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CRAFTING JOB CRAFTING:

FROM JOB (RE)DESIGN TO PROMPT EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

In this inductive study, I examine the extent to which the adoption of a *Kaizen* philosophy in a contact center affects job crafting patterns. The emergent grounded theory model suggests that such job (re)design technique may be experienced by workers in two distinct ways – (1) it can forge an internal process, or (2) it can be perceived as an external imposition. The findings show that whenever an internal process takes place, intrinsic motivation arises to job craft, proving that job crafting is not a mere internal process as previously studied, but the result of a continuous interaction between organizational policies and the individual. In addition, this process is associated with enhanced work identity and work meaning, stronger satisfaction, increased motivation, and enhanced self-confidence and feelings of recognition.

Key words: *Kaizen*; job crafting; job redesign; intrinsic motivation; interactive model

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, studies on how workers experience their jobs have been evolving on the idea that job designs may be starting points from which employees proactively introduce changes at work. Such an approach was firstly proposed by Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton (2001), who argued that “job boundaries, the meaning of work, and work identities are not fully determined by formal job requirements” (2001, p. 179). Instead, individuals often alter the task and relational boundaries of their jobs, and those actions shape how they define themselves as workers and understand the purpose of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Following the introduction of the job crafting theory, empirical research has examined its prevalence and role in employees’ work lives and its impact on organizations in which job crafting happens. To date, the literature revolves around the idea that job crafting behavior derives from one or more intrinsic motivations. Indeed, although researchers’ theories of job crafting process differ slightly from one another, most models involve three general stages. First, employees are motivated to craft their jobs by one or more factors. Second, employees identify the crafting opportunities available to them and enact one or more ways of crafting their jobs. Third, crafting techniques are associated with outcomes for the job crafter and the organization itself. According to this point of view, managers have considerable influence and control over work design choices, while workers are the ones who decide when, why, and what to change in the execution of their jobs. Job crafting is thus understood as an individual phenomenon that might at some point be influenced by managers’ choices in defining the design of the work. But what if managers could go further and have a direct influence on employees’ choice to change their jobs?

In this paper, I address how a new job design, following the introduction of a *Kaizen* environment in a contact center, relates to the occurrence of job crafting episodes, under two research questions: Can the implementation of *Kaizen* induce job crafting behavior? And, perhaps more intriguing, does the enactment of a *Kaizen* culture produce *per se* such significant alterations over employees' jobs that they do not ever feel the motivation to craft their jobs again? In so doing, I had an opportunity to address the issue of whether job design and job crafting were relatively exclusively or somehow reconcilable. The job crafting literature typically presumes an internal motivation as a starting point; yet in this case study, there was no clear initial point of reference that I could use as an absolute basis for such behavior. Given such orientation, this study extends the job crafting literature by revealing that the crafting of jobs may, in fact, be induced by extrinsic motivation. While existing works have looked at the work context as a moderator of crafting, my findings suggest that a job redesign policy may be the motto for an internal motivation to craft jobs. This, in turn, gives rise to a non-stop cycle, as *Kaizen* could ever replace job crafting, nor job crafting could ever oust *Kaizen*. The primary contribution to theory involves considering managers may not just design jobs that allow for crafting (as suggested by previous literature), as they can build and sustain a work culture that indeed creates internal needs for job crafting. However, the adoption of *Kaizen* should be carefully assessed by managers, since it can be perceived by some employees as a mere management technique and, thus, an external imposition. To provide appropriate context for understanding these emergent findings, I proceed to review job crafting literature that proved helpful in guiding the data analysis efforts and may ultimately benefit from the claims of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although every person in an organization is assigned a job design made up of prescribed tasks and relationships, employees often introduce changes to their jobs to better fit their motives, strengths, and passions (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Initially explained by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), this notion of a process of employees redefining and reimagining their job designs in personally meaningful ways has been studied for almost two decades. The overarching assumption underlying this standpoint is that employees are proactive actors who can change social and task components of their jobs and experience different kinds of meaning of the work and themselves (Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013). From the most routine to the most complex jobs, and from the lowest to the highest tiers of an organization, employees have latitude for some crafting (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010).

Furthermore, job crafting is not a one-time event; on the contrary, it is a process that individuals engage in over time (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2008).

In the existing literature, job crafting is defined as an intricate process that begins when employees are motivated to change their views of the meaning of their work, their work identities, or both. While Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) originally proposed three fundamental needs as job crafting antecedents – the need for control, positive self-image, and human connection –, other scholars have suggested a more comprehensive list of potential motivations to craft a job. In particular, research on person-job fit suggests that, when employees see more of a fit between themselves and their jobs, they are more likely to engage in job crafting (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Ko, 2012). Therefore, the motivation to job craft can happen for a variety of reasons, including a desire for a different meaning of work, better or more human connections at work, enhanced interactions with the beneficiaries of one's work, fulfilling a passion, leveraging one's strengths, aligning job with one's key motives, or coping with adversity at work (Berg et al., 2013; Berg et al., 2008). These motivations then compel employees to actively change their job designs by altering the set of tasks formally assigned to them (task crafting), their relationships with others (relational crafting), or their thoughts about work (cognitive crafting). Still, employees motivated to craft their jobs are more likely to do so when they perceive opportunities for that – defined as “the sense of freedom or discretion employees have in what they do in their job and how they do it” (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 183). Following this, the perceived opportunity for job crafting moderates the relationship between motivation to job craft and job crafting patterns. Perceived opportunities for crafting can, therefore, restrict or open up possibilities for employees to see what lanes are available in how they construct a customized job (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) assert that the perceived opportunities for job crafting are affected by two main components of the actual design of work: the level and form of task interdependence, and the closeness of monitoring and supervision. However, empirical support for these two work design components is not clear. In two studies, Ghitulescu (2006) found that, while discretion and task complexity significantly predicted one or more forms of job crafting, task interdependence did not. Moreover, Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton (2010) suggest that the moderating role of perceived opportunities may be more complicated than Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) initially proposed, stressing that employees may not proactively seize opportunities to craft their jobs whenever they face problems and constraints or when they do not have enough autonomy. Further to these two factors, the role of context has extensively been noted in literature as a moderator of job crafting behaviors.

Earlier research by Griffin, Neal, and Parker (2007) takes notice of the role of context – particularly the degree of unpredictability and interdependence inherent in work – in influencing how much and what kind of job crafting might affect individual and organizational outcomes. More recently, Lyons (2008) asserts some types of jobs, some job venues, and some organizations may offer opportunities to employees to modify their jobs; for example, the very nature of the job and amount of supervision received can impact the likelihood of job crafting activity taking place.

Once employees enact their jobs by introducing changes to them, these are linked to outcomes that can be beneficial or costly to the job crafter. When studying the group task crafting efforts among childcare teachers, Leana, Appelbaum, and Sevchuk (2009) found that working together to customize work results in higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as in increased job performance. Other examples of job crafting outcomes include enhanced individual satisfaction and commitment levels (Ghitulescu, 2006), increased individual performance (Ghitulescu, 2006), positive emotions (Ko, 2012), or higher levels of enjoyment and meaning (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010), but also negative experiences of stress and regret (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010), and negative side-effects on the well-being of colleagues (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2015). Job crafting is, thus, not always positive, neither for the job crafter nor the organization. It has the potential to cause harm if the crafting goes against organizational goals or produces negative side effects, which alerts to the fact that managers should help unlock positive job crafting by designing jobs that leave room for employees to tailor their work (e.g., Berg et al., 2008).

Taken together, existing works imply that job crafting is a reasonably complex phenomenon through which employees can shape facets of their work to cultivate meaningfulness and create new domains for mastery in their jobs. Still, even taken together, these works provide only a limited insight into how the interplay of intrinsic motivations (individual) and external factors (organizational) might affect the actual formation of a job crafting behavior. Indeed, the impression left in literature is that these are drawn in a process that always begins by the first (an intrinsic motivation to job craft), and is moderated by the other (external factors). However, it is likely that the process is more complicated than this model implies - an approach that is examined here. In this study, I delve into the processes and practices that lead to the emergence of a new job crafting process following the introduction of a *Kaizen* environment in a contact center.

METHODOLOGY

Contextual Background

Call centers are often characterized by work designs that de-skill and disempower the workforce (Parker & Ohly, 2008). In the setting studied in this research, the contact center was contracted by a company in the energy sector to provide service support to their clients, comprising a total of around 900 employees. Outsourcing is quite common in the industry and seen as an adequate strategy, permitting flexible management of the workforce. At the contact center, flexible time arrangements are commonplace, including variable working hours on a weekly and/or monthly basis. Wages are low, prospects of future promotions are reduced, and labor turnover is high. Notwithstanding, the workforce is mostly comprised of young and relatively high educated workers, considering that interpersonal and communication attributes are particularly valued by management. In effect, the contact center agents involved in this study are mainly responsible for answering incoming calls (according to the distribution made by an advanced automatic call distribution software) – *Front Office* agents – and must promptly identify the accurate information or solution to be provided through an efficient and rapid research in the database system. They also have to perform other regular duties, such as updating customers' databases, performing data entry activities, and reporting concrete situations to colleagues from other service lines. These, in turn, deal with scheduling activities, responding to and solving claims, and other supporting services – *Middle Office* agents. A vital component of the work of all these contact center agents is devoted to express themselves in an efficient and courteous manner throughout all the stages of the service interaction. Their performance is scrutinized by several mechanisms of control/surveillance, including the monitoring of the quality and accuracy of the information provided, rewards, and penalties, in order to enforce workers' compliance with managerial rules. To help them out in these surveillance tasks, management has the support of specific teams that mainly identify problems and define solutions to improve customer service – *Support* teams. Also, employees are confined to individual compartments, resulting in restricted interpersonal communication with colleagues. In addition to the high number of calls and tasks, which induces great pressure among the contact center workers, the stress levels are further exacerbated by a highly intense pace of work that is only slowed down in small and predefined pauses.

