

Exploring the Influence of a Job Crafting Intervention among a Pilot Group of Academic Employees

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Abstract

Constant changes in the higher education arena led to academics needing to function in a volatile and complex environment. This has created unique demands which academics need to overcome. Academics, therefore, need to change their job design proactively. The effectiveness of a job crafting intervention among HEI academics in improving job resources and decreasing job demands was explored. Owing to constant changes in the higher education environment, it has become imperative that HEIs have a better understanding of how to assist academics when dealing with challenging or hindering demands in the workplace. Job crafting can be a proactive mechanism to alter demands and enhance job resources. This study attempts to contribute knowledge in assessing the effectiveness of a job crafting intervention with a pilot group of academic staff. A mixed-method, pre-experimental research approach was implemented (n = 9). Participants completed pre- and post-measures while participating in two, two-hour online job crafting training sessions. No significant quantitative differences between pre- and post-measurements emerged from the data, although participant reflections hint towards qualitative differences in work-related thinking and actions. The pilot study implied favourable acceptance of a brief job crafting intervention to consider changes to academic work by reducing demands and increasing resources. Organisations, specifically HEIs should know the opportunities that job crafting can provide. HEIs may, therefore, use interventions to foster employee job crafting behaviours.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

A constant discussion in the Higher Education (HE) sector focuses on the impact of global challenges experienced by academics and the effect of this on their overall performance. Researchers have put

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forward that academic employees need to be adaptable due to the constant changing landscape (Wood, Geard & Silverman, 2016; Woods, Mustafa, Anderson & Sayer, 2017). Aspects such as restricted access to research funding and adjustments in the number of teaching hours all play a role in the constant demands experienced by academics. Additionally, either for innovation-related reasons or due to other changes, the teaching tasks are subject to major alterations that comprise delivering courses online and adjusting to the circumstances of remote education (Urbanaviciute, Roll, Tomas & De Witte, 2021).

Based on this there is a need for academics to manage their job demands and exploit their resources with the use of job crafting as this will allow academics to alter their job demands and resources as they see fit (Ebuka, Ngozi, Obianuju & Peace, 2022). Finding no empirical evidence of the impact of a job crafting intervention for academic employees in South Africa, the authors wanted to test the assumption and delivered a job crafting intervention to a pilot group of academics at a HEI within the Western Cape, South Africa.

Job crafting is an employee-initiated work design process allowing employees to actively alter their work characteristics (Wang & Demerouti, 2016). This is conducted to balance the individual's job demands and resources (Demerouti, 2014). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2018), job crafting is observed as employee modifications regarding job demands and resources.

The goal of job crafting is to make employees aware of the tasks they perform and on which tasks they spend most of their time (van Wingerden, Derks, Bakker & Dorenbosch, 2013; Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019). By doing this, employees have more insight in their jobs and can decide whether this aligns with their desires. This results in more knowledge and better understanding of one's job, where the employees have the initiative to change their jobs and create their ideal working circumstances. This eventually leads to meaningfulness to the job (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Morales-Solis, Chen, May & Schwoerer, 2022), it increases job satisfaction (Cheng & Yi, 2018), engagement (Mäkikangas, 2018) and performance (Kooij, Tims & Akkermans, 2016; Mohd Rasdi, Tauhed, Zaremohzzabieh & Ahrari, 2022).

Job crating is different from for example job rotation, because job crafting does not involve long-term changes. When engaging in job rotation, an employee changes their job continuously, which mostly impacts the short-term effects. Job crafting, on the other hand, changes the job itself and therefore also impacts the long-term effects. In addition, the implementation of job crafting encourages employees to take the initiative to change their working environment. Therefore, it can be assumed that the process of job crafting is cost efficient as well, because the employer can now focus on other tasks. It is important for employers to understand what job crafting is, because then they are able to successfully implement job crafting (Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti, Soyer, Vakola & Xanthopoulou, 2021).

Even though the research on job crafting is still new, many researchers have shown that job crafting is effective (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Demerouti, Peeters & van den Heuvel, 2019) and

should be implemented by more organisations. Furthermore, a unique advantage of job crafting is that it is applicable to every employee (Schrijver, 2018).

The paper will provide some background in terms of the study, with theoretical knowledge of job crafting and its relationship with the JD-R framework. The research objectives along with the research methodology used will also be discussed. The findings are presented to determine the effectiveness of a job crafting intervention among Higher Education Institution (HEI) academics in improving job resources and decreasing job demands. Participants completed pre- and post-measures while participating in two, two-hour online job crafting training sessions. And finally, recommendations are made with a conclusion.

