

Day-level job crafting and service-oriented task performance

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Day-level job crafting and service-oriented task performance

The mediating role of meaningful work and work engagement

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines whether job crafting is related to service-oriented task performance (i.e. performance aimed at providing high-quality services) through meaningful work and work engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 156 employees of a Dutch unemployment agency (4 days, 531 observations). Multilevel SEM was used to analyze the data.

Findings – Results showed that job crafting was related to service-oriented task performance via meaningful work and work engagement. Specifically, seeking resources and seeking challenges were positively related to service-oriented task performance via meaningful work and work engagement, whereas reducing demands was negatively related to service-oriented task performance via meaningful work and work engagement.

Originality/value – The study concludes that seeking resources and seeking challenges are beneficial for service-oriented task performance.

Keywords Job crafting, Meaningful work, Service-oriented task performance, Work engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the last decades, the service industry has experienced an immense growth (Dall'erba *et al.*, 2009), as there has been a shift from the production of products and goods to the provision of services (Oliva and Kallenberg, 2003). In this light, employee performance also changed: where it used to refer to the quality or number of products made, nowadays employee performance increasingly refers to the quality of the services provided (Bowden, 2009; Oliva and Serman, 2001). Providing high-quality services is essential, as it increases customer loyalty and offers competitive advantages for organizations (Taylor and Pandza, 2003). However, as a consequence of the economic crisis, service quality is increasingly pressurized. Budget cuts have resulted in a smaller workforce that has to do the same amount of work in less time, thereby seriously threatening the core business of many service organizations. At the same time, resources such as help and feedback from coworkers are decreasing, as they are busy too (Reinardy, 2013).

Having a highly demanding job with few(er) resources available puts employees at risk to develop stress-related complaints that might eventually result in a burn-out (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). To prevent this from happening, it seems worthwhile to find ways that protect employee well-being, while at the same time optimize employee performance. One way to achieve this is through the enhancement of meaningful work (May *et al.*, 2004) and work engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). In the past, this has mainly been done using top-down approaches such as job redesign (Holman *et al.*, 2010). Lately, however, interest in bottom-up approaches – in which employees themselves initiate desired changes – has risen. One particularly fruitful example is job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), which refers to small changes employees make in their work to align their job with their wishes and preferences.



In this paper, we aim to unravel the daily process through which job crafting is related to a key performance indicator in the service industry: service-oriented task performance (S-OTP; i.e. performing one's service-related tasks optimally). S-OTP is an important behavioral outcome in the service sector, as it enhances employee functioning and customer satisfaction (Sin *et al.*, 2006). We examine whether daily job crafting is related to daily S-OTP by exploring the mediating role of daily experienced meaningful work and work engagement in this process. Using a within-subject design in which employees are followed over four consecutive working days, we are able to study the short-term dynamics of job crafting, not only between persons, but also within (Ohly *et al.*, 2010). This is important, as it advances our understanding of the same-day effects of job crafting on work-related cognitive evaluations and affective-motivational states (i.e. meaningful work and work engagement) (Höge and Schnell, 2012) and actual behavioral outcomes (i.e. S-OTP). Doing so, we gain a deeper understanding of the daily process leading from altering one's job characteristics (i.e. job crafting; Tims and Bakker, 2010) to enhancing the provision of high-quality services.

We build our model by integrating two dominant literature traditions of job crafting: one based on positive psychology (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and one based on job (re) design (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) propose that employees craft their job to fulfill basic psychological needs, leading to meaningful work and enhanced performance. Tims and Bakker (2010) argue that employees craft their (perceived) job demands and job resources to increase fit between the job characteristics and their personal needs and abilities, leading to work engagement and enhanced performance. However, little is known about the daily motivational process relating job crafting and work engagement (Petrou *et al.*, 2012). Integrating meaningful work into the job crafting–work engagement relationship provides us with a (motivational) reason *why* employees craft their job and how this is related to day-level performance.

Earlier cross-sectional research has shown that psychological meaningfulness mediated the relationship between job crafting and work engagement (Peral and Geldenhuys, 2016), whereas weekly job crafting has been found to be related to weekly meaningfulness through increased weekly person-job fit (Tims *et al.*, 2016). Building on these studies, we contribute to the literature not only by unifying the two literature traditions on job crafting, but also by advancing our understanding of the overall process leading from job crafting to performance in which motivational components (i.e. meaningful work and work engagement) play a key factor. Moreover, using a within-person design, the results of this study strengthen the findings of the work by Peral and Gelderhuys (2016) and Tims *et al.* (2016) by showing that the processes described in their studies not only hold over time (i.e. weekly) or on a cross-sectional level, but also on a daily basis. This advances our understanding of the motivational pathway leading from job crafting to performance.

Second, this paper adds to the literature on meaningfulness by being the first to examine whether daily experiences of meaningful work are related to well-being and daily functioning at work. Allan *et al.* (2018) showed that instructing individuals to do daily acts of kindness increased their daily experience of meaningful work, but how daily experiences of meaningful work are influenced by self-initiated or crafted rather than instructed changes at work as well as how daily experienced meaningfulness influences well-being at work (i.e. work engagement) and functioning (i.e. daily performance) are still unknown. Although we know meaningful work influences long-term outcomes reflecting dedication to one's career and a willingness to put in extra effort, insight into daily dynamics of meaningful work is a novel advancement in the literature (Allan *et al.*, 2018).