These constraints have been long subject to managerial analysis and, at some point, suggested that an organizational intervention was needed – in particular, a participatory intervention that could help increase employee involvement. The contact center managers, therefore, recognized the necessity for a systematic technique: *Kaizen*. *Kaizen* is a structured, iterative and

participatory approach for making continuous improvement (Jacobson, Lescalette, Russ, and Slovis, 2009). Its main objective is generally to improve organizational outcomes by building momentum for continuous change (Haun, Mothersell, & Motwani, 2015; Schwarz, Nielsen, Stenfors-Hayes, & Hasson, 2017). At the same time, considerable attention is usually drawn to the human aspects of the job, giving rise to the idea that it may not only be the quantitative methodology that provides the gains, but that behavioral changes may also contribute to greater outcomes (Cheser, 1998). As such, using *Kaizen* as a means to improve the way work is organized, designed and managed has been proved to encourage mutual consideration of organizational and employee objectives (Schwarz et al., 2017).

In such a poor work context as described above, *Kaizen* appeared as a way to improve work conditions and enable a better environment for employees. Ultimately, *Kaizen* would lead to continuous *changes for the better* and benefit the organization as a whole: the managers and (additionally and foremost) the employees. Conversion to a *Kaizen* environment thus started to confront the contact center agents with new demands, requiring a higher degree of engagement and participation than that found in the prior traditional call center environment. By the end of 2017, nearly 1,500 daily *Kaizen* team meetings had occurred at the contact center, and every single person had received training in workshops, team sessions, and audits.

Participant Selection

Interviews were conducted with 35 employees from the contact center. Although the selection of the organization was primarily based on convenience, it was ensured that the sample included participants in a variety of occupations who held positions of relatively higher or lower rank, in an effort to facilitate maximum variation on employees' type of work. Thus, three groups that spanned across the contact center structure were chosen (from the lowest to the highest rank): Assistants, Team Leaders, and Supervisors. To make sure that all job types were covered, employees within each of the three groups occupied positions in different areas, covering the *Front Office*, *Middle Office* and *Support* operations. Furthermore, the group of informants consisted of employees who were assigned different tasks, owned diverse skills and worked in varied working schedules.

As an additional feature of this research, expert interviews were also employed to give voice to knowledgeable insiders who could easily articulate their perceptions about the *Kaizen* project. In this sense, five interviews were carried out with experts from the Project Team, *i.e.*, the members responsible for the implementation of *Kaizen* in the contact center.

Data Collection

Data were collected from two types of sources: (a) semi-structured, one-to-one interviews, and (b) ethnographic observation.

Based on previous research concerning job crafting (Lyons, 2008; Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Berg et al., 2010), two interview protocols were created to serve as semi-structured frameworks for gathering insights of how, on the one hand, employees describe their perceptions and experiences, both with job crafting and *Kaizen* (in particular, how may *Kaizen* be related to the craft of jobs), and, on the other hand, how experts acknowledge such realities as primary informants (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for a detailed description of both interview protocols). In addition to the protocol queries, some follow-up questions were also asked to encourage participants to expand on relevant subjects.

Overall, 40 formal interviews were conducted. Each formal interview was 25-50 minutes in length, digitally recorded, and subsequently transcribed. Every member interviewed agreed to participate in the study, and all group participants were assured that data analysis would consider the information they provided in aggregate only, so no individual's information would be revealed in the study's findings.

Additionally to the interviews, I was allowed participant access to several *Kaizen* meetings (among the contact center teams), weekly *Mission Control* gatherings (among the Project Team), coaching sessions, workshops and audits over the path of my in-course experience at the contact center. Having this direct involvement provided me with valuable insights into the day-to-day functioning of the employees' work life and the managerial involvement in the project. Detailed notes were taken during these meetings and events, and several conversations were held to help triangulate the accuracy of the contents being studied.

Figure 1 displays a detailed list of all data types, quantities and sources.

Data Analysis

The data were gathered based on the principles of the Gioia Methodology – iterating between ethnographic data and theoretical constructs –, with the ultimate goal of building an inductive model (Van Maanen, 1979; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

The analysis began by identifying relevant *concepts* within the data and grouping them into *categories* (open coding). For this analytical step, first-order codes (*i.e.*, terms and concepts adequate at the level of meaning of the informants) were used whenever possible, or a simple descriptive phrase when a first-order code was not available. Hence, a fine-grained coding consisting of 26 first-order categories was developed. Next, relationships between and among

Figure 1. Data Inventory

Data type	Quantity	Data source
Interviews	40	Contact Center informants Project Team informants
Training materials	6, with 268 pages total	Materials used for training sessions and manuals developed for the <i>Kaizen</i> project at the contact center
Observational data	Approximately 190 hours	Personal notes from project team weekly meetings – <i>Mission Control</i> sessions
Observational data	Approximately 20 hours	Personal notes from daily <i>Kaizen</i> team meetings
Training sessions	Approximately 10 hours	Participation in <i>Kaizen</i> training sessions
Coaching sessions	Approximately 10 hours	Personal notes from sessions between team leaders and their individual <i>Kaizen</i> coaches
Audits	Approximately 5 hours	Personal notes from <i>Kaizen</i> pre-audits and first audits to teams

these categories were found and assembled into higher-order *themes* (axial coding). At this stage, five second-order themes emerged: embracing *Kaizen* culture, joint efforts among colleagues, job customization, work meaning, and work identity. Finally, the data were further reduced to the *aggregate dimensions* that constitute the basis of the emergent, grounded model. Ultimately, three doubled-aggregate dimensions resulted: organizational motives/individual motives, responding to change in the job/initiating change to the job, and employee/proactive changer (see Figure 2).

During this process, new concepts continued emerging until there was a clear sense of the developing relationships among categories and their related themes, and until additional data failed to reveal new relationships.

FINDINGS

An important first step in my attempt to understand *Kaizen*'s relationship with job crafting was to explore whether the contact center workers had previously crafted their jobs in some way. Thus, I began by identifying participants' accounts of job crafting efforts that they had already

undertaken or wanted to undertake, as well as any accompanying description of the experiences that they associated with each behavior (e.g., their reasons for wanting to engage in the action or the main outcomes of such behavior). Although most participants recognized some restrictions in making proactive changes to their work, all informants described at least one instance of job crafting. The most common examples include making and using personal notes, creating their own digital files, constructing an individual style when talking to a client, forging relationships with colleagues, and broadening perceptions of the purpose of their jobs. Moreover, informants reported feelings of higher satisfaction, stronger motivation and enhanced performance following crafting activities.

