetition of a term, it begins a story of 20 years of studies on a theme that would have changed forever the way work is organized. It is 2001, and Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane E. Dutton are proposing an innovative approach concerning organizational behavior in the workplace that is the most popular and the most widely used in the job literature of recent years: it is about "job crafting."

Until the 1990s, work had been a static concept in which the employee was charged with faithfully following the job description designed and imposed by an employer. Today, on the contrary, organizations expect individuals to be proactive and go beyond the provisions of the job statutes. In an economic, financial, and social environment characterized by extreme dynamism and non-linearity, in which the keywords for organizations are rapid response to change and

adaptation to unforeseeable and often ambiguous situations, individuals have to rethink themselves and their tasks as well as the relationships with others in the workplace. This way they find meaning and motivation in what they do and also maintain high individual performance levels that, at the same time, favor organizations in achieving their goals. Try to think, for example, about the impacts that changes and technological innovations are having in the workplace and the repercussions in terms of requests for greater flexibility both for organizations and for individuals.

Grant and Parker (2009) indeed suggested that it is possible (and it is appropriate to add "necessary") to manage organizations with more flexible jobs than traditional ones, where tasks and roles are modified and developed by employees, allowing them to respond to requests and opportunities in the workplace. This paradigm shift stems from a need and a perception: the nature and structures of work are continually influenced by constant and repeated changes, so establishing top-down organizational practices is not functional in responding to the continuous evolution of working conditions (Demerouti, 2014). For example, the economy has gone from being manufacturing-based to being knowledge-based and, consequently, it has become more ambiguous, dynamic, and complex (Davenport, 2013). This is why scholars have proposed extending the reach of job design theories to a bottom-up approach based on personal proactive initiative namely job crafting, understood as an individual-level job redesign. Job crafting, which stems from a new viewpoint of job redesign, represents a swift and a voluntary adaptation of workers to changes at work, so it is considered a useful strategy for the sustainable development of organizations.

Job crafting captures "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). It consists of

three proactive individual behaviors that enable workers to manipulate their jobs to fit more to their natural inclinations: (1) physically altering the task boundaries to incorporate one or more additional tasks in one's job, (2) enhancing the social environment at work by investing in high-quality relationships with coworkers, supervisors, customers, and so forth, and (3) working on the cognitive nature of the job by mentally reframing it in more positive terms.

This theory is then described as the possibility, by workers, to shape and redefine their job through physical, relational, and cognitive modifications. In practice, employees proactively modify the way they view their work, the form or number of activities, and the social interactions with others. For example, a personal trainer behaves in task crafting when he or she prepares individual training programs favoring the preferences of their customers, or when he or she chooses alternative contexts to practice the training (Grant, 2007). Another example is a history teacher, passionate about music, who engage in task crafting by including songs within the study program to carry out his or her profession in an innovative and more challenging way (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). An example of relational crafting is the case of a cashier of a supermarket that improves the service offered to his or her customers by involving them in talks and conversations or providing them useful shopping tips (Rafaeli, 1989). Another example of this facet is represented by the case of mechanicals when they share with other workers some anecdotes about previous experience of reparations (Orr, 1996). Finally, the cleaning staff of a hospital may offer an example of cognitive crafting when they attribute to their work a wider and more significant meaning in relation to the contribution they can make to the healing process of patients in the healthcare setting (Ghitulescu, 2007). About this, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) hypothesized that workers that

are employed in hierarchically lower duties engage with more motivation in cognitive processes in order to improve their professional identity; individuals who work as cook, for example, do not believe they are simply people who prepare food, but rather they perceive they are "culinary artists" and behave accordingly to meet their need for challenges, achievement, and self-esteem (Berg, Dutton, Wrzesniewski, & Baker, 2008).

This is an epochal turning point that has not had an easy birth (de Gennaro, Buonocore, & Ferrara, 2017). Indeed, even if it is from the beginning of the last century that research has focused on the behavior of employees at work (Taylor, 1911), that perspective and those studies are in a completely opposite view compared to job crafting theory. Scholars used to propose to model and shape the work activities in a top-down approach in which managers chose the way employees carry out the tasks in organizations: job design theories represented the only way of interpreting the working reality, as a tool for management to define the job profiles of employees (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Subsequently, scholars of motivational theories took a small step forward and proposed the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which identified for individuals a need for freedom and a will to choose for themselves the activities to be performed and carried out. Ryan and Deci proposed three types of needs – of competence, relationships, and autonomy – which determined the motivation of workers in the exercise of their professional activity. Through the theories of these scholars, although they were not framed in a purely work organizational literature, over the years the paradigm of work organization has therefore been reversed.

On the basis of these lines of study, it has come to accept the fact that employees autonomously modify their activities in order to make them more similar to their own characteristics, increasing the well-being and the satisfaction at work: scholars then started to talk about "job crafting" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and "job crafters" (that is persons who adopt this type of behavior; Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013; Tims & Bakker, 2010). Job crafting is a technique that refers to the changes put in place by the workers in order to make their job more satisfying and challenging.