Lastly, this study adds to the job performance literature by focusing on a behavioral outcome that is important for the service industry: S-OTP. S-OTP emphasizes the importance

of the provision of high-quality services. Although the relationship between job crafting and performance has been studied before (for a meta-analysis, please see: Rudolph *et al.*, 2017), none of these studies have focused on task performance in terms of providing high-quality services. To this aim, we developed a tailored measure assessing S-OTP and explore whether daily S-OTP can be enhanced through daily job crafting. As providing services is increasingly important for contemporary organizations (Bowden, 2009), this paper not only broadens the generalizability of job crafting, but also is of practical value to service-providing organizations. Based on our results, we hope to provide service organizations with guidelines to enhance their employees' well-being and functioning through the use of bottom-up job redesign techniques.

From job crafting to work engagement

The theory of work adjustment (TWA) describes work as an interactive, continuous, and reciprocal process between an employee and his/her environment (Rounds *et al.*, 1987). Employees strive for congruence (i.e. correspondence) between their needs and the work environment to enable optimal performance (Blau, 1987). Correspondence can be achieved in two ways: through reactive and active adjustment behavior. When reactive, employees change themselves to increase correspondence. When active, employees change the environment (or circumstances) to increase correspondence (Eggerth, 2008). Thus, TWA suggests that through active adjustment behavior, employees can shape the conditions to perform optimally.

Employees can (pro)actively adjust their work environment through job crafting (Bakker *et al.*, 2012). Job crafting is defined by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) as “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (p. 179). Framing job crafting in the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), it refers to the optimization of job demands and job resources (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Job demands are those aspects of work that require sustained physical or mental effort and may lead to feelings of stress, strain, and exhaustion when they are too high. Job resources are those aspects of work that help to achieve work goals, enhance motivation, and stimulate personal development (Demerouti, 2014). The prevailing job demands and resources may differ per job, and even per employee, as individuals craft them to align them to their needs and preferences.

We define three types of job crafting behavior: *seeking resources*, *seeking challenges*, and *reducing demands* (Petrou *et al.*, 2012). When seeking resources, employees, for example, ask colleagues for feedback or advice on how to handle a specific case. When seeking challenges, employees, for instance, start a new project or go the extra mile for a customer. Lastly, when reducing demands, employees, for example, try to make the work less demanding by avoiding red tape (Demerouti, 2014). This conceptualization of job crafting provides an opportunity to describe Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) “task crafting” and “relational crafting” on the basis of job demands and job resources, and thus allows for a wide list of targets of crafting (Petrou *et al.*, 2012). Not surprisingly, Petrou *et al.* (2012) found that 40–50 percent of the crafting variance is within persons, whereas Lyons (2008) reported a mean of 1.49 crafting episodes performed by employees during the past year using the conceptualization of Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001).

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) also identify “cognitive crafting,” which is described as the changes employees make to the cognitive boundaries of their work. There are three types of cognitive crafting (Berg *et al.*, 2013): *expanding perceptions* (i.e. employees broadening perceptions of impact or purpose of their jobs), *focusing perceptions* (i.e. employees narrowing perceptions of impact or purpose of their jobs by focusing attention on aspects that are valuable to them), and *linking perceptions* (i.e. employees using existing components in their

job to draw mental connections between these aspects of the job and other aspects they value). Cognitive crafting, however, is not reframed within the JD-R model, because this is focused more on one's inner self and cannot occur daily (Demerouti, 2014).

Recent research suggests that job crafting is a promising tool to stimulate work engagement (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017), as increased correspondence leads to work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2012). Work engagement refers to feelings of energy and enthusiasm about one's work and consists of three dimensions: *vigor*, *dedication*, and *absorption* (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Vigorous people are energized and resilient during setbacks. Dedicated people are enthusiastic and continue until the job is done. Absorption allows individuals to be highly focused and lose track of time while working (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Although job crafting has been linked to work engagement, the different types of job crafting behavior seem to have different effects. Where seeking resources and seeking challenges are positively related to work engagement, the results for reducing demands are mixed (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). Some research shows no effect of reducing demands on work engagement (e.g. Tims *et al.*, 2012), whereas others (e.g. Petrou *et al.*, 2012) find negative results.

Job crafting has conceptually been linked to work engagement through a motivational process (Petrou *et al.*, 2012), as motivation and satisfaction are linked to job characteristics (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). By changing these job characteristics (i.e. job demands and job resources) in a more favorable way through job crafting (thus enhancing correspondence), the motivational process can be initiated (Petrou *et al.*, 2012), resulting in higher levels of work engagement. However, it remains unclear how this motivational process works.