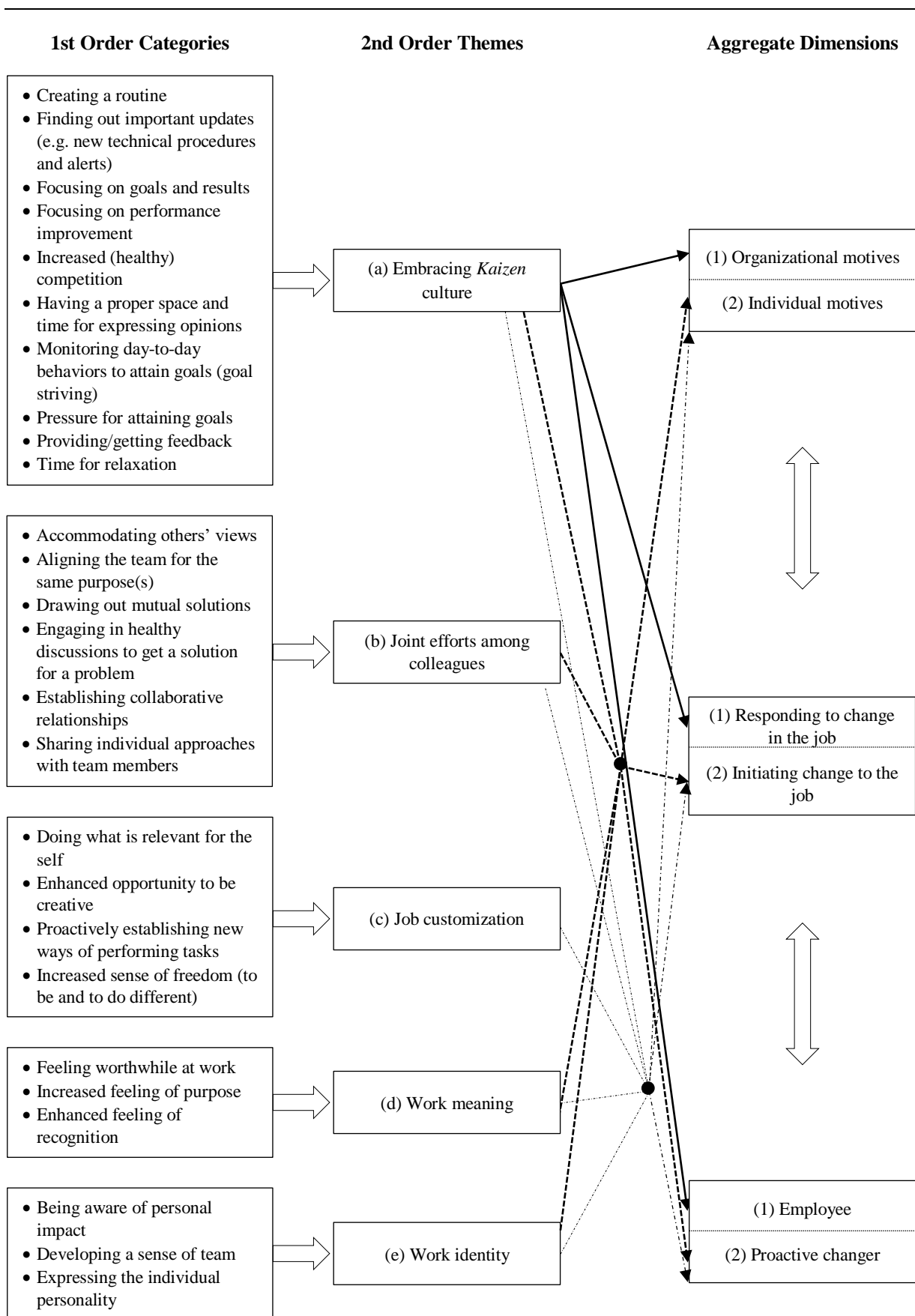
Then, the data collecting and analysis centered on understanding how employees describe their perceptions of and experiences with *Kaizen*, especially in personal means. As data analysis proceeded, two central ideas began to coalesce. First, I noticed a strong commitment to *Kaizen* methodology, as an effect of a friendlier visual environment, better planning and easier communication from and between the top and the bottom of the organization. In essence, members of the contact center see themselves as strongly enmeshed within the *Kaizen* culture, and almost everyone came to feel a duty for behaving, thinking, and disseminating *Kaizen*.

Second, the data suggest that *Kaizen* may be experienced as a simple mechanical process for enhancing organizational outcomes, or, on the contrary, as a more complex mix of operational and behavioral factors. This mix emerges from a continual exchange between the organizational motives, external to the individuals, and internal motives, intrinsic to the individuals. Hence, *Kaizen* can lead workers to internalize the responsibility and sense of value for extrinsic goals, meaning that a mechanism that started to be a managerial technique may convert into something inherently interesting or enjoyable for the self. This organization-individual, extrinsic-intrinsic interface may involve two processes: (1) an ‘embracing *Kaizen* culture ↔ joint efforts among colleagues ↔ work meaning ↔ work identity’ process, through which *Kaizen* leads to collaborative job crafting, and (2) an ‘embracing *Kaizen* ↔ joint efforts among colleagues ↔ job customization ↔ work meaning ↔ work identity’ process, through which *Kaizen* induces not only collaborative but also individual job crafting.

As a result of the above, two different outcomes emerged from the data: (a) Organizational motives ↔ Responding to change in the job ↔ Employee, and (b) Individual motives ↔ Initiating change to the job ↔ Proactive changer. As previously observed, the second outcome may be motivated either by social level techniques (collaborative crafting) or personal level techniques (individual job crafting).

I begin by sharing the emergent dimensions and their constituent themes individually, while

Figure 2. Data structure



acknowledging their complexity and interactivity, using the data depicted in Figure 2 as an illustrative guide. The study findings are reported in a descriptive findings narrative, including representative quotes from informants; however, for clarity of explanation, Appendix 3 provides representative supporting data for each second-order theme. From there I move onto a discussion of the theoretical implication of the findings, including the consideration of an empirically grounded theoretical model of the dynamics created following the adoption of *Kaizen* at the contact center. Finally, I explore how this emergent model might generalize beyond this contact center particular case and, therefore, how this new perspective on the interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic motives may contribute to the job crafting literature.

Organizational motives ↔ Responding to change in the job ↔ Employee

The primary managers' motivation for converting the contact center into a *Kaizen* environment was not centered on business indicators, but rather on specific principles, attitudes, and tools that could ease day-to-day activities, with a primary focus on people. As Project Team informant (2)¹ said:

“We are perfectly aware that there were some communication failures between contact center management and our first line. And so, in the way that the [Kaizen] project was presented to us at the time, it seemed to be a tool to ensure that the message we wanted to convey would reach the people it had to reach. We knew there were problems of motivation, training, and communication, and at the time we thought we could work on these issues with the Kaizen methodology.”

When an organization, its managers, and even the teams themselves devote significant attention to employees, it can only be expected to get commitment back. Indeed, right after *Kaizen* was introduced in the contact center, it started being absorbed by workers at different levels of the organization. The project thrived essentially due to four critical factors: (1) knowing where and how to get there, that is, everyone is aware of their current performance, and everybody knows what is demanded from them; (2) people alignment, meaning that virtually every person works to reach a common outcome; (3) better internal communication, considering that, some people had never spoken with their team colleagues before having *Kaizen* daily meetings; and (4) the human aspect of the job, in the sense that workers now have the chance to take a moment for their team and themselves in every work day.

Also, a paramount feature of *Kaizen* is continuous improvement – *Kaizen* is, in substance, a philosophy of continuous improvement and *change for the better*. Continuous improvement is

¹ For direct quotes from the interviews, the numerical subscript identifies individual Contact Center agents and Project Team members.

one of the core strategies for excellence in organizations, as it calls for neverending effort for improvement involving everyone in the workplace. One of the central reasons to engage employees in such continuous improvement is the assumption that the people closest to the work process are best suited to promptly identify areas in need of improvement and, consequently, implement action plans to improve the work (Schwarz et al., 2017). In an ideal *Kaizen* environment, workers are given the tools and the training to make their own decisions, even to the point of designing their own jobs and controlling their performance. From this, the worker accepts personal responsibility for the outcomes rather than transferring the responsibility to supervision or co-workers (Cheser, 1998). In such reality, people in the organization would not have to ask for permission or approval to make changes in their works, since the organization itself would be willing to assign that responsibility to employees.

However, this level of maturity, where workers are responsible for their own work and, thus, able to tailor jobs in their own ways, is all but a reality for some contact center agents, as the following quotes illustrate:

“I would not say Kaizen helped me introduce changes to make my work more interesting. Not in that sense. It made it easier for me to know what was happening to the team, (...) yes. But other than that, I do not see, I have not felt any influence. I do not feel that because of Kaizen I have more freedom to make my work more personal.” – Contact Center informant (6)

“Honestly, I do not know if I have used Kaizen for changing my work. The adoption of Kaizen was good for us, but it has not changed anything in a personal level.” – Contact Center informant (8)

“Kaizen was very good to have those minutes with the team every day, to convey important messages, to be more united and for everyone to realize what it is necessary to do for the team as a whole. Now, personally... no, I do not think so. I did not change anything about myself.” – Contact Center informant (21)

By talking with assistants, team leaders, and supervisors, I found that some see *Kaizen* as a tool designed by managers simply to serve organizational outcomes. Instead of making use of *Kaizen* to create or initiate change to their jobs, they just react or respond to a change in the job introduced by managers. In essence, these workers limit themselves to the tasks, roles, and boundaries assigned to them while they cannot perceive *Kaizen* in personal meaningful ways. The data revealed that those employees get to this outcome through merely *embracing Kaizen culture*.

Embracing Kaizen culture

Kaizen is not supposed to be a formally adopted method but involves a transformation of the working environment. As such, it needs to become something all employees do because they want to, and because they know it may be good for the company and even for them.

To get to this outcome, *Kaizen* makes use of several tools and particular approaches. One of the distinguishing characteristics of *Kaizen* is its visual management focus. A visual workplace gives employees instant access to the critical information they need, right when they need it. Visuals can easily be understood at a glance, eliminating the wasted downtime that is often spent searching, asking, or waiting for information (Galsworth, 2013). By using management tools to display relevant information visually, *Kaizen* strongly facilitates participation. Therefore, *Kaizen* might be more than the sum of its parts, that is, the individuals and the tools. On the contrary, its potential is realized through its ability to create participation (interaction between individuals) and interaction between individuals and tools (the *Kaizen* boards), allowing knowledge to be spread across time and space in the organization (Schwarz et al., 2017). Daily *Kaizen* meetings can hence promote communication and interaction for those meeting face to face around the *Kaizen* boards. This is even truer at the contact center under study, where *Kaizen* meetings were conducted using digital *Kaizen* boards, creating a further interactive moment for the teams. As noted by some informants: “*Kaizen gives me the right moment to talk*” – Contact Center informant (16), or “*I think that Kaizen improves communication*” – Contact Center informant (27).