1.2. Problem Statement

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been experiencing an array of changes that do not necessarily affect its corporate counterparts (Dhanpat, Geldenhuys & De Braine, 2019). The unparalleled outbreak of the Coronavirus had made work even more demanding for academics, based on the immediate move to technology-based learning. Academics needed to show more flexibility and had to alter their traditional work methods (Marinoni, van't Land & Jensen, 2020) and were faced with increased demands and a restricted amount of resources (De Rijk, 2020). Unequal distribution of work could lead to disengagement and health disorders (Barkhuizen, Rothmann & van de Vijver, 2014), as well as burnout (Maseri, Tajuddin & Monil, 2022). Thus, it has become vital for academics to understand how to alter their work by embarking on job crafting.

A paucity of research on job crafting in HEIs exists specifically for academic employees (Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti, Bakker & Gevers, 2015). Previous research on job crafting interventions focused on the private (Dickson, 2020; Kilic, Tatar & Erdil, 2020; Thomas, Thomas & Du Plessis, 2020) and healthcare sectors (Baghdadi et al., 2021; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Carrying out the job-crafting intervention at a South African HEI, allowed testing of the assumption that job crafting can assist academic employees to better manage job demands and optimise their resources.

1.3. Research objectives

The primary aim of this study was to pilot and determine whether a job crafting intervention among HEI academics can help manage job demands and increase job resources. The study intended to answer the question: 'How does a job crafting intervention influence the perceived intensity of job demands and resources of academic employees in an HEI?'

2. Literature Review

Organisations today are becoming more and more concerned about how their workers react to changes in the workplace, this is due to the changing nature of the local and global work environment, leading to a surge in workload, emotional demands and various time pressures (Geldenhuys, Bakker &

Demerouti, 2021). To try and cope with the rapidly changing work environment workers are engaging with job crafting (Shin & Hur, 2021).

Job crafting and the JD-R model

The Job demands and resources model has become a widely used model across various occupations (Han, Yin, Wang & Zhang, 2020). As noted previously, the JD-R model foretells that the level of an individual's work engagement is influenced by the balance between job demands that are motivational and those that are health-impairing, and by the balance between sufficient and inadequate job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In other words, when there is incompatibility amongst accessible resources and job demands (e.g., when the employee feels too little control over her work environment, and workload is too high while rewards are too low, and community values are incongruent with personal ones), there is a threat of burnout (Maseri et al., 2022) and disengagement (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Beta, Zulkifli, Abd Rahim, Ahmad & Mohamad, 2019).

Therefore, exploring job crafting within the JD-R model can increase the understanding of the motivating and inhibiting factors that drive employees at work and aid in developing job redesign interventions to target these factors. In detail, the JD-R model considers individuals as active agents in the ever-changing work context (Demerouti, 2014), who can be motivated to optimize their job demands (i.e., aspects of work that require effort) and resources (i.e., aspects of the job that facilitate effective functioning) to achieve their work goals (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007).

A follow-up school of thought approaches job crafting from job demands-resources theory JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This perspective proposes that individuals craft their jobs to balance their job demands and resources (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Job demands refer to aspects of the job, which require sustained cognitive, emotional or physical effort, such as workload, dealing with time pressure, or challenging customer interactions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources refer to aspects of the job, or work characteristics, which help individuals achieve work goals, reduce job demands, or stimulate growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), such as job autonomy, feedback and social support.

Tims, Bakker and Derks (2012) empirically validated four types of crafting:

- i. Increasing structural job resources, when individuals increase job resources such as autonomy, variety, and development opportunities;
- ii. Increasing social job resources, which refers to increasing relational characteristics such as social support and feedback from others;
- iii. Increasing challenging job demands, which is when individuals take on extra tasks, roles or responsibilities which are stimulating as opposed to a hindering;
- iv. Decreasing hindering job demands, when individuals reduce the number of tasks which require sustained effort and are not motivational.

A meta-analysis concluded in 2017 put forward that the most widely adopted theoretical model of job crafting is the one proposed by Tims and Bakker (2010), which positioned job crafting in the JD-R model (Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017). Of particular relevance to the current research is that recent updates to the JD-R model incorporating, directly and particularly, the concept of job crafting (Figure 1).