To advance our understanding of this process, we integrate the positive psychology perspective on job crafting, focusing on fulfilling basic psychological needs to enhance the experience of meaningful work (Berg *et al.*, 2013) with the JD-R perspective, aiming on enhancing correspondence to increasing work engagement (Tims and Bakker, 2010). We propose meaningful work to be the missing link in the motivational process leading from job crafting to work engagement, as this provides a reason employees are willing to craft their job. Though "meaningfulness of work" is closely related to "meaning in work," they are conceptually different, as meaning in work refers to what the work signifies or represents, whereas meaningfulness of work refers to how much purpose or significance work has for a person (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2013).

Meaningful work refers to the belief that one's work is significant and serves an important purpose (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). It resembles a sense of purposefulness, autonomy, and social belongingness in the work context (Baumeister and Vohs, 2005) and satisfies basic psychological and social needs (Clausen and Borg, 2011). Meaningful work is a fluctuating phenomenon, as it can be derived from the tasks at hand (Allan *et al.*, 2018; Niessen *et al.*, 2012). When people experience their work as meaningful, they are able to express themselves through their work activities as they experience congruence between their personal values and their work activities (Chalofsky, 2003). Though in the literature different ways of (conceptualizing and) assessing meaningful work have been proposed (e.g. WAMI by Steger *et al.*, 2012), in our study, meaningful work was assessed with a measure that aligns with the above-mentioned conceptualization by Wrzesniewski *et al.* (2013).

Recently, the first scholars operationalizing job crafting from a job (re)design perspective examined whether job crafting was related to meaningful work and found support for this assumption (Tims *et al.*, 2016). However, they did not explore whether meaningful work mediated the relationship between job crafting and work engagement, explaining *why* employees craft their job. Peral and Geldenhuys (2016) did show that that psychological meaningfulness mediated the relationship between job crafting and work engagement, but their study was cross-sectional. Specifically, they found that increasing development-based resources and decreasing hindering demands had, respectively, a positive and a negative

indirect effect. Building on this evidence, integrating it with the positive psychology tradition of job crafting (e.g. Berg *et al.*, 2013), we expect meaningful work to mediate the relationship between job crafting and work engagement.

On days that employees seek resources and challenges, they experience additional resources and opportunities for growth, satisfying basic psychological needs (e.g. asking for feedback and advice may satisfy the need for relatedness, starting a new project may satisfy the need for competence, and taking on additional responsibilities may satisfy the need for autonomy) and enhancing the experience of meaningful work (Clausen and Borg, 2011; Tims *et al.*, 2016), in turn making them more willing to invest themselves fully in their job and become engaged that day (Demerouti *et al.*, 2015). On days that people reduce demands, they may not completely fulfill their basic psychological needs (e.g. decreasing the amount of tasks carried out may not completely fulfill the need for competence, decreasing the level of interaction with colleagues may not completely fulfill the need for relatedness, and decreasing the amount of decisions one has to make may not completely fulfill the need for autonomy), leading to a lowered experience of meaningful work. As people experience little daily meaningful work, they are probably less willing to fully invest themselves in their work activities, making them less engaged that day.

- H1. Day-level meaningful work mediates the positive relationship between day-level a) seeking resources and b) seeking challenges on day-level work engagement. Moreover, day-level meaningful work mediates the negative relationship between c) day-level reducing demands and day-level work engagement.

From job crafting to service-oriented task performance

Van Wingerden *et al.* (2016) examined the effects of a job demands resources intervention and found, amongst others, that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between job crafting and performance. Though their study was conducted among service providers too (i.e. healthcare professionals), they used a general scale to assess in-role performance rather than a more focused measure. Moreover, their study design did not enable to test for a full mediation as work engagement and performance were assessed at the same point in time.

In the current study, we focus on an unemployment agency. Their core business is bringing together supplies and demands on the labor market. The quality of this mediation is of vital importance, and thus employees need to provide optimal services to both unemployed customers and potential employers (Inspectie S.Z.W., 2013). Therefore, we introduce the concept of service-oriented task performance (S-OTP), which refers to the provision of high-quality services to customers and clients in order to meet organizational and customer goals. In the unemployment sector, S-OTP refers to provision of high-quality services to unemployed customers and potential employers in order to successfully mediate unemployed candidates to new jobs. S-OTP finds its roots in the construct of task performance (Motowidlo and Van Scotter, 1994), which, in the service industry, refers to the provision of services. Most measures of task performance use a broad definition, while providing services is a quite specific type of task performance. Therefore, for the present study, we operationalized task performance in terms of S-OTP. The construct emphasizes the importance of the relationship between employees and customers (Oliva and Serman, 2001) and shows to what extent employees make a connection with their customers through active listening, emotional support, and expectation management. When actively listening, employees unconditionally accept the experiences of their customers through unbiased and non-judgmental reflections. Active listening builds empathy and trust, and helps customers reflect upon their feelings and experiences (Weger *et al.*, 2010). Emotional support

helps customers to cope more effectively with their stressful situation (i.e. being unemployed (Wanberg, 2012). Providing emotional support includes expressions of care, concern, affection, and interest, and it helps customers to feel better (Burlinson, 2003). Lastly, expectation management is important (Hsieh and Yuan, 2010), as it helps the service provider and the customer focus on their expectations, needs, and desires, and the extent to which these can be met. This way, an honest, sincere, and sustainable relationship between the service provider and the customer can be built (Parasuruma *et al.*, 1991).

