

May 14, 2020 | Blog

# Thinking Outside the Job: Boosting Engagement through Job Crafting

Engage Your People

During a 1961 visit to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), President John F. Kennedy met with the scientists, engineers, and astronauts the United States would entrust to put the first person on the moon.

Yet, it was perhaps an employee at the lowest rung of the organizational ladder whose interaction with the President was most captivating. On a tour of NASA facilities, President Kennedy introduced himself to a young janitor who was, at the time, mopping the lobby floor. The president asked the janitor what he did at NASA, to which the janitor is said to have replied, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.”

This story captures the essential idea of “job crafting,” or the notion that the meaning and gravity one finds in their work can be altered, built upon, and reimagined.

## Job Crafting in Action

Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton (2001), coined the term “job crafting,” which they define as “employees utilizing opportunities to customize their jobs by actively changing their tasks and interactions with others at work.” In this pursuit, job crafters set out to alter one, or more, areas of their work; tasks, thoughts, and relationships.

**Task crafting** occurs when employees decide to expand the scope of work tasks that they enjoy or reconfigure the process through which some tasks are completed (i.e., initiating a recycling program at work because of an interest in sustainability).

**Thought crafting** deals with employees actively changing how they perceive their job to understand it in a more meaningful and fulfilling way. (i.e., a receptionist at a medical facility, whose job is to check patients into the waiting room, may see the



**Jacob Westerberg**  
Organizational  
Psychologist

opportunity to calm people in a tense or anxious situation by offering customer service comparable to that found at a five-star hotel).

**Relationship crafting** happens when employees reshape and reevaluate the relationships they have with others at work. This provides the opportunity to make new connections with coworkers (i.e., an IT professional using their knowledge of computers to teach coworkers keyboard shortcuts).

### **How it works**

As a continuous and iterative process, job crafting is often initiated when an employee does not feel fulfilled by their role, or that a part of their work is more interesting than the rest. From this stage, employees identify areas of their work that they may be able to craft to fulfill an identified need or further pursue an interest. The outcome of these efforts is reflected back in work that is more aligned with an employee's preferences, creating an experience that is more engaging, enjoyable, and meaningful. While certain jobs lend themselves more to job crafting, even the most rigid jobs allow for some degree of crafting.

### **How Managers can Support Job Crafting**

Managers play a vital role in the efficacy of employee job crafting. First, managers can support job crafting by designing jobs in such a way that employees have room to tailor work to fit their interests, motives, and strengths. Second, managers can simply create the space, and even, the expectation that employees will craft their job in such a way to make it more meaningful to them. Third, it is imperative that managers set positive expectations, as job crafting is not without risk. Job crafting can produce both positive and negative outcomes. With this in mind, managers are well-advised to recognize that effective job crafting is in service of achieving desirable organizational outcomes.

That said, whether you are charged with going to the moon, increasing next quarter's sales, or ensuring the cleanliness of the lobby – job crafting is a viable strategy to boost employee engagement.

### **References**

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