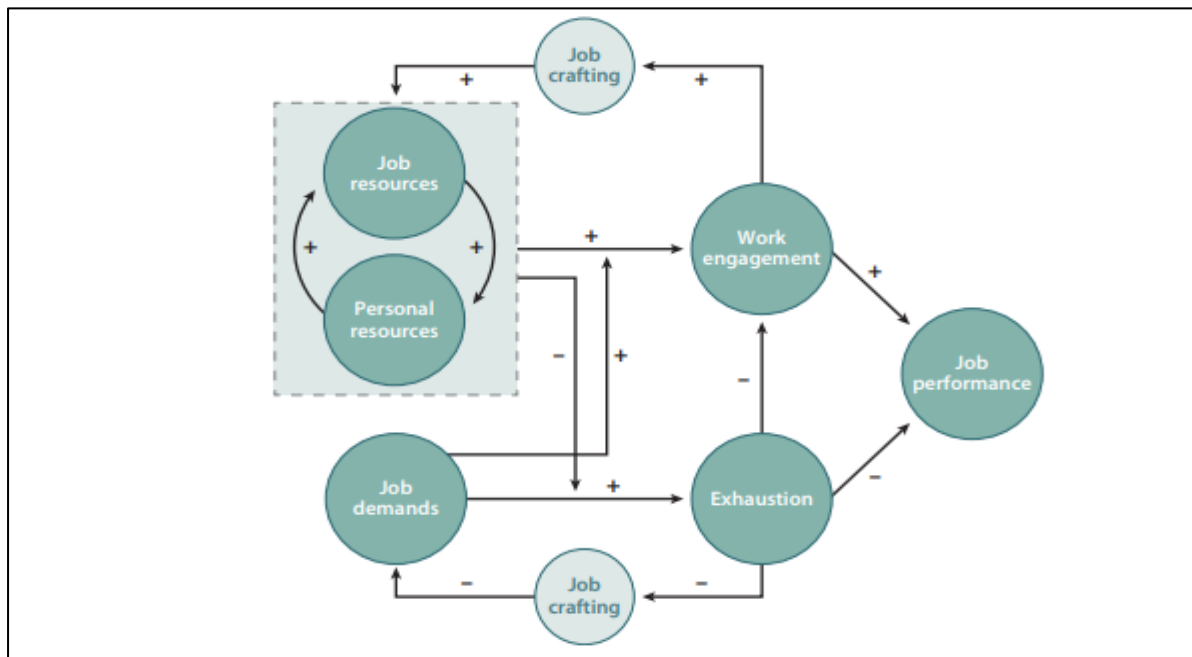


Figure 1: An updated version of the Job Demands-Resources model, incorporating a job crafting component.

(Source: Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, p. 10).

This concept employs the JDR (JD-R) framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) as a preliminary theme. Within the JD-R framework, job characteristics can be categorised as either job demands or resources. Job demands and resources are specific to roles and occupations.

According to Naidoo-Chetty and Du Plessis (2021), academic job demands include:

- Workload;
- Work-home life balance;
- Online teaching and learning; and
- Publication pressure.

Job resources, including:

- Autonomy;
- Personal support; and
- Meaningful work.

Whilst there is a wealth of research with regard to job crafting and job demands and resources and employees in the workplace, there is a paucity of research that focuses on how academics could use job crafting to assist in improving job resources and decreasing job demands.

3. Research Methodology

A mixed method research design was used in the present study. The quantitative component consisted of a pre-experimental pre and post intervention questionnaire. Qualitative data were gathered in a focus group, with the specific purpose to provide qualitative insight to the quantitative results.

3.1 Participants and setting

The study population included academic employees from a HEI in the Western Cape, South Africa. The rationale for sampling this population is that academic employees often need to approach aspects, such as workload imbalances and severe resource restrictions. Academics are also expected to complete complex tasks within a highly demanding environment (Wray and Kinman, 2022) while dealing with COVID-19 social distancing implications of teaching and research activities (Al-Taweel et al., 2020). The concerned university provided an ideal setting for the sample choice.