In the current study, the operationalization of S-OTP is tailored to the unemployment sector. However, S-OTP is relevant for all organizations providing services to customers as active listening, emotional support, and expectation management are universally important aspects of providing services (De Ruyter and Wetzels, 2000; Rafaeli *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, to meet organizational goals in the service sector, it is crucial that employees are motivated to show a high level of S-OTP.

Previous research on job crafting in the job (re-)design approach has shown that job crafting is related to performance via work engagement (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). Research on job crafting from the positive psychology literature tradition argues that job crafting is related to performance via meaningful work (Berg *et al.*, 2013). Integrating these two job crafting literature traditions, we propose that job crafting is related to S-OTP via meaningful work and work engagement. Hypothesis 1 explained how job crafting, via meaningful work, relates to work engagement. However, the link from meaningful work to S-OTP via work engagement is still missing.

We propose that work engagement mediates the positive relationship between meaningful work and S-OTP. To explain ourselves, we turn to identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000). The core of identity theory holds that people identify themselves with certain (work) roles they have. They incorporate meaning and expectations associated with this role into the self, and these form a set of standards that guide behavior (Burke, 1991; Stets and Burke, 2000). When people experience meaningful work, they identify themselves with their work (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). If one's identity aligns with the work activities, people become engaged (Kahn, 1990), as people can bring their personal selves into their work role. Guided by the sets of standards that guide behavior, people carry out their tasks with a sense of passion and energy, fully investing themselves into the tasks at hand, enabling optimal performance (Kahn, 1990).

Engaged employees also outperform their non-engaged colleagues, as they experience more positive emotions like joy, enthusiasm, and happiness (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010) when work is meaningful. This is in line with the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) which holds that positive emotions (such as joy, happiness, and enthusiasm) broaden peoples' thought-action repertoires through widening the thoughts and actions that come to mind. This broadened perspective helps people to perform optimally. Thus, the positive emotions experienced when work is meaningful, help people to become engaged and perform optimally. Therefore, we expect:

H2. Day-level work engagement mediates the positive relationship between day-level meaningful work and day-level S-OTP.

Lastly, we propose a sequential path model (Figure 1) in which job crafting is sequentially related to S-OTP via meaningful work and work engagement. We propose a positive pathway for seeking resources and seeking challenges as they enable employees to adjust the work in ways that align with their personal needs. This relates to higher levels of meaningful work (Berg *et al.*, 2013; Tims *et al.*, 2016) and work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2012), which, in turn, is related to performance (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010; Kahn, 1990). We propose a negative pathway for reducing demands, as it is related to the experience of less meaningful work, lowered levels of work engagement, and suboptimal performance.

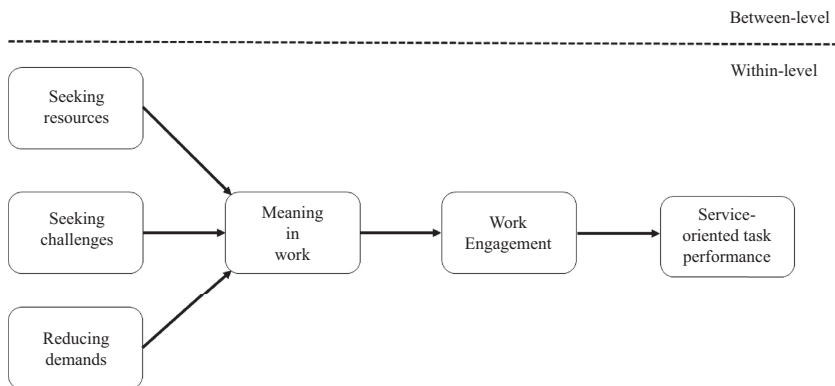


Figure 1.
Research model for
level 1: Day-level
(within-person)

H3A. Day-level seeking resources and seeking challenges are positively related to day-level S-OTP via day-level meaningful work and work engagement.

H3B. Day-level reducing demands is negatively related to day-level S-OTP via day-level meaningful work and work engagement.

Method

Study design and participants

We conducted a diary study in which participants filled out questionnaires for four consecutive workdays. Questionnaires were the same each day and aimed to capture within-person fluctuations in work engagement, S-OTP, meaningful work, and job crafting behavior. The diary study was conducted for four days instead of five, since most of the participants worked part-time. Data were collected in three departments of a Dutch unemployment agency. The three departments were chosen based on their geographical location. The study was a regional initiative, and all departments within the region were invited to participate. Participants were recruited via small messages in the weekly newsletter and presentations in work meetings. Questionnaires were administered online. Email addresses from all employees were provided by the organization, and people received a daily invitation email with the link to the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, people could drop out any moment if they wanted to, and people did not receive any kind of compensation for participating in the study.

