

The influence of job crafting behavior on sustainable career outcomes: an empirical study

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Abstract:

As the work environment is unpredictable and constantly changing, individuals are challenged to protect and further enhance their career sustainability (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020; Kooij, 2015). It is assumed that individuals can do this through the use of job crafting to improve their career fit (Kooij, 2015) and that job crafting might be especially beneficial for older workers (Kooij, Tims, & Kanfer, 2015; Nagy, Johnston, & Hirschi, 2019). However, there is little empirical evidence available on the effects of job crafting on sustainable careers (operationalized as work ability, vitality, and occupational expertise) (Kooij et al., 2015), and the majority of studies focusing on the ability, motivation and opportunity to work are based on cross-sectional data. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the literature on sustainable careers by addressing these gaps in three ways. The first contribution is to examine the effect of job crafting on sustainable career outcomes. The second contribution comprises to investigate differences in the effect of job crafting on sustainable career outcomes between younger, middle-aged and older employees. The third contribution this paper aims to make is by studying changes over time with panel data.

Our study is part of a larger research project, referred to as “the healthy healthcare project”. Longitudinal data is collected through the means of questionnaires at two measurement moments, which are 6 months apart. Employees of 25 healthcare institutions in the Netherlands were approached to take part in this study of whom 1,478 filled in both questionnaires. The mean age was 46 years and 84% of the respondents were female.

Results show that increasing structural resources is positively related to occupational expertise, whereas decreasing hindering demands is negatively related to work ability and occupational expertise. Multi-group analyses reveal that the effect of job crafting differs per age

group. In particular, for younger employees, increasing social resources is positively related to vitality. For middle-aged employees, increasing structural resources is positively related to occupational expertise, and increasing social resources is positively related to vitality for this category of workers. Decreasing hindering demands is negatively related to vitality for this group of employees. For older employees, increasing structural resources is positively related to occupational expertise while decreasing hindering demands is negatively related to occupational expertise and vitality. Finally, moderation analyses show that increasing structural resources can compensate for low levels of resilience for both younger and middle-aged employees.

This study gives employees and HR practitioners more insight into which job crafting behaviors can help to promote employees' career sustainability. However, the panel data does not allow us to draw conclusions on causality. We recommend researchers to conduct intervention studies to be able to prove the causality of the relationship in future scholarly work, and to gain more knowledge on the strategies that are effective in increasing favorable job crafting behaviors.

Word count: 470

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