Twelve participants formed the initial intervention group sample; however, owing to various work commitments, three participants could not participate in the intervention. The participants included seven females and two males (Table 1). Most participants were appointed at a lecturer level within the selected HEI. All participants completed the pre- and post-test online questionnaire.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants (n = 9)

Participant (P)	Job title	Gender	Faculty
P1	Lecturer	Female	Economic and Management Sciences
P2	Lecturer	Female	Economic and Management Sciences
P3	Lecturer	Female	Economic and Management Sciences
P4	Researcher/Lecturer	Female	Community and Health Sciences
P5	Snr Lecturer	Female	Dentistry
P6	Lecturer	Male	Community and Health Sciences
P7	Lecturer	Female	Economic and Management Sciences
P8	Lecturer	Female	Economic and Management Sciences
P9	Lecturer	Male	Economic and Management Sciences

3.2 Data collection and procedure

This study formed part of a larger project aimed at understanding the job demands and resources of academic employees. An invitation email to participate in the intervention was distributed among potential academic staff within this specific HEI that participated in interviews in a previous stage of the project. These academics had indicated an interest in job crafting. If the academics were interested

they let the researcher know and were also encouraged to forward the invitation to other academic staff members that may be interested. The participants were therefore recruited through purposive and snowball sampling.

The pre-intervention phase involved perusing and endorsing an informed consent document. Participants needed to complete this form and send it back to the researcher before completing the biographical questionnaire. Furthermore, participants were requested as part of this process to complete a compilation of the five measurement instruments. These five instruments are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Table 2: Survey Instruments, own compilation

Instrument	Developer	Factor measured	Sources
Flourishing-at-work scale short form (FAWS-SF)	Rautenbach 2015	Autonomy and meaningful work	Rautenbach and Rothmann, 2017
The Hindrance demand scale	Dhanpat (2019)	Workload and Online teaching and learning questionnaire	Dhanpat et al., (2019)
The Survey of Work-home Interaction (*Nijmegen, also known as the SWING)	Geurts et al. (2005)	Demands of work-home responsibilities (negative work-home interaction was employed)	Mostert & Oldfield, 2009; Pieterse & Mostert, 2005; Van Tonder, 2005
Publication Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ)	Haven et al., 2019	publication stress subscale and subscale publication attitude	Haven et al., 2019
Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS)	Eisenberger et al. (1986)	Perceived organisational support	Eisenberger et al., 1986

The flourishing-at-work scale short form FAWS-SF (Rautenbach 2015) measured autonomy and meaningful work; however, for this study, only these two dimensions from the FAWS-SF were employed. The FAWS-SF was valid and reliable (>0.70) in the South African context (Rautenbach and Rothmann, 2017).

The workload scale of Dhanpat et al. (2019) measured load-overburden. The scale measures a seven-point response scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, and 1 = never to 7 = always. The workload variable presented acceptable Cronbach alpha of 0.76 in earlier research (Dhanpat et al., 2019).

The Dhanpat et al.'s (2019) online teaching and learning questionnaire features the altering teaching nature, measuring technology-mediated learning approaches. Five items on a seven-point response scale measured online teaching and learning, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Dhanpat et al. (2019) failed to establish significant factor loadings for online learning and teaching as

part of their HE hindrance demand scale. This may have been because online learning and teaching were lacking in the institution; however, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning and teaching became a new norm; therefore, imperative to include them in the study.

The Survey of Work-home Interaction (*Nijmegen, also known as the SWING) developed by Geurts et al. (2005) measured the demands of work-home responsibilities. For this study, the first 15 items investigating negative work-home interaction were employed. The negative load reactions developed at work hamper home functioning (Questions 1-9); negative work-home interference and negative load reactions developed at home hamper work functioning (Questions 10-15). These aspects were most relevant to the study. The responses are provided on a four-point scale (range: 0 = never to 3 = always). For NWHI, Cronbach's alpha varied from 0.85 to 0.90 across three studies (Mostert & Oldfield, 2009; Pieterse & Mostert, 2005; Van Tonder, 2005). The reliability coefficient varied from 0.78 to 0.79 for PWHI. These studies provided beneficial, although preliminary, evidence of the reliability of the SWING English version for South Africa.

The PPQ (Haven et al., 2019) comprises three subscales scored on a five-point Likert scale ('5 = totally agree', '1 = totally disagree'). For this study, only the first two subscales were used. The third subscale, 'publication resources', did not focus on the demand aspects academics experienced but rather on the needed resources, which was intended to be measured. The publication stress subscale (six items) presented a Cronbach's $\alpha = .804$, whereas the subscale publication attitude (six items) presented a Cronbach's $\alpha = .777$ (Haven et al., 2019).