A total of 214 employees were invited, of which 156 participants responded (72.9 percent). In all, 108 participants completed the whole study (69.2 percent), the rest (30.8 percent) filled in at least one day. In total, there were 531 observations ($M = 3.40$ observations per participant). The dropout pattern was completely random: ($MAR/MCAR; \chi^2 = 178.7, df = 275, p = n.s.$). Most participants (79.0 percent) worked as a mediator or tried to recruit potential employers. The rest (21.0 percent) had managerial or administrative tasks. However, all employees provided services to customers. In all, 67.7 percent of the respondents were female, 32.3 percent were male. On average, participants were 45.4 years ($SD = 10.2$) old, worked 16.5 years ($SD = 11.2$) for the organization, and worked 4.8 years ($SD = 5.7$) in their current position. They worked an average of 32.3 h a week ($SD = 7.2$). In all, 72.6 percent of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree.

Measures

Day-level job crafting. Day-level job crafting was assessed using the ten-item job crafting scale developed by [Petrou et al. \(2012\)](#). This scale consists of three subscales: *seeking challenges* (3

items, e.g. "Today I asked for more responsibilities," α from 0.88 to 0.93), *seeking resources* (4 items, e.g. "Today I asked my supervisor for advice," α from 0.52 to 0.64), and *reducing demands* (3 items, e.g. "Today I made sure that my work was mentally less intense," α from 0.83 to 0.93). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = does not apply to me, to 5 = totally applies to me.

Day-level meaningful work. A shortened version (4 items) of the meaningful work scale (Schnell, 2009) was used to measure day-level meaningful work. In line with other researchers (e.g. Breevaart *et al.*, 2012), items were adjusted to refer to "today." An example item was "Today my work seemed meaningful to me" (α from 0.87 to 0.92). The multilevel CFA showed a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 7.16$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.13$ CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.02/0.01. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree, to 5 = totally agree.

Day-level work engagement. Day-level work engagement was measured using the adapted version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Breevaart *et al.*, 2012). This scale consists of nine items representing three subdimensions: *vigor* (3 items, e.g. "Today I felt bursting with energy," α from 0.80 to 0.87), *dedication* (3 items, e.g. "Today I felt inspired by my job," α from 0.85 to 0.87), and *absorption* (3 items, e.g. "Today I was immersed by my work," α from 0.71 to 0.74). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = does not apply to me, to 5 = totally applies to me. Cronbach's alphas of the overall construct ranged from 0.89 to 0.91.

Day-level service-oriented task performance. Day-level S-OTP was measured using an adapted and shortened version of the subscales "information" and "social support" from the Job Performance Scale (Greenslade and Jimmieson, 2007). This scale was originally developed to measure healthcare providers' task performance, but is also relevant for the current sample since both deal with the high emotional demands of customers in a stressful situation (Guy and Lee, 2013). Items were adapted to a service-providing environment. Items were "Today,..." "I listened to the concerns my customers had," "I took the time to fulfill the emotional needs of my customers," "I did something meaningful for my customers," "I gave a clear explanation about the rules of the unemployment agency," and "I supported my customers in their search for a new job." All items were discussed with an expert panel, consisting of an employee working with customers on a daily basis, a manager, and the CEO. All were experienced in working with customers. The items, as represented in our scale, covered in their opinion the most important aspects of working with customers in an unemployment agency. When conducting a multilevel CFA, the item "Today I did something meaningful for my customers" did not load well on the factor. Therefore, this item was excluded from further analysis. The remaining four items (α from 0.83 to 0.93) had a good fit ($\chi^2 = 5.27$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.07$ CFI = 1.00, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.01/0.02). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = much below average, to 5 = much above average.

Analysis

Since each participant answered the same questions for four consecutive workdays, observations were not independent from each other (Hox, 2002). Therefore, multilevel analysis is necessary. The Mplus software program (Muthén and Muthén, 2014) was used to conduct multilevel structural equation modeling (SEM). Maximum likelihood parameter estimation was applied, and we controlled for age, gender, tenure, and day in the analyses. None had a significant effect. Job crafting, meaningful work, work engagement, and day were person-mean centered, while age, gender, and tenure were grand-mean centered. Bootstrapping (Hayes, 2013) was used to test for mediation effects.

In multilevel modeling, a two-level model should explain the data better than a single-level model (Hox, 2002). The intra-class correlation (ρ) illustrates how much of the variance can be

attributed to the different levels of analysis. For S-OTP, the ρ indicated that 48.9 percent of the variance could be attributed to within-person fluctuations. For the other variables in the model, the ρ indicated that 39.3 percent to 62.5 percent of the variance could be explained by within-person fluctuations. These results signify the importance of using a multilevel structure when testing the specific hypotheses. The full data set ($N = 156, n = 531$) was used, as Newman (2009) advises to use all available data since Mplus is adequately capable of dealing with missing values.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table I shows the means, standard deviations, and multilevel correlations between the study variables. As meaningful work and work engagement might intuitively overlap, multilevel CFAs were conducted to examine whether both constructs loaded on one factor, or on two separate ones. Modeling work engagement and meaningful work on separate factors showed a good fit: $\chi^2 = 352.68, df = 118, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05/0.06$. Modeling meaningful work and work engagement on the same factor showed an inadequate fit: $\chi^2 = 1008.61, df = 130, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.76, TLI = 0.72, RMSEA = 0.11, SRMR = 0.17/0.23$. Thus, although intuitively there seems to be some overlap between meaningful work and work engagement, the data show that they are two separate constructs.