By making workers aware of the related data and information through charts and graphs, this visual management philosophy helps to guide their action to attain proposed goals:

“We were never given the possibility of being accompanied in terms of indicators. And nowadays we can have a perception of our daily evolution, which is great.” – Contact Center informant (5)

In simple terms, instead of trying to make radical changes, contact center teams now focus on making small improvements every day that will gradually lead to long-term improvements. In fact, it is much easier to get going if the task at hand is smaller and is continually updated to meet each person’s goals, as implemented in this contact center. Moreover, having daily access to information about their own performance and the performance of co-workers did stimulate competition among employees. Such sense of a race is quite interesting, as competing with co-workers to see who will do the best job further stimulates and encourages contact center agents to improve their performance:

“[Having Kaizen] I am more satisfied because, with it, I can also see other people’s results. What used to happen was that not much comparison could be made and now this shows us what we do every day.” – Contact Center informant (28)

For the organization, daily *Kaizen* meetings also mean a clearer, easier, and standardized way of conveying important messages, since a significant part of those meetings is devoted to talking about updates in technical procedures and key alerts:

“Kaizen helps us understand overall aspects, what is actually happening (...) for example, in terms of notifications, the alerts that exist.” – Contact Center informant (3)

Through a combination of visual controls, posted performance charts and graphs, and a more organized plant layout, immediate and constant feedback is available to all employees, and no further input is necessary for the worker to see what has been accomplished. As Contact Center informant (13) explains:

“I believe that what makes a difference [in Kaizen] is the time we spend with our team leader for him to give us specific input about our service.”

And, as Contact Center informant (15) takes note:

“Even the team leaders learn with assistants and assistants learn with team leaders - that’s how it has to be. Nobody knows everything. And Kaizen is the moment when this can be discussed as a strategy for everybody.”

At the same time, such moments emphasize performance, goals, achievements, and communication, since *Kaizen* places great attention to the human aspect of the job. In a contact center, characterized by the highly constrained nature of work (Russel, 2008), the “humanization” of the workplace assumes particular importance. Project Team informant (2) put it in stark terms:

“I believe we needed this moment of sharing and communication for people to get to know each other – it may seem bizarre, but people did not know their teammates. You are sitting in a place, and if there is no such thing as a Kaizen team meeting, you will most probably not know that X and Y are also part of your team.”

Overall, the findings about *embracing Kaizen culture* suggest that the implementation of *Kaizen* results in an enriched contact center environment. Although workers’ experiences differ(ed), it became clear that employees came to perceive their jobs to be more challenging, thus increasing their desire to work towards achieving proposed objectives. And, perhaps more important,

Kaizen gave rise to an entirely new workplace culture and atmosphere, where each and every employee matter.

Individual motives ↔ Initiating change to the job ↔ Proactive changer

Although *Kaizen* results in an enriched environment, it is only part of the story. Even more compelling is how employees proactively alter their jobs to achieve a personalized fit to this new work environment. Such approach is that of job crafting, through which contact center agents foresee and make changes in their tasks and relationships to achieve both managerial and personal goals (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

As I worked my way through ethnographic observation and one-to-one interviews, I began to uncover consistent patterns indicative of crafting. In essence, it was evident that some workers became aware of many aspects of their jobs that they could proactively change following the adoption of *Kaizen* at the contact center. As noted by Contact Center informant (3): “*Before Kaizen, we were totally in the dark. So, I didn’t even know what I was doing. Nothing.*”, and noticeably illustrated by Contact Center informant (15): “*(...) I knew before that I would have to sell. But maybe without kaizen I wouldn’t have realized that I could be good at selling and that this would motivate me.*”

Hence, *Kaizen* produces and opens up opportunities for employees to create meaningful experiences for themselves through job crafting. In this sense, a new job design imposed by managers such as *Kaizen* can undermine feelings of self-determination engendering an extrinsic orientation. For some employees, *Kaizen* may inclusively enhance intrinsic motivation through a process of motivational synergy between organizational goals and individual drive. The fostering of intrinsic motivation among contact center workers is especially important given the very nature of this job hindered by the general dissatisfaction these employees experience with work. Once *Kaizen* meets individual needs, employees bring change to the(ir) jobs, taking control of or reframing some aspects of their work. In so doing, they are no longer mere employees, but also and foremost proactive changers of their jobs. Even in small ways, proactive changers make the job their own and become what Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) defined as job crafters.

Viewing *Kaizen* as a tool to create job crafting behavior raises the question of how employees craft their jobs. The data revealed different crafting techniques, whether it involved others or was done by the self. At the social level, job crafting techniques consist of initiating change to work processes by joining efforts with others at the workplace. This kind of events was previously studied and described by Leana et al. (2009) as collaborative job crafting. Conversely, job crafting at the personal level occurs when an individual agent makes “physical

and cognitive changes (...) in the task or relational boundaries” of his or her work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). As mentioned in previous research (e.g., Leana et al., 2009), individual and collaborative job crafting are not mutually exclusive, and individuals may engage in both. Indeed, findings show that, when employees engage in a good deal of individual job crafting, they also see the need for collaborative job crafting (Leana et al., 2009). In this case study, both individual and collaborative job crafting have altered one’s work identity and were also critical as a path to meaningfulness in work. As noted by Project Team informant (3):

“I realize that people feel more as being part of something (...). Therefore, I think there is more room here for each one to be their own self and to be able to suggest ideas and contribute to the good of the organization as a whole.”

And as further explained by Project Team informant (4):

“I think the added value of Kaizen has to do with people's engagement. That is, knowing they are part of a mechanism larger than themselves that works. They realize the meaning of their work, but, beyond the meaning of their work, they know they are part of a structure that is dynamic and evolves with them as well.”

Based on the data collected, in addition to *embracing Kaizen culture*, four themes emerged. Phrases such as *joint efforts among colleagues*, *job customization*, *work meaning*, and *work identity* represent how contact center workers came to engage in job crafting patterns and are evidence of collaborative and individual job crafting, both derived from the introduction of a *Kaizen* environment at the contact center.

Joint efforts among colleagues

As suggested by Weick (1979) several decades ago, interpersonal relations at work, which develop over time through social and task interaction, are the basis of collective action. According to Leana et al. (2009), these interpersonal relations may give rise to a particular form of behavior in the organizations: collaborative job crafting. In fact, the more frequent and closer interaction with colleagues, the stronger the employee’s social ties at work are bound to be, and the higher the chances of collaborative job crafting that may occur (Leana et al., 2009).

Such a view clearly contrasts to the reality of the contact center, which is characterized by the highly constrained nature of work, with employees working in isolation and the work being automatically allocated and strongly monitored. The question that arises here is: how can collaborative crafting occur in such a context? And, if it does occur, how could this behavior be stimulated? *Kaizen* proved to be the answer in this research. Indeed, by having daily *Kaizen* meetings, most contact center agents met their teammates for the very first time. In addition,

the new layout of the floor plants allowed a better organization of the teams. Also, being a systematic and participatory approach, *Kaizen* rapidly encouraged communication and interaction in the team and among different teams and with managers. As a result, some informants reported stronger ties with colleagues following the adoption of a *Kaizen* environment, which ended up leading to relational techniques of job crafting. Specifically, my analysis uncovered six specific ways in which employees joint efforts in service of changing work processes: *accommodating others' views, aligning the team for the same purpose(s), drawing out mutual solutions to the problems identified, engaging in healthy discussions to get a solution for a problem, establishing collaborative relationships, and sharing individual approaches with team members.*

Establishing collaborative relationships, in particular, helped employees to improve their relationships by getting and providing continued support from and to team colleagues:

“For example, I made a mistake in a situation or in an audit and another colleague in another situation. And we help each other. Before Kaizen we were totally in the dark.” – Contact Center informant (3)

Similarly, informants reported that they often exchange opinions and individual approaches among peers in *Kaizen* meetings. Consider these agents' stories of, on the one hand, sharing individual approaches with colleagues and, on the other hand, accommodating other colleagues' views:

“What has happened in Kaizen is that I convey how I was doing things so that other people, if they found this correct, could do the same.” Contact Center informant (5)

“I have my way of doing things, but if I introduce a colleague's way of doing things, maybe I can improve by joining the two.” Contact Center informant (18)

As reported by some informants, reciprocating help among co-workers may also allow for drawing out mutual solutions in the team. The following experience of a particular team clearly illustrates it:

“So X [the team leader] and the rest of us, we all thought that having a work plan for every week was great. And this way we also change what we are doing, we understand what each person already knows how to do and what they can learn and even who they can learn it with.” Contact Center informant (1)

All the above forwards a common purpose: grant that every person in a team is on the same wavelength. As Contact Center informant (26) affirms: *“The good thing about Kaizen is that we are all in tune with each other.”* This suggests that in addition to engaging in completely

new activities together because of *Kaizen*, employees may also perceive and adapt to the challenges in their jobs as a collective group.

In general terms, these findings determine that the adoption of *Kaizen* has established group-level processes at the contact center, in such a way that had never been experienced before. *Kaizen* has thus produced job crafting as a collective undertaking, in which teams collaboratively redraw their jobs and get completely new connections at work.

Job customization

The job customization dimension took the foreground in the data collected, often appearing in the language of the informants, who used the term “freedom” to describe their experiences at work following *Kaizen* introduction. As an illustrative example, Contact Center informant (15) elucidates that “*Kaizen gives [him] the freedom to introduce more changes according to [his] needs, because Kaizen is quite flexible.*”

In contrast to the traditional contact center environment, employees can now explore new facets of themselves and *establish new ways of performing their work*: “*If I am in [a] Kaizen [meeting] and they tell me that my phone calls are very long, maybe I’ll answer the phone and try to improve, and maybe I’ll get methods to be faster when answering phone calls. This has already happened. At least I tried to work out ways of doing this.*” – Contact Center informant (4).