The SPOS developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) measured POS as a job resource. The POS was assessed on a seven-point agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The internal consistency of the three-item measure was reported as $\alpha = 0.75$ (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The post-intervention phase required the participants to complete the same measures excluding the biographical questionnaire.

The qualitative phase of the data collection was conducted in a focus group interview format. During these online group discussions, the first author directed a reflection on academics' challenges to achieving their job crafting goals. Four questions were asked, based on the Kirkpatrick evaluation model, where the aspects to consider are: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results (Cahapay, 2021). The questions were adapted slightly to meet the needs of the intervention, i.e. (i) What was your experience of the intervention? (ii) In your own words, what did you learn from the intervention? (iii) Has the intervention changed your behaviour? and (iv) How have the changes you made influenced your department?

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.3 Ethics

The University Research Ethics Committee involved with the data collection approved the study (HS19/6/11). The deputy registrar (Ref-UWCRP270819MN) permitted participant access.

3.4 Overview of the job crafting intervention

The job crafting intervention was modelled on the intervention described by Van den Heuvel, Demerouti and Peeters (2015). The reason for choosing this job crafting intervention is attributable to its unity with the JD-R framework; therefore, striving to compel participant employees to be mindful of the model's three primary strategies for altering job demands and resources (increasing resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands). The intervention started with a 2-hour online training session between November and December 2021. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and following social distance rules, this was the most suitable method, as opposed to a face-to-face training session. The intervention entailed a two, two-hour training workshop, including a personal crafting plan and a reflection exercise over four weeks (Figure 2). Groups of three academic employees attended the training workshop, this was done based on the availability of participants. However, each sub-group received exactly the same training.

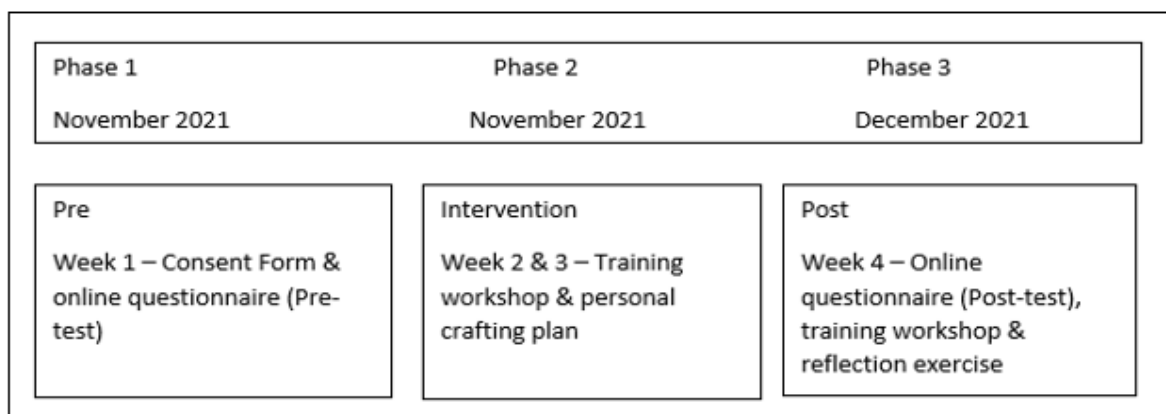


Figure 2. Intervention phases, own compilation

The first two-hour session was conducted in November 2021, a week after participants completed the pre-test. A presentation format was executed. To start the session, participants were provided with an overview of job crafting and its relation to the JD-R framework. Once the first author established a proficient level of engagement with the participants, there was discussion around tips on how to craft your own job. After the session, each participant was presented with crafting their work over the next few weeks.

The next step in this process was to send out the online post intervention questionnaire. This was conducted a week before the final group session. In December 2021, for the final two-hour session, the first author provided a brief re-cap about job crafting and the uses thereof. Once this was complete, each participant was provided with the opportunity to talk through their experiences and indicate whether

they were or could not use job crafting in their everyday working lives. To end the session, a reflection exercise was conducted in a focus group format. This allowed information to be collected for the qualitative data collection process for the study.

Data analysis

Data from the pre- and post-measurement were extracted from the Google survey and exported to SPSS Version 28 (Corp IBM, 2019) for analysis. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare the differences between pre- and post-test scores on the measurement instruments, besides calculating descriptive statistics. The confidence interval level for statistical significance was 95% ($p \leq 0.05$). The information obtained from the focus group discussions was transcribed and categorised based on the specific job demands and resources measured, as well as a category for overall evaluation of the intervention.