To test the validity of the six-factor measurement model (i.e. three types of job crafting, meaningful work, three dimensions of work engagement combined into one latent factor, and S-OTP), we compared this model with a four-factor model (i.e. the different types of job crafting loaded on the same factor) and a one-factor model. Model fit was assessed using the chi-square statistic (χ^2), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). Conventional cut-off scores were used (CFI > 0.90, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, and SRMR < 0.08).

Results of the multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the six-factor model had the best fit: $\chi^2 = 886.47, df = 306, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06/0.00$, which was better than the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1203.98, \Delta df = 9, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.79, TLI = 0.77, RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.10/0.00$) and the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4467.11, \Delta df = 18, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.41, TLI = 0.37, RMSEA = 0.17, SRMR = 0.15/0.00$).

Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were examined using a sequential path model from day-level job crafting to day-level S-OTP via day-level meaningful work and day-level work engagement. Paths were modeled from job crafting to meaningful work and work engagement, from meaningful work to work engagement and S-OTP, and from work engagement to S-OTP. The overall model

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Day-level seeking challenges	1.98	0.77	–						
2. Day-level reducing demands	1.78	0.66	0.28***	–					
3. Day-level seeking resources	2.58	0.68	0.24***	0.06	–				
4. Day-level meaningful work	3.91	0.64	0.13**	–0.12**	0.13**	–			
5. Day-level work engagement	3.51	0.64	0.07***	–0.06**	0.07***	0.50**	–		
6. Day-level networking behavior	2.23	0.94	0.10*	–0.007	0.04	0.17***	0.29***	–	
7. Day-level service-oriented task performance	3.58	0.73	0.002	–0.08	0.001	0.34***	0.32***	0.15***	–

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table I.
Means, person-centered standard deviations, and multilevel correlations among the study variables ($N = 156; n = 531$)

(Figure 2) had a good fit: $\chi^2 = 4.39$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.62$, $TLI = 1.02$, $CFI = 1.00$, $RMSEA = 0.00$, and $SRMR = 0.02/0.00$.

H1A-C predicted that meaningful work mediated the relationships between job crafting and work engagement. Seeking resources ($\gamma = 0.08$, $p = 0.05$) had a direct effect on work engagement, whereas the direct effects for seeking challenges ($\gamma = 0.04$, $p = n.s.$) and reducing demands ($\gamma = -0.02$, $p = n.s.$) were nonsignificant and only indirect. A significant indirect effect of meaningful work for all three types of job crafting was found ($\gamma_{\text{seeking resources}} = 0.02$, $p < 0.02$; 95 percent confidence interval (CI): 0.01–0.08; $\gamma_{\text{seeking challenges}} = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$; CI: 0.02–0.09; $\gamma_{\text{reducing demands}} = -0.07$, $p < 0.001$; CI: -0.10 to -0.03). Thus, although seeking resources had a direct effect on work engagement too, meaningful work acted as a mediator in all three relationships between job crafting and work engagement, thereby supporting H1A-C.

H2 predicted that work engagement mediated the positive relationship between meaningful work and S-OTP. This hypothesis was supported, as the indirect effect was significant ($\gamma = 0.094$, $p < 0.01$, CI: 0.03–0.16). However, the direct effect of meaningful work on S-OTP ($\gamma = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$) was significant too. Work engagement thus acted as a mediator in this relationship, although there was a direct effect of meaningful work as well.

H3A-B, examining the full sequential path model from job crafting to S-OTP, was supported as well. The indirect effects of job crafting to S-OTP were all significant and in the expected direction: from seeking resources to S-OTP ($\gamma = 0.010$, $p = 0.04$, CI: 0.001–0.019), from seeking challenges to S-OTP ($\gamma = 0.013$, $p < 0.01$, CI: 0.004–0.022), and from reducing demands to S-OTP ($\gamma = -0.015$, $p < 0.01$, CI: -0.025 to -0.005). Moreover, the indirect effect from meaningful work to S-OTP was significant ($\gamma = 0.094$, $p < 0.01$, CI: 0.03–0.16), thereby supporting H3A-B. The independent factors (i.e. the three types of job crafting behavior) explained 6 percent of the variance in meaningful work, 26 percent of the variance in work engagement, and 10 percent of the variance in S-OTP. These effects are therefore small to almost medium at best (Cohen, 1988).

Alternative models

As the design of this study is insufficient to establish causality, alternative models cannot be ruled out. Therefore, the fit of several alternative models is examined as well. If these models show a worse fit to the data, this adds to the likelihood that our model is adequate. Three examples are discussed, although more models (all showing an inadequate fit) were tested.