This *sense of freedom* and consent for *doing what is relevant to the self* is likely to be more motivating to employees than simply focusing on the assigned tasks that make up their jobs. In the way expressed by Contact Center informant (2), “*Kaizen has helped me to create that irreverent self-sufficiency because I can think differently and I feel that the whole situation lets me think differently as long as it can still make sense.*”

By taking frequent steps to be and to do different at work, the contact center agents also focus on the creative aspects of the job that are most important to them, thus having a chance to leverage the relevant components of their jobs for the very first time: “*I started to adapt to what I thought was correct for myself and to add my own ideas, which I might even had had within me, but which they weren’t so well reasoned, on the table. And this happened, above all, because Kaizen arrived.*” – Contact Center informant (2).

Through job customization, workers at the contact center engage in what is defined in literature as *individual job crafting*. This kind of actions is particularly crucial as a path to work engagement and satisfaction among these employees, who broadly do not expect much from a job at a contact center. This is even truer when we consider that many members of this

workforce are part of Generation Y and, as explained by Berg et al. (2013), have strong expectations for the experiences they would like to derive from their jobs.

Work meaning

Work meaning captures a significant part of how employees understand their experiences at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As defined by Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe (2003), work meaning concerns employees' understandings of *what* they do at work, and also the *significance* of what they do.

It soon became apparent that some employees came to understand the meaning of their work and what their job consists of differently since *Kaizen* was adopted at the contact center. The ways employees proactively shape their jobs to themselves as well as the interaction with partners at work played an important role in this change. Indeed, when the contact center agents meet in *Kaizen* daily encounters, they are exposed to cues that convey their colleagues and superiors' appraisals of their worth in work and reveal others' evaluations of them. At the same time, communication with managers was facilitated following the introduction of *Kaizen*, signaling that employees are regarded positively as members of the organization. These positive evaluations from others, in turn, have a direct impact on how employees make sense of the worthiness of their work. As a team leader verbalized:

"My work has more meaning since I have Kaizen because my work is no longer just the cold work of a team leader and has become the warm work of a team leader." – Contact Center informant (2)

Proposed by Dutton, Debebe, and Wrzesniewski (2016), felt worth describes individuals' sense of importance accorded to them by others, which can facilitate meaningfulness at work. In simple terms, throughout the workday, everyday *Kaizen* encounters turned into valuing acts for employees' notion of the meaning of their work, making them feel worthwhile and valuable at work: *"I feel more valuable since I have Kaizen because here there is recognition."* – Contact Center informant (32).

At the same time, enhancements in meaningfulness arose from contact center workers altering how they think about their jobs as a consequence of *Kaizen*. Undeniably, some employees came to rethink the job and what it means by broadening their perceptions of the impact or purpose of their jobs:

"The role is not just to provide support in the room, but it is as if the Team Leader had a more important role. It is as if we were all trying to bolster the team – I try to bolster my team." – Contact Center informant (14)

As the affirmation quoted above demonstrates, individuals have reconstructed their jobs in ways that differ from their original structure and found a different purpose for the work that is meaningful for self.

Work identity

The adoption of a *Kaizen* environment also led to an inward look at the individuals' work identity, as manifested in references to *being aware of personal impact, developing a sense of team, and expressing the individual personality.*

Some employees described *Kaizen* meetings as having had an essential influence on “knowing” or “understanding” themselves as workers, a description meant to suggest a personal assessment of one's impact: “*These 15 minutes [of daily meetings] give me an overall understanding of my work, (...) and I would not have that perception if there were no Kaizen.*” – Contact Center informant (32).

As a consequence of *Kaizen*, some individuals also had the opportunity to voice their individual personality, thus creating and sustaining desirable identities. The following quote is paradigmatic for this purpose: “*(...) honestly, it is only after these ten years [now that I have Kaizen] that I am myself.*” – Contact Center informant (2). Such observations from informants suggest that *Kaizen* is not only a vital tool for getting insights on one's work but also that this new environment proved essential for employees to nurture their self-views.

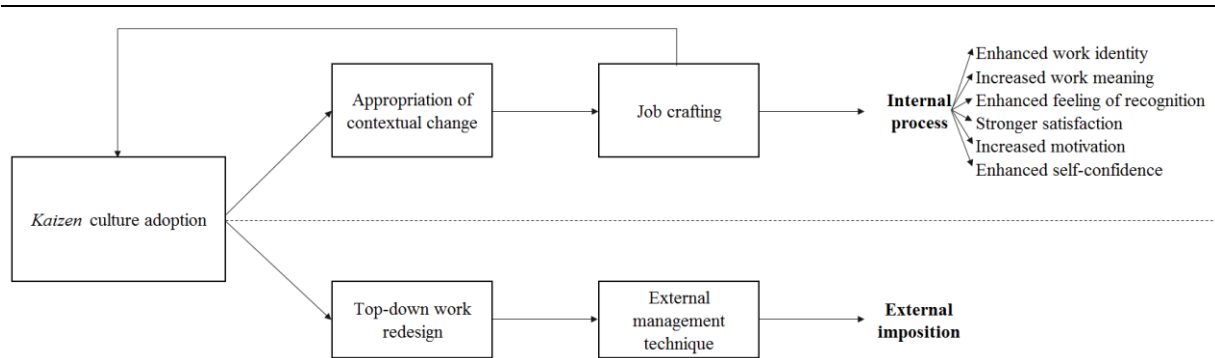
While work identity is partly cognitive – and therefore a result of one's individual conception of themselves at work –, it is also in part a socially embodied construction. In fact, whom individuals interact with at work constitutes an essential means by which employees change their work identities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Clearly, engaging in collaborative efforts with colleagues for changing work processes forged a sense of team that considerably changed the way individuals describe themselves as workers – to a point where they are not just an individual, but part of something greater, someone meaningful, with a deep sense of belonging: “*My work is never really mine, it is my team's.*” – Contact Center informant (23).

DISCUSSION

I began the report of this study by posing two questions that directed the analysis of the interplay between the adoption of a *Kaizen* environment in a contact center and the occurrence of job crafting: Can the implementation of *Kaizen* induce job crafting behavior? And does the deployment of a *Kaizen* culture produce *per se* such significant alterations over employees' jobs that they will never feel compelled to craft their jobs again?

By detailing the dynamic interrelationships between the concepts that emerged from the study, as follows, my aim is not only to provide a summary of the findings, but also a statement of the contributions arising from this research to the job crafting literature.

Figure 3. Conceptual Model



Can the implementation of *Kaizen* induce job crafting behavior?

It was clear almost from the beginning that not only *Kaizen* opens up opportunities for job crafting, as it does create intrinsic motivations in employees to do so. However, not all employees perceive *Kaizen* in such a way. The emergent findings reveal two distinct dynamics following the adoption of *Kaizen*. As illustrated in Figure 3, the creation of a *Kaizen* culture may lead to the appropriation of this contextual change by some individuals, whereas others experience it as a mere top-down work redesign. Indeed, *Kaizen* was introduced as a job redesign approach that represents a top-down process in which managers altered the conditions under which employees execute their work. From day one, *Kaizen* required a higher degree of engagement from all participants. Shifting from a traditional work environment to a *Kaizen* environment, workers often moved to a broader and more demanding range of responsibilities, including increasingly ambitious objectives to accomplish. However, while some employees limited themselves to the tasks and boundaries assigned to them by superiors, others came to think about their jobs as a flexible set of building blocks, rather than just a fixed list of duties (Berg et al., 2013). In other words, although some workers felt that only managers or some other person in power have the freedom to suggest or introduce changes into work – and, therefore, looked upon *Kaizen* as yet another external management strategy –, others developed a job crafting mindset because of *Kaizen*. This made them believe they have the right to be the actual architects of their jobs, even in small ways. By accompanying their performance and achievements on a daily basis, every employee had the chance to think about opportunities for performing their jobs in different and more meaningful ways.

In essence, *Kaizen* allowed individuals to become aware of aspects of their jobs (that they had never realized they wanted to change, before *Kaizen*) to create a better work experience for themselves. Thus, a situational condition like *Kaizen* does not moderate how motivation to craft creates job crafting patterns, as defined in previous literature (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001); on the contrary, *Kaizen* itself gives rise to intrinsic motivation for job crafting. Because of this theory, managers have more than just the capacity to create a context that seeds the ground for job crafting. With *Kaizen*, they can redesign jobs in such a way that creates new means of individual and collaborative job crafting.

This view is somewhat in line with recent research on job redesign, which has progressively acknowledged that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is no longer enough for organizations (Grant & Parker, 2009). Definitely, modern job redesign approaches have come to recognize the role of employees as proactive agents that tailor their jobs in changing their characteristics (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010; Nielsen, 2013). Such bottom-up approaches, like job crafting, thus complement the traditional job design literature. In this way, job redesign approaches can become more successful when they are tailored to individual needs and ultimately create job crafting patterns (Demerouti, 2014). That is precisely the case of *Kaizen*. In this study, conversion to a *Kaizen* environment proved to result in a significant investment of authority in the worker by managers, which accounts for a straightforward demonstration of worker empowerment and autonomy. In this process, *Kaizen* came to serve both organizational and individual outcomes without sacrificing either. Trusting relationships between managers and employees thus guide positive job crafting, as trust help workers feel more comfortable taking risks that will ultimately lead to beneficial outcomes.