4. Results and Findings

The quantitative pre- and post-test study examined job crafting intervention effects. Table 3 presents the study variable descriptive statistics and correlations. Qualitative data from the focus group were analysed to support specific findings from the quantitative data. Themes were identified based on participant answers.

Most Cronbach alpha values were higher than 0.70 except for the workload (post- $\alpha = .631$), online teaching and learning (pre- $\alpha = .606$), and publication pressure (pre- $\alpha = .645$) of job demands. For publication pressure, two items (item 5 and 12) were removed to improve the reliability. According to Ursachi, Horodnic and Zait (2015), an accepted rule is that an alpha of 0.6 directs an acceptable level of reliability. The Cronbach alpha, therefore, indicates acceptable reliability for both the pre-test and post-test measurements.

A slight change in the pre- and post-test mean scores existed for most variables. The job demand, publication pressure, indicated the most meaningful change. This change could indicate a reduction in this job demand as the mean score was lower post intervention ($M = 3.06$ vs $M = 2.88$). This improvement of 0.18 was, however, statistically insignificant, $t(8) = 1.037, p = .330$.

Workload mean scores signified a perceived change as the score lowered ($M = 3.87$) to ($M = 3.73$), albeit not statistically significant. This could indicate that participants observed a reduction in workload. This can be affirmed by the qualitative feedback obtained from the reflection exercise, where most participants agreed to hold power to change certain aspects of their jobs, commenting as follows:

It has helped to put things into perspective. I have learnt to ask myself, what is the deadline? When should it be done? Instead of leaving what I was doing like my writing. It has taught me to set boundaries and stick to my initial plan [P4, female, Researcher, Faculty of Community and Health Sciences].

Your mindset is a resource and is a powerful tool - that in itself can help you overcome what you feel and do things [P1, female, Lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences].

Regarding job resources, the numerically largest perceived change was in organisational support. The mean score ($M = 4.35$) in the pre-test increased by 0.52 to ($M = 4.87$). This could be observed as an increase in support experienced after the intervention. This improvement -0.51 , was statistically insignificant, $t(8) = 1.053, p = .341$. This is also prominent in meaningful work. The mean score was ($M = 4.61$), increasing to ($M = 4.77$), observed as an increase in participants experienced after the intervention about meaningful work. This improvement, 0.16 , 95% CI, was statistically insignificant, $t(8) = -.371, p = .720$.

Participants perceived behaviour change even though the quantitative difference between pre-test and post-test scores was not statistically significant. Participants agreed that job crafting led to contemplating their tasks.

I actively try to think about my days/week and try to plan according to that [P9, male, Lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences].

I have been more intentional about how I craft my work [P7, female, Lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences].

P1 (female lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences) also mentioned that job crafting provided a 'can-do attitude' and made her feel more positive, considering tiring and complex tasks. Similarly, P8 (female lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences) agreed, indicating she was motivated in her performance even though certain tasks were challenging.

Table 3: Paired sample T-test results for the pre- and post-measurement of the intervention

Variable	M(Pre)	M(Post)	ΔM	ΔSD	t	p
Job demands						
Workload	3.87	3.73	.14286	1.91130	.224	.828
Work-home interaction	.44	.42	.01481	.54546	.081	.937
Online teaching and learning (OTL)	4.00	3.42	.5777	1.07445	1.613	.145
Publication pressure	3.06	2.88	.17778	.51424	1.037	.330
Job resources						
Meaningful work	4.61	4.77	.16667	1.34629	-.371	.720
POS	4.35	4.87	1.79307	.73202	1.053	.341

Note: OTL = Online teaching and learning; POS = perceived organisational support; M = mean; ΔM = change in the mean from pre to post; ΔSD = change in the SD from pre- to post-test; t = t-test statistic; p = level of significance. Analysis reported is for $n = 9$, $df = 8$. For the paired sample t-test, variables were paired to determine the differences between the pre- and post-scores.

With regard to overall feedback on the usefulness of job crafting, most participants confirmed following methods similar to job crafting; this session reaffirmed their accomplishments.

Was happy to see that there is a model to validate what I was doing. That there is a model to give this process credibility [P5, female, Snr Lecturer, Faculty of Dentistry].

What I have been exposed to has reaffirmed my learning - have been doing job crafting unconsciously [P2, female, Lecturer, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences].