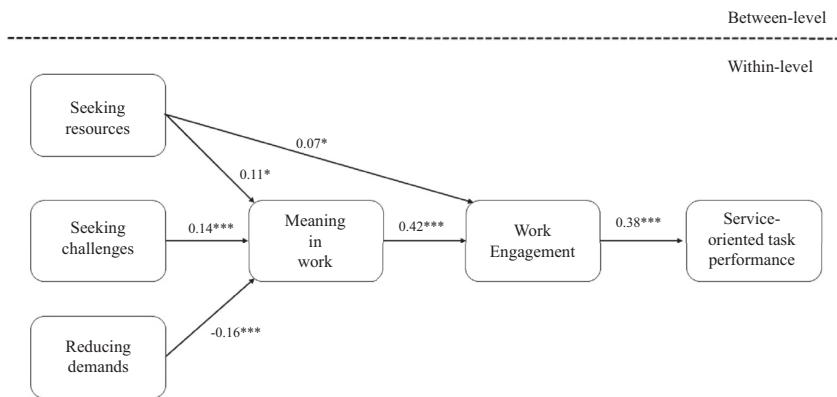


Figure 2. Final model for level 1: Day-level (within-person) based on the results of multilevel SEM

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

First, the model was tested backward, exploring whether service-oriented task performance would lead to work engagement and meaningful work, resulting in more job crafting behavior among employees. This model showed an inadequate fit: $\chi^2 = 35.72$, $df = 13$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.86, RMSEA = 0.06 and SRMR = 0.04/0.001. Second, a model from work engagement to meaningful work to job crafting to service-oriented task performance was examined. This model showed a poor fit: $\chi^2 = 144.91$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.57, TLI = 0.29, RMSEA = 0.13, and SRMR = 0.11/0.000. Lastly, a model from meaningful work to job crafting to work engagement to service-oriented task performance was assessed. This model showed a poor fit as well: $\chi^2 = 240.94$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.26, TLI = -0.22, RMSEA = 0.18, and SRMR = 0.13/0.000. Thus, although the causality of our model cannot be established, exploring alternative models (all showing an inadequate fit) adds to the likelihood that the proposed order in the current model is more accurate than alternative ones.

Discussion

The main focus of this article was to advance our understanding of the process leading from job crafting to S-OTP, by examining the role of meaningful work and work engagement in this process. We built our model by integrating two literature traditions on job crafting that have dominated the literature in the last decade: the job (re)design approach (Tims and Bakker, 2010) and the positive psychology approach (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). We proposed meaningful work (the positive psychology approach) to act as a mediator in the well-established relationship between job crafting and work engagement and performance (the job (re)design approach) (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). As expected, seeking resources and seeking challenges were positively related to S-OTP via meaningful work and work engagement, whereas reducing demands was negatively related.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this is the first study to justify the importance of daily experiences of meaningful work in explaining how employees alter their job daily in order to improve their functioning. That is, employees craft their job to make it more meaningful and engaging, thereby enhancing performance. As little was known about the reason why job crafting and work engagement were related (Petrou *et al.*, 2012), this study enhances the understanding of this process by emphasizing the role of daily meaningful work. Although some scholars took a first step by showing that job crafting was related to heightened meaningful work, they did not examine whether meaningful work explains why job crafting is related to work engagement (e.g. Tims *et al.*, 2016), or when they did so, they only used cross-sectional data (Peral and Geldenhuys, 2016). Results showed that seeking resources and seeking challenges were effective strategies to enhance meaningful work, and, in turn, work engagement. Through seeking resources and challenges, employees fulfill their basic psychological needs (Berg *et al.*, 2013), leading to heightened meaningful work and work engagement. However, reducing demands was negatively related to meaningful work and work engagement, making it an ineffective strategy to enhance meaningful work. A possible explanation for this negative effect may be that when people reduce their demands, they are unable to fully fulfill their basic psychological needs that day (Berg *et al.*, 2013), leading to lowered meaningful work and work engagement. Together, these results provide a deeper understanding of the reasons *why* employees craft their job, as seeking resources and challenges may be used to enhance meaningful work and work engagement, whereas reducing demands may be used for other reasons, for example, to prevent health impairment (Demerouti, 2014; Petrou *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, results showed that meaningful work is positively related to S-OTP via work engagement. Thus, on days that people experience their work as meaningful, they can become engaged, enabling them to provide high-quality services. These results are in line with earlier studies showing a positive relationship between meaningful work and performance (e.g. Wrzesniewski, 2003), and between work engagement and task

performance (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). However, we add to the literature by showing that meaningful work is related to S-OTP *via* work engagement.

Furthermore, full support for the overall model was found, suggesting that job crafting is related to (service) performance via meaningful work and work engagement. This is in line with the theory of work adjustment (TWA) (Rounds *et al.*, 1987) and shows that people actively adjust their job to enhance correspondence between their needs and the work environment to enable optimal performance (Blau, 1987). As the provision of services is becoming increasingly important for contemporary organizations (Bowden, 2009), our results stress the relevance of job crafting as a means to enhance meaningful work, work engagement, and ultimately (service) performance for these organizations. Note, however, that not all job crafting strategies were effective to improve service performance. Whereas expanding the scope of the job (i.e. seeking resources and challenges) had a positive, indirect effect on service performance, reducing demands had a negative indirect effect, implying that it inhibits employees from providing high-quality service. Demerouti *et al.* (2015) also found similar unfavorable effects using supervisor ratings of creativity and adaptivity. Their explanation is that employees who take the initiative to reduce their job demands seem to select the most important tasks to invest their energy (Demerouti, 2014), and they let down less essential tasks of work performance.