Individuals implement job crafting behaviors when tasks or duties are not well specified (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) but not only then, as it will be shown later. By taking advantage of this "lack of norms," individuals can get the best work performance and motivation in the moment they succeed in modifying the features of their job on the basis of their personal characteristics. Thanks to these behaviors and these modifications, individuals are able to change the organizational routines (von Hippel, 1994) by altering the way of working of individuals and workgroups. An example is the relational modifications implemented by doctors and laboratory technicians in the moment they start using a new machinery in the hospital (Barley, 1986): in this situation they are forced to talk to each other because each one has specific skills and knowledge to be shared. Therefore, this modification does not only generate a change in the duties of individuals but also in the boundaries of the team roles and in the activities of the team members. Therefore, job crafting concerns actions aimed at modifying something in the own job – these actions extend the boundaries of the work in order to include additional tasks that individuals consider interesting or useful – but there is no doubt that these changes can generate a chain reaction toward other people in the workplace.

Compared to the logics of the last century, job crafting is an innovative phenomenon which over the years has been affirmed and consolidated, becoming in all respects a recognized and appreciated work and organizational practice.

1.2. CHARACTERISTICS AND DEFINITIONS OF JOB CRAFTING

Before 2001 scholars only cared about the definitions of a job regardless of the workers who carried it out: these definitions were based on individual variables (Roberson, 1990) such as expectations, values, or other peculiar characteristics of the job and not of the person (Griffin, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1980); these represented prospects that minimized the role that employees covered in actively performing a job. This short-sightedness is not surprising: the organizational culture was effectively linked to managerial logics and completely focused on the best way to manage and direct the work of others. A demonstration of this is also the fact that today we still worry a lot about issues related to leadership − with numerous contributions on the subject − with respect to followership: the focus is on those who manage, who controls, and much less on those who actually carries out the operational work. This is the surprise and the innovation of job crafting: a change of perspective that is not fashionable but hides decisive and interesting implications for the organization of work and, it will be seen, for numerous other characteristics of work. Indeed, the lens cannot be placed only on those in charge, but also and above all on those who act. The literature of the last century has been as focused on evaluating the victory of a soccer team only assessing its coach, or worse its manager; although they make an

important contribution, at least the value of the team and of the single players is omitted.

The "job crafting" expression was introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton in 2001 when they realized employees try to make their job in line with their personal characteristics and that the task boundaries, as well as the relational and cognitive ones, of a job are not always precisely determined. "I don't go to work without having my say." "I do not accept passively everything that others propose (impose?) to me." The job crafting expression was then used to identify the ability to shape, model, and redefine a job, and job crafters are individuals who actively modify the psychological traits of their work activity by altering the task boundaries and the cognitive traits, by changing the way in which they use resources and relational features, and finally by altering the interactions within their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafters act on these employment variables and so they change tasks, identity, and meaning of their work: in this way jobs' characteristics differ significantly from those supposed by employers.

Job crafting is an activity that employees spontaneously undertake to meet their needs and preferences in the workplace (Kira, van Eijnatten, & Balkin, 2010). It's a behavior that requires an adaptation to the challenges and to the constraints imposed by an employer (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010) and it represents a strategic advantage for employees and for the organization as a whole, although it will be shown that these changes are not always in line with the organizational goals and needs (Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010).

When employees mobilize resources through job crafting behaviors, they can create a work environment that meets their needs and that is more in line with their abilities (Tims & Bakker, 2010). This means job performance will be better: happy employees are indeed more sensitive to take the

opportunities in their working environment, they engage more often in relationships with their colleagues, and they are more optimistic and more confident and these attributes enable better results for the organization (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). Re-reading these lines seems to have discovered hot water: happy workers work better, it seems trivial. And yet it is clear that the focus on the worker is a really recent phenomenon, which has not had the deserved attention over the years and which is taking hold only in the literature of the last 20 years.

The actions proactively and independently undertaken by employees to model, craft, or redefine the nature of a job are different than the agreement negotiated between an employee and a supervisor in the selection phase, and this is the *ratio* of job crafting (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigl, 2010). It is an inevitable process: due to the disparity of information between the two parties at the time of hiring, very often the lack of data on the methods of work does not allow them to accept with complete awareness on the one hand, and on the other − the candidacy made. Indeed, a worker who expected a different job − not only for activities, relationships, perception, but also other characteristics − will do everything to change that situation; at the same time, but this is another story, even the company could decide to carry out a sort of job crafting by moving the worker from one position to another based on the position for which he or she had been hired.

The job crafting behaviors can generate positive results for individuals implementing them, for the other members of the work group, and for the organization as a whole; in the same way, however, it can generate benefits for the individual and negative consequences for the working group or the organization. These are actions undertaken from a bottom-up approach that generates greater work