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for human resources and line managers

As employees themselves initiate job crafting, managers play an essential role in encouraging ways and resources for employees to job craft (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Managers can embed job crafting into their culture and continuously support employees to invest their energy in enhancing the meaning of their work through job crafting (Tims, Derks & Bakker, 2016; Zhang & Li, 2020). HEI line managers should be involved in job crafting, encouraging academic employees to craft their jobs, enabling them to develop the suitability level acquired (Janse van Rensburg, Rothmann & Diedericks, 2018; Wrzesniewski, 2012). Relevant stakeholders within HEIs should encourage academic employees to

associate with individuals with similar features, values, and opinions about work and life. Such relations would support enhancing social resources, such as job resources in the organisation (Wang, Chen & Lu, 2020).

The heads of organisations wishing to implement the ‘job crafting intervention’ as a strategy to increase the efficiency of their employees should focus on initiative support from personnel, autonomy, a positive atmosphere creation, along with the creation of conditions for value management (Yakimova, Tsareva & Vlasenko, 2017).

According to Meijerink, Bos-Nehles and De Leede (2020), job crafting mediates the relationship between perceived HRM and work engagement and also suggests that managers can adopt certain roles to ensure that high-commitment HRM practices produce desirable outcomes. The first aspect to consider, beyond initiating favourable employee perceptions of HRM, is that management can encourage employees to attain and preserve job resources.

This could be conducted, for example, by encouraging career progression (Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994) along with developing an organisational climate encouraging skill development and feedback-seeking (McNamara et al., 2012). It was implied in the study by Meijerink et al. (2020) that HR and line managers, through offering feedback, coaching activities, or on-the-job training, have to signal the importance to employees of proactively increasing job resources and pursuing challenging job demands, as this increases their work engagement. (Meijerink et al., 2020). This confirms that job-crafting should be given formal support and acknowledgement by HEIs. This would include giving academics autonomy to craft their jobs. Using this approach, academics are likely to find more meaning in their work (Arachie et al., 2020).

5.2 Recommendations for employees

Not all employees may have the desire to engage in job crafting; therefore, feedback may help them become more aware of their environment and what changes they can initiate to improve aspects of their jobs (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2015). This is supported by Arachie et al. (2020) who indicates that even though Nigerian academics have the autonomy to choose how they can structure their work, they are still experiencing high turnover rates as many of the academics are struggling to manage their job demands and utilize their job resources. However, Musi (2020), who based his study on job crafting as an overarching approach, indicates that employees need to have the freedom to craft according to their needs, values and goals to improve their functioning (Vanbelle, Van den Broeck & De Witte, 2017).

Without this freedom, it is hard for employees to feel confident about crafting their work; therefore, a need exists for an employee to feel like they are in control and that they can influence their environment (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). An employee’s level of self-efficacy is vital as it contributes to the level

of meaningfulness and value of the role. Miraglia et al. (2017) established that, when employees believe in their capabilities, they are more inclined to pursue opportunities that can challenge them, improve their abilities, and develop them personally and professionally. This was confirmed in a study by Ebuka et al. (2022) that concludes that job crafting could be an authentic method for academics to improve their working conditions.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

The study results confirm a lack of statistical variances from the pre-test to the post-test scores, despite the job crafting intervention. As indicated, this could be based on the small sample size employed. Consensus is derived from the reflection exercise. Participants reflected that the job crafting intervention influenced their thinking and how work was conducted. Quantitatively, statistically significant differences between pre- and post-test scores could not be established.

The positive influence of job crafting reflects a voluntary exercise employees could undertake. Job crafting is also a cost-effective application, mostly requiring support from organisations. It could be valuable for future academic research and human resource practitioners and academics to understand and identify resources associated with proactive work behaviour and the demands hindering job crafting; it can offer insight into which crafting behaviours could trigger positive outcomes. Job crafting should, therefore, be considered by HEIs and not merely organisations.

This study was pre-experimental; therefore, it held a small sample size. Other researchers should, therefore, involve a larger sample group with a control group. Management should also be involved in the intervention itself, this is to show employees that there is understanding and commitment from top management. Another practical implication of the study outcomes is that organisations should recognize the opportunities that job crafting interventions provide. Furthermore, HEIs policy makers should try to understand the job characteristics of academics and thus document the level of enrichment and potential advantages that job crafting could bring to HEIs as a whole.

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