Lastly, this study contributes to the literature with the measure of S-OTP. Since the concept of employee performance is shifting from the quality or number of products made to the quality of the services provided (Bowden, 2009; Oliva and Serman, 2001), more tailored measures, focusing on the dynamics between service-employee and customer, are necessary. Our measure emphasizes the importance of active listening, emotional support, and expectation management to provide optimal services. Although the measure was tested in an unemployment agency, active listening, emotional support, and expectation management represent aspects of service quality that are relevant across different service settings (Burlison, 2003; Hsieh and Yuan, 2010; Weger *et al.*, 2010), making the measure a useful tool for research in other organizations providing services as well.

Practical implications

First, as S-OTP can be stimulated through job crafting, organizations should facilitate the conditions that maximize employee job crafting. Employees need sufficient resources (e.g. feedback, autonomy) to craft their job in ways that enhance motivation and performance. Organizations may either stimulate spontaneous job crafting behaviors (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) or provide a job crafting intervention (Gordon *et al.*, 2018). Encouraging spontaneous job crafting behavior that is in line with the organizational aims is a cost-efficient way to improve individual job design (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Organizations can also use a job crafting intervention, as employees learn to craft their jobs in ways that align with the organizational aims, without potentially harming them (Oldham and Hackman, 2010).

Our results not only hold practical implications for organizations, they also are also valuable for employees. Employees can proactively make adjustments to their job in order to enhance well-being and performance by focusing on seeking resources and challenges. However, reducing demands is something employees should aim to avoid, as it is negatively related to well-being and performance. Managers should be aware of these relationships too, aiming to create a work environment in which sufficient resources and challenges are available (e.g. by providing support and feedback, and giving employees opportunities to develop themselves).

Study limitations and directions for future research

While interpreting the results of this study, some limitations should be kept in mind. First, this study is based on self-ratings, which are sensitive to common method bias (Podsakoff

et al., 2003). Self-reports were used based on the recommendations of Conway and Lance (2010), who advocate the usage of self-reports when examining private experiences that are difficult to rate by others (e.g. meaningful work and work engagement). This holds especially for participants in the current study, as they worked quite independently. Although we relied on self-reports, the results are in line with other studies that used more objective measures of performance (e.g. Bakker *et al.*, 2012). Future research, however, should try to incorporate other ratings as well.

Second, as the study results are correlational, causal inferences cannot be made. The proposed model is supported by the data, but alternative models cannot completely be ruled out, as SEM cannot rule out different causal relationships (Stone-Romero and Rosopa, 2010). However, by examining several alternative models (which all showed a worse fit than the model presented in this model), we at least add to the chance that the proposed model is more accurate than alternative ones. Moreover, the design was carefully chosen, as we aimed to integrate the literature tradition from positive psychology (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) with the job re-design perspective (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Nevertheless, future research may try to establish causality, for example, by using a quasi-experimental design in which one group is trained in job crafting behavior and the other group serves as the control group.

Third, the measure of S-OTP was specifically developed for this study. Although it was based upon previous work by Greenslade and Jimmieson (2007) and the items were extensively discussed with an expert panel, we lack specific information about the validity of the measure. Although results are in line with earlier research on job crafting behavior and performance (Bakker *et al.*, 2012; Rudolph *et al.*, 2017), we encourage future researchers to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the measure.

Fourth, we used the scale of Petrou *et al.* (2012) to measure daily job crafting. Although the scale is reliable and validated, it differentiates three broad categories of job crafting behavior. It would have been interesting to also look at more specified types of job crafting behavior (e.g. increasing social resources (Tims *et al.*, 2012) or decreasing social demands (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012)) and explore what their effects would be on S-OTP. Moreover, in our study, like in earlier research (e.g. Petrou *et al.*, 2017), the seeking resources dimension had low reliability, which may inflate its relationship with other constructs. Future research is encouraged to expand the number of items.

Last, future research could also focus on other pathways leading from job crafting to service performance. For example, in their study among IT management professionals, Singh and Singh (2018) found that the relationship between job crafting and peer-rated job performance was mediated by a lower level of role stress and burnout and a higher level of psychological availability. These mediators could be very relevant for service-oriented task performance too.

Conclusions

To enhance productivity and efficiency, organizations nowadays ask employees to do more work in less time and with less people. Job crafting enables employees to achieve this goal by shaping a work environment that lets them to make meaningful contributions to the organization. This, in turn, stimulates the experience of work engagement and enhances levels of S-OTP. Job crafting may be beneficial for the organization as well as for employees themselves, as job crafting protects well-being and enhances performance. These are both valuable aspects for sustainable employability, now and in the future.

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