Can *Kaizen* surpass the need for job crafting?

Teasing out why employees might engage in job crafting requires answers at the organizational and individual levels. As noted throughout this study, work design has considerable influence on managers, workers, and organizations. Managers are often charged with designing or redesigning the work of employees, usually needing to adapt the work designs to the specific characteristics of the jobs and workers (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2008). For their part, employees are proactive crafters of their works, often redesigning their own work to suit their particular motives, strengths, and passions (e.g., Berg et al., 2008). At the outset of the study, *Kaizen* appeared as an important organizational tool to improve a work environment that is typically characterized by a highly constrained and disempowering nature. Not only did *Kaizen* change the contact center environment for the better, as *it* created intrinsic needs in employees

for crafting their jobs. If, as documented in this investigation, this happened, would it be possible for *Kaizen* to create a virtually perfect environment at some point? That is, would it be possible that, because of *Kaizen*, employees would never feel the need to introduce changes to their jobs again eventually?

As noted by informants in some interviews, this could never be the case. In fact, the very nature of both concepts cannot allow changes to stop occurring in the workplace. First, daily *Kaizen* is only true when it fosters continuous improvement – it is a daily activity that is done by every person at all levels. Since this becomes a habit, changes and improvements are sustained and further developed, creating a loop that promotes a non-stop process. Second, job crafting does not occur only once. It is instead a continuous process that is likely to be influenced by where employees are in their career trajectories and their circumstantial needs (Berg et al., 2010). Hence, *Kaizen* and job crafting create a never-ending dynamics, both powering this continuous mechanism of change.

I labeled this continual interchange between *Kaizen* and job crafting behavior as *internal process* to convey the idea that employees are motivated to proactively introduce alterations to their jobs because of *Kaizen*. This theory thus shifts the focus from job crafting as developed “internally” – through one or more intrinsic motivations – to an interaction between external factors - related to the design of the job - and individual needs. The model also shows that such a process can have a profound impact on the individuals and the organization. Indeed, the data suggest that employees who embrace and interpret contextual change and engage in job crafting are likely to alter their jobs in ways that increase the purposefulness of what they do at work.

Along with a more positive meaning of work, this loop between *Kaizen* and job crafting leads to an enhanced work identity. Because of constant feedback and improved communication among all employees, workers get a heightened sense of recognition from their peers. In turn, the overall *Kaizen* dynamics will increase employees’ level of job satisfaction and ultimately boost one’s subsequent motivation and self-confidence at work.

Thus, although it is repeatedly stated in literature that job crafting is not inherently good (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013), virtually all the examples of job crafting cited by the informants of this study make it clear that positive changes in identity and meaning accrue, not to mention other benefits to the individuals and the organization.

Contributions to Theory

The primary contribution of this conceptual model is a foundation of a dynamic perspective of job crafting. Hence, this model contributes to the traditional job crafting perspective by emphasizing how employees might internalize the contextual resources that make up their job

designs, thus creating an interactive process between the organizational environment and their individual drives. This interplay gives rise to a theory that shifts attention from the individual to external factors in the organization. As the underlying conceptual model illustrates, job crafting may not be an essentially internal process, but rather a practice that evolves from external reasons to the employee. In essence, this model explains managerial policies that simultaneously provide the raw materials and the motto for job crafting patterns. In other words, following a new job design proposed by managers, individuals are deciding, behaving, and playing with contextual materials to find out and undertake new means of job crafting.

As a secondary contribution, this model informs future managerial decisions. In effect, whereas previous research has made strides by recommending managers to create a context that leaves room for crafting, this grounded study adds definitional clarity to this view and locates managerial policies in the actual starting point for job crafting behavior. So, even though this theoretical framework emerged from the specific context of *Kaizen* in a contact center, this praxis might be adopted in other organizations and can become a springboard for a more generalizable theory on an interactive approach to job crafting.

Limitations and future directions

During this research, I noticed a few limitations in my approach. First, this study was carried out in just one organization, and in the very particular context of a contact center. Future research should, therefore, investigate forms of job crafting across a wider range of work organizations where new job designs may be introduced by managers.

Second, all job crafting episodes reported in this study benefited employees, personally, but were also in service of the organizational goals. Nevertheless, it might be possible that employees did not want to report episodes of job crafting that diminished their productivity or performance in terms of what management expects. Therefore, the resulting findings from this study leave the door open for future research on all consequences of job crafting following a job redesign technique.

Third, despite the fact that the findings of this study suggest that *Kaizen* might be perceived by some employees as an external imposition, I did not get into the factors that influence this kind of process. For example, it is possible that differences in leaders' approaches to *Kaizen* or even workers' personality characteristics could explain why employees described different processes following *Kaizen* adoption. Future research on the interactive process of job crafting could help shore up the shortcomings of the present investigation, especially if future studies include variables such as leadership style, personality characteristics, and other related factors.

This study sheds light on other potentially fruitful directions for further research. In the setting studied, the factor that was likely to create internal motivation for crafting was the conversion to a *Kaizen* environment. As a managerial method arguing for a more “peopled” approach, *Kaizen* environments offer abundant opportunities for future research. On the other hand, future works on job crafting could expand on other job (re)design techniques that might give rise to an internal process for crafting jobs.

CONCLUSION

Previous job crafting theory provided one view of employee proactivity by shaping their jobs in a manner that starts and ends up as a bottom-up process. This elaborated grounded theory on job crafting focuses on the “internal process” involved in the employees’ redesign of jobs following managers’ job redesign decisions, and succeeds in unveiling how managerial techniques may prompt a job crafting process. This study has only initiated the briefest investigation of the dynamics involved in a “contextual-internal”, interactive model of job crafting. As future research engages the model proposed here, we will deepen the understanding of this process and ultimately help managers find techniques that benefit both employees and organizations.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Protocol – Contact Center workers

Introductory questions

1. How long have you been in the business of contact centers?
2. How long have you been working for Randstad with the client X?
3. What segment do you work on (FO, MO, ...)?
4. When did you first start having *Kaizen* meetings?

Questions probing episodes of job crafting

First layer of questioning

Have you ever felt that your needs are/were not being met in your job as it is/was designed?

Would you say that you enjoy, in general terms, the job that you have here?

In what ways, if any, have you introduced new approaches on your own to improve your work since you first started it? [**Clarifying:** Have you ever made some proactive changes to your job? What took place in that/those change(s)?]

In what ways, if any, have you worked together with your coworkers to introduce new approaches to improve your work since you first started it? [**Clarifying:** Have you decided together with your coworkers to make changes to your job? What took place in that/those change(s)?]

For the last two questions:

Why did you make this/these change(s)? / Why was it needed?

What was/were the consequence(s) of that/those initiative(s)?

Do you feel you were ever rewarded or recognized by your effort to alter your job in those ways?

If it proves necessary:

For instance, would you say that with those changes that you introduced on your own your job turned out being more significant for you? Would you say that they improved your performance? That you became more satisfied doing your job? That you became more motivated in doing your job? What else would you add?

Second layer of questioning

Has the existence of Daily *Kaizen* helped you in executing any important change/modification in your own work?

In what sense? Can you tell me an episode when this occurred?

Were those changes self-introduced to your job to better fit your individual motives? Or were the changes subject to someone else's approval in order to be implemented?

Would you rather say that *Kaizen* by its own, only because it exists as a culture, has introduced changes to your job in such a way that it made you feel this job your own? In what sense?

Do *Kaizen* daily meetings motivate you to further alter some aspects of your job?

Do those changes make you feel more worthwhile and valuable at work? Why?

Would you say that the existence of *Kaizen* is enough to introduce all the necessary changes to your work?

Thinking from the point of view of your own experience at work, what do you believe to be the most important outcomes of daily *Kaizen*?

If it proves necessary:

Since you have *Kaizen*, do you feel that your work has more meaning to you? Do you feel more satisfied with your job? What else would you like to point out?

APPENDIX 2

Interview Protocol – Experts (Project Team)

First layer of questioning

Why did you decide to take up the *Kaizen* challenge here in the contact center?

What would you point out as being the main outcomes of Daily *Kaizen* in a company? And in the contact center in particular?

What were your initial expectations for the project?

Has the outcome of the project come up to your expectations?

Now I am going to tell you about a somewhat recent theory named “job crafting”. Specifically, job crafting is the process of employees redefining and reimagining their job designs in personally meaningful ways. Thus, job crafting is an action, and those who undertake it are job crafters. In this way, job crafters may proactively reshape the boundaries of their jobs using at least one of three categories of job crafting techniques:

- a. Task crafting: involves employees altering the set of responsibilities prescribed by a formal job description, by adding or dropping tasks, altering the nature of tasks, or changing how much time, energy, and attention are allocated to various tasks.
- b. Relational crafting: involves altering how, when, or with whom employees interact within the execution of their jobs.
- c. Cognitive crafting: involves employees changing the way they perceive the tasks and relationships that make up their jobs.

These actions do not necessarily involve profound changes to job design. Such crafting activities can comprise, for example: creating personal notes, creating personal digital files or

documents, creating a personal style when talking to a client; starting the day by more demanding tasks; choosing to clarify doubts with some particular person, etc.

Bearing this in mind,

Do you believe that individual job crafting actions may come with positive side effects? Which ones?

Do you consider it important to encourage job crafting behavior? (In general terms, and in the contact center in particular)

In this job, supervisors closely control team leaders' tasks and time who, in turn, closely control assistants' tasks and time. Do you believe this control may limit job crafting behavior? Do you think it is possible for employees to hide work and job changes from management and supervision?

In this job, employees are engaged in tasks with a high degree of interdependence, *i.e.* it is common for a person to start a task that is then finished by another person from another team. Do you think that this great interdependence with coworkers can turn job crafting into a contagious behavior?

So far I have talked about job crafting as an individual action. But besides individual job crafting, employees can also engage in collaborative crafting among workers who together customize how their work is organized and enacted in meaningful ways. For instance, team leaders of a particular area can jointly prioritize tasks even if it is not the orientation of the organization; they can also split up tasks among them; the assistants may define a new way of performing a specific task; etc.

Bearing this in mind,

Do you believe that collaborative job crafting actions may come with positive side effects? Which ones?

Do you think that long-tenured employees engage in more job crafting (both individual and collaborative), or is job crafting more the province of newer employees? Why do you think that?

Would you say that job crafting actions are easier for employees with higher formal autonomy (like team leaders and supervisors), or for employees with very little formal autonomy (assistants)? Why?

Do you think there is a particular area that can be more supportive of job crafting initiatives?

Second layer of questioning

Do you consider that Daily *Kaizen* creates a favorable environment for the occurrence of job crafting episodes?

Would you say *Kaizen* helps employees feel that they have the freedom to suggest or implement changes into the work?

And would you say *Kaizen* makes them feel that that exercise is desirable?

Do you think the contact center workers became more motivated since *Kaizen* was implemented? And more satisfied? And what about their performance – has it improved?

Would you say it is possible that Daily *Kaizen* produces *per se* such significant and relevant changes over their jobs that employees do not ever feel the motivation to craft their jobs again?

APPENDIX 3

Representative Supporting Data for Each 2nd Order Theme

1st Order Categories	2nd Order Categories	Representative Quotations
Embracing <i>Kaizen</i> culture	Creating a routine	<p><i>“Kaizen helps to maintain this regularity. It is very important for there always to be follow-up.”</i> CC 15</p> <p><i>“As it is daily, this regularity eventually makes it sufficient to introduce changes at work.”</i> CC 30</p> <p><i>“I believe we needed this moment of sharing and communication for people to get to know each other – it may seem bizarre, but people did not know their teammates. You are sitting in a place, and if there is no such thing as a Kaizen team meeting, you will most probably not know that X and Y are also part of your team.”</i> PT 2</p>
Embracing <i>Kaizen</i> culture	Finding out important updates	<p><i>“In kaizen we know about the changes that are happening on that day or that week.”</i> CC 3</p> <p><i>“Kaizen helps us understand overall aspects, what is actually happening (...) for example, in terms of notifications, the alerts that exist.”</i> CC 3</p>
Embracing <i>Kaizen</i> culture	Focusing on goals and results	<p><i>“ (...) since I have kaizen I have a better notion of what I am doing.”</i> CC 1</p> <p><i>“Before kaizen we didn’t know our results. I didn’t know if I had a negative or positive impact.”</i> CC 2</p> <p><i>“I used to look at individual results, but I didn’t talk much to people directly (...) And that’s not the case now, now it’s normal.”</i> CC 2</p> <p><i>“[In kaizen] we also see our progress, both personal and in conjunction with the team.”</i> CC 3</p> <p><i>“Before kaizen we were totally in the dark. So, I didn’t even know what I was doing. Nothing.”</i> CC 3</p> <p><i>“We were never given the possibility of being accompanied in terms of indicators. And nowadays we can have a perception of our daily evolution, which is great.”</i> CC 5</p> <p><i>“What I note is a greater desire to meet objectives, both mine and those of my team colleagues.”</i> CC 13</p> <p><i>“As now I have to look at indicators every day, indicators may have become the most important thing in my life.”</i> CC 14</p> <p><i>“I already had that concern, but it led me to be a bit more concerned with my daily target.”</i> CC 19</p>

		<p><i>“Kaizen has changed me because it has led me to work more to achieve my objective.” CC 20</i></p> <p><i>“For me, personally, it has helped me to take control over Average Handling Time. I feel that I am improving there.” CC 26</i></p> <p><i>“I’m constantly concerned about my Average Handling Time.” CC 22</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Focusing on performance improvement	<p><i>“And [kaizen] also gives us – at least me – more motivation to focus on the points that we are going to improve.” CC 3</i></p> <p><i>“I think that it is very important in order for us to understand, so far, how we are, our progress, positive points, negative points, where we can improve.” CC 4</i></p> <p><i>“[At kaizen meetings] we can talk about (...) points to be improved.” CC 5</i></p> <p><i>“[Kaizen] is an opportunity for our leader to tell us where we as a team are failing and how we can improve.” CC 6</i></p> <p><i>“[With kaizen] warnings are possible, to maintain focus and decide which processes to follow.” CC 29</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Increased (healthy) competition	<p><i>“[Kaizen] enables me to compare my data with others, creating positive pressure.” CC 30</i></p> <p><i>“Kaizen leads me to want to work a bit more, because I see colleagues of mine doing more than me.” CC 20</i></p> <p><i>“When there is a day when I have a 12-minute Average Handling Time, my colleagues are on 6 and I start to panic.” CC 22</i></p> <p><i>“Group pressure is good, it compels us, it pressures us.” CC 22</i></p> <p><i>“We end up also creating fair play in the team. We tease each other, but in a good way, and it ends up creating a real team.” CC 23</i></p> <p><i>“[Having kaizen] I am more satisfied because with it I can see also other people’s results. What used to happen was that was not much comparison could be made and now this shows us what we do every day.” CC 28</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Having a proper space and time for expressing opinions	<p><i>“Kaizen gives me the right moment to talk.” CC 16</i></p> <p><i>“Kaizen meetings are important because they are a space where we can say what we think, maybe what we should do, what should be changed.” CC 20</i></p> <p><i>“I think that kaizen improves communication.” CC 27</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Monitoring/controlling day-to-day behaviors to attain goals	<p><i>“Kaizen is quite helpful in our everyday work, in matters of organization, of control over what we do.” CC 5</i></p>

		<p><i>"It has helped us to access information that we would never have had before. That was also good to us to control ourselves in work." CC 6</i></p> <p><i>"For me, personally, it has helped me to take control over Average Handling Time. I feel that I am improving there." CC 26</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Pressure for attaining goals	<p><i>"With more pressure, we give more of ourselves and we have more results." CC 26</i></p> <p><i>"Now seeing the graphics, we understand 'hey, almost there, just a bit more, I can do it' and we achieve the goal, all together. And it's great." CC 23</i></p> <p><i>"I think that it was also possible for them [assistants] to feel the obligation to comply with what was proposed to them." CC 12</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Providing/getting feedback	<p><i>"I believe that what makes a difference [in kaizen] is the time we spend with our team leader for him to give us specific inputs about our service." CC 13</i></p> <p><i>"[Kaizen] is an opportunity for the team leader to tell us where we as a team are failing and how we can improve by putting things into practice." CC 6</i></p> <p><i>"Even the team leaders learn with assistants and assistants learn with team leaders, that's how it has to be. Nobody knows everything. And kaizen is the moment in which this can be discussed as a strategy for everybody." CC 15</i></p> <p><i>"Lots of questions are asked and clarified in kaizen." CC 23</i></p>
Embracing Kaizen culture	Time for relaxation	<p><i>"[Kaizen meetings are important because] we can leave customer service for a while." CC 5</i></p> <p><i>"Kaizen is good because we have a moment of relaxation and there is more encouragement." CC 19</i></p> <p><i>"[Kaizen] is a space for (...) decompression." CC 32</i></p> <p><i>"The simple fact of being with the team on a daily basis and adding a moment of relaxation, in which everybody can unburden themselves, has the positive aspect of adding something more to the Assistants." CC 29</i></p> <p><i>"I see [kaizen] as 15 minutes for relaxation, a moment to chill out." CC 34</i></p>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Accommodating others' views	<p><i>"I have my way of doing things, but if I introduce a colleague's way of doing things, maybe I can improve by joining the two. And I think that kaizen helps quite a lot, because I may have a question and there we share things." CC 18</i></p>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Aligning the team for the same purpose	<p><i>"The good thing about kaizen is that we are all in tune with each other." CC 26</i></p> <p><i>"I think that it was also possible, more briefly, to transmit the message [that the team leader wants to pass on to assistants]." CC 12</i></p>

		<p><i>"I try to ensure that the team is on the same wavelength; and ensuring the message is transmitted at meetings is encouraging."</i> CC 12</p> <p><i>"One of the main results of kaizen is the alignment between all. That is, it is not only knowing where we are going, it is everybody going to the same place."</i> PT 1</p>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Drawing out mutual solutions to the problems identified	<p><i>"So X [the team leader] and the rest of us, we all thought that having a work plan for every week was great. And this way we also change what we are doing, we understand what each person already knows how to do and what they can learn and even who they can learn it with."</i> CC 1</p> <p><i>"Essentially, what we did was adapt each person's professional situation and adapt this to a work plan."</i> CC 2</p> <p><i>"Earlier in the week, the team leader X looked at his team members' skills and asked everyone what they would like to do during the week. At the end of a month and a half, the team (...) had skills they did not have at the beginning of the project."</i> PT 4</p>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Engaging in healthy discussions with colleagues	<p><i>"Often somebody says 'hmm, I think we could do it like this', during a conversation - all of us talking about what happened and this leads us to ideas."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes our questions are the same questions as our colleagues' and we end up debating ideas."</i></p>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Establishing collaborative relationships	<p><i>"Anyone who has a less positive impact searches out someone who has more positive impacts and they start to understand 'what does this person do differently from me? How can I do what they do but even better?' And there you create a very good involvement."</i> CC 11</p> <p><i>"For example, I made a mistake in a situation or in an audit and another colleague in another situation. And we help each other. Before kaizen we were totally in the dark."</i> CC 3</p> <p><i>"We are a team, we must work together."</i> CC 6</p> <p><i>"Kaizen brought more frequent meetings to set out problems, both team and individual, and to solve them. And we solve them together, as a team, with everybody's ideas and doing what we think is important to do and change."</i> CC 6</p> <p><i>"A colleague said 'since we have 3 colleagues here who work with Y, come on, you do Y and we'll divide it between the safe invoices, because somebody might be off work or whatever'. For example, in this respect, we can help the team out."</i> CC 9</p> <p><i>"As you can see it is possible to discuss together here a strategy to improve everybody's work. A dynamic,</i></p>

		<i>a procedure (...) is shared with everybody and changes everybody's work." CC 15</i>
Joint efforts among colleagues	Sharing individual approaches with colleagues	<i>"What has happened in kaizen is that I convey how I was doing things so that other people, if they found this correct, could do the same." CC 5 "Sometimes our questions are the same questions as our colleagues' and we ending up debating ideas." CC 23</i>
Job customization	Doing what is relevant for the self	<i>"Kaizen brings a great deal of freedom, because you can decide a lot of things. Indeed, it is a canvas that the team leader can paint however they like. It's cool." CC 15 "[Kaizen] is a really useful tool for me to be able to carry out my work, to do what makes sense to me, within what somebody in my field is supposed to do. (...) for example, I spoke to you about the question of sales – here we are pressured to sell, I knew before that I would have to sell. But maybe without kaizen I wouldn't have realized that I could be good at selling and that this would motivate me." CC 15 "[Kaizen] ultimately gives me freedom and significantly changes how I do my work." CC 15 "Kaizen gives me the freedom to introduce more changes according to my needs, because kaizen is quite flexible." CC 15 "I think [a kaizen meeting] can be a starter so the person realizes that he needs to do something different and, on the other hand, that we are giving him that freedom." PT 3 "Kaizen is a good vehicle for me to understand some things about my work. And there are things that, yes, I can do for myself. If I think it is better for myself, I'll do it." CC 32</i>
Job customization	Enhanced opportunity to be creative	<i>"I started to adapt to what I thought was correct for myself and to add my own ideas, which maybe I even had within me, but they weren't so well reasoned, on the table. And it was above all this, because kaizen arrived." CC 2 "I feel that the objectives are mine and I feel that the operators can manipulate these objectives with reference to this need." CC 2 "If we take a look, "Kaizens" are all different – some team leaders do something more number-oriented, others get things that are more decorative. It ends up reflecting each person's way of working." CC 14</i>
Job customization	Establishing new ways of performing tasks	<i>"If I am in [a] Kaizen [meeting] and they tell me that my phone calls are very long, maybe I'll answer the phone and try to improve and maybe I'll get methods to be faster when answering phone calls. This has</i>

		<p><i>already happened. At least I tried to work out ways of doing this.” CC 4</i></p> <p><i>“On a personal level, of course it changed things (...) if I know that the AHT [Average Handling Time] on the line is 7 minutes something, I can better manage my calls to be able to reduce this. And that leaves me satisfied, because I can see that the objective has been achieved.” CC 5</i></p>
Job customization	Increased sense of freedom (to be and to do different)	<p><i>“[Kaizen] gives me greater freedom, because I am the one who chooses the information that I am going to show at that moment.” CC 14</i></p> <p><i>“It is only now with kaizen, quite frankly, that I do things my way.” CC 2</i></p> <p><i>“Here [with kaizen] I can improve in my work every day, if I want to.” CC 3</i></p> <p><i>“I can say what I want for myself and I can even do on my own initiative what I believe I should do to improve my results and feel better at work.” CC 26</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe as I have a better vision of things and I have a better notion of the problems, I can also build something more for myself.” CC 27</i></p> <p><i>“Kaizen has helped me to create that irreverent self-sufficiency because I can think differently and I feel that the whole situation lets me think differently as long as it can still make sense.” CC 2</i></p>
Work meaning	Feeling worthwhile at work	<p><i>“My work has more meaning since I have kaizen because my work is no longer just the cold work of a team leader and has become the warm work of a team leader.” CC 2</i></p> <p><i>“I think that the added value of kaizen projects has to do with the fact that people know themselves part of a mechanism that works (...) and know that they are part of a structure that is dynamic and that evolves with themselves too.” PT 4</i></p>
Work meaning	Increased feeling of purpose	<p><i>“I think that kaizen is ultimately important on a personal level, because it also has an influence on me.” CC 1</i></p> <p><i>“The role is not just to provide support in the room, but it is as if the Team Leader had a more important role. It is as if we were all trying to bolster the team – I try to bolster my team.” CC 14</i></p> <p><i>“From what I understand, people feel more as being part of something.” PT 4</i></p>
Work meaning	Enhanced feeling of recognition	<p><i>“How can a person feel valuable? A person feels valuable from the moment when she is highlighted. And my boss turns to me and says ‘hey X, you had a return of 300%, didn’t you? Congratulations, great!’ – you feel good, don’t you? I feel recognized.” CC 15</i></p>

		<p><i>“Kaizen is a tool that warns us about what isn’t going so well, but also when everything is good, we are valued for this at that moment.”</i> CC 18</p> <p><i>“I feel more valuable since we have kaizen because we feel listened to.”</i> CC 33</p> <p><i>“I feel more valuable since I have kaizen because here there is recognition.”</i> CC 32</p> <p><i>“It is good when we have good results and the boss the next day says ‘oh, very good’ (...) when a person has good results it is good, because it is recognized.”</i> CC 26</p>
Work identity	Being aware of personal impact	<p><i>“We know what is going on in general, which is an impact. And before we really didn’t know, it was work, login, logout and leave.”</i> CC 6</p> <p><i>“I have a moment there to understand where I went wrong, to identify the mistake and to try not to repeat it.”</i> CC 16</p> <p><i>“These 15 minutes [of daily meetings] give me an overall understanding of my work, (...) and I would not have that perception if there were no Kaizen.”</i> CC 32</p> <p><i>“Without the kaizen culture, we would be closed away here, doing our work without much of an understanding of it.”</i> CC 32</p> <p><i>“I think the added value of Kaizen has to do with people’s engagement. That is, knowing they are part of a mechanism larger than themselves that works. They realize the meaning of their work, but, beyond the meaning of their work, they know they are part of a structure that is dynamic and evolves with them as well.”</i> PT 4</p>
Work identity	Developing a sense of team	<p><i>“Kaizen is fundamental for building a solid team.”</i> CC 29</p> <p><i>“Kaizen helps with motivation. Not only through a team spirit, the boss encouraging us... I think it has a lot to do with this.”</i> CC 4</p> <p><i>“I believe that [kaizen] is important for us to have a stronger team spirit.”</i> CC 13</p> <p><i>“This may be related to the fact that we are all more united. Now I feel that they [the assistants in my team] understand everything.”</i> CC 21</p> <p><i>“Without kaizen, everything would be very impersonal. Thus, we have understood the importance of the team, we need the “family” component.”</i> CC 31</p> <p><i>“The truth is that people’s first feedback was “Well, I did not even know my colleagues”. Therefore, the feeling of belonging is now much stronger than at first.”</i> PT 2</p>

		<p><i>"My work is never really mine, it is my team's."</i> CC 23</p> <p><i>"Before we rarely got to know people... we knew their names, but we didn't know who they were. Now we are a family, and it's good."</i> CC 23</p>
Work identity	Expressing the individual personality	<p><i>"Kaizen ends up reflecting the personality of the person responsible, as it ends up creating a team personality. If I taught kaizen to another team, those people would be waiting for certain things that are different. I feel that the team ends up creating a personality."</i> CC 14</p> <p><i>"It gives me greater accountability because I have more time to be with people, to influence how they look at situations."</i> CC 14</p> <p><i>"I felt, quite sincerely, that [with the implementation of kaizen] I could finally think outside everything that is established."</i> CC 2</p> <p><i>"[Kaizen] has a personal effect at work."</i> CC 31</p> <p><i>"Now we know who we are in the team."</i> CC 31</p> <p><i>"And honestly it is only after these ten years [now that I have kaizen] that I am myself."</i> CC 2</p> <p><i>"I realize that people feel more as being part of something (...). Therefore, I think there is more room here for each one to be their own self and to be able to suggest ideas and contribute to the good of the organization as a whole."</i> PT 3</p>