

Psychological Empowerment of University Academicians through Job Crafting in a Challenging Environment

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Abstract

Academicians in Higher Education Institutes are required to exhibit proactive behavior in order to demonstrate continuous learning, quality research and creative thinking. Job crafting is one such proactive behavior where academicians craft the tasks, relationships and cognitive understanding of their jobs meaningfully. This positive involvement in the job results in their psychological empowerment. Although psychological empowerment also requires various facilitating resources, the demanding nature of a job exerts physical and psychological pressures that sometimes lead to employee burn out and stress. The purpose of this research is to identify the effect of job crafting on psychological empowerment of university academicians with the moderating effect of demanding nature of a job. The survey of 209 academicians from different universities in Karachi was carried out for this purpose. Process Macro and regression analysis measured the impact of the opportunity of job crafting on the psychological empowerment among faculty members while determining the effects of demanding job factors such as time pressure, work load, variety of tasks, emotional interaction with people and poor environmental conditions. The results show that while the impact of job crafting is significantly positive on the psychological empowerment of academicians, the moderating relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment is interestingly found out to be negligible. While this finding is unexpectedly different from the conclusion of previous researches, yet it is highly interesting to account for the reasons that yield these results. This increases the academic and practical significance of the study because it explores those avenues of job crafting, psychological empowerment and demanding nature of job that were not explored in the context of HEIs of Pakistan before.

Keywords: Job Crafting, Psychological Empowerment, Job Demands, Employee Engagement.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement is no more a fad, it is here to stay. Engaged employees deliver their best, making their organizations better performers. Lack of employee engagement results from poor structuring of jobs and unjustifiable work load. This hinders the career growth and psychological empowerment of employees, resulting in employee dissatisfaction. Contemporary researches support the fact that jobs can be designed more meaningfully through a new approach known as Job Crafting (Nielsen, Antino, Vergel, & Muñoz, 2017).

Job crafting is an innovative process introduced by Wrzesniewski & Dutton in 2001. It enables the employees to alter the tasks, relationships and the cognitive understanding of their job. Since managers can't be available all the time to guide, it is obvious that the subordinate employees have to make some decisions on their own. Therefore, job crafting enables the employees to make decisions in their present role, a phenomenon called, psychological empowerment of employees. It requires liberty to decide about the ways to perform the job, developing a network through it and giving it a valuable meaning (Kim & Lee, 2016).

The employers unfortunately fail to understand the importance of psychologically empowering employees through job crafting. In the context of Pakistani organizations, there exist a number of challenges that hinder employers to empower their workforce. Unfortunately, the jobs are not designed appropriately initially. The employee, being the actor of the specific role, is secluded from the designing and redesigning of the job. This leads towards ineffective utilization of a job for attainment of organizational objectives. Apart from it, the job demands are also not found parallel to the job resources. The jobs are usually too demanding in terms of performance, results, time dedication, work load, improper working environment and emotional interactions (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). In comparison, the resources to perform the jobs like supportive environment, work-life balance, compensation package, job security, autonomy, job functions

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and career opportunities are insufficient to motivate employees. This creates a strain on employees and they lose their interests in their jobs.

The researchers have been keen in identifying the interesting effects of job crafting on well-being of employees. Previous researches have been focused on identifying the antecedents of job crafting in diversified context (Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015; Akram & Hassaan, 2013; Demerouti, 2014; Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012). However, there seems to be paucity of research while considering job crafting as a predictor of certain desirable outcomes including psychological empowerment, employee motivation and wellbeing.

This research focuses on the university academicians in Karachi to fill the gap in literature. The dynamics of the academic industry are different from any other sector. The faculty members require to perform demanding roles in terms of teaching and developing research content simultaneously. This creates a pressure on them to produce quality work (Hoodbhoy, 2017). The creative element of research requires that the faculty enjoys autonomy and freedom to make necessary changes in their jobs, to collaborate and coordinate with students, other faculty members and researchers, for research output. Job crafting can be a very effective tool for psychological empowerment of university academicians even in the presence of challenging job demands (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013; Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013)

Miller (2005) concluded that psychological empowerment is the outcome of job crafting. This research contributes to the literature by taking forward the conclusion of Miller and Tims, Bakker and Derk, by studying the moderating variable, demanding nature of the job that influences the relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment.

The objectives of this study are:

- To measure the influence of job crafting on psychological empowerment of university academicians
- To measure the influence of job demands on the relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment.

Herzberg was the first to introduce the concept of job enrichment through the intrinsic motivating factor of work itself. This concept was further supported by the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) highlighting the 5 basic characteristics of jobs including skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. This model elaborates the fact that jobs must be designed meaningfully by incorporating such intrinsic factors which ultimately cause motivation, growth and satisfaction to employees (Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001; Lunenburg, 2011).

The previous traditional approaches of job enrichment, including the JCM, have a top-down management perspective (Tims & Bakker, 2010; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013; Kirkendall, 2013). The employees are considered as passive recipients of their roles where they are not empowered to participate in planning their work roles according to their needs. The new approach towards JCM regards employees as active crafters of their jobs because they are well versed about duties, responsibilities, procedures, techniques and relationships and are involved in their work. Therefore, involvement of employees while deciding about work related aspects can be a productive and motivational strategy. This empowerment is possible through a new approach of Job Crafting (Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013; Tims, Bakker, & Daantje, 2015).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Crafting

The new approach to job crafting is an individual bottom up approach for redesigning the tasks, relationships and meaning of the job to induce more active participation, motivation, empowerment and commitment of employees. It is a proactive phenomenon where employees actually redesign the job activities by matching their needs, skills and abilities with the demands and resources of the jobs. This is a promising concept gaining attention of researchers and organizational psychologists to have a strategic focus towards employee empowerment. Over a period of time, changes in technology, work systems and procedures demand to bring in changes in elements, behaviors, attitudes and contribution into the jobs. But

these kinds of changes are only possible when employees are willing to own the job and consequent outcomes of the changes. Although former researches had also highlighted multiple ways of making such changes in jobs through task revision, personal initiatives, role innovation and voice (Tims & Bakker, 2010), but all these approaches require managerial direction as well as encouragement for execution. Job crafting, on the other hand, is an individual innovative approach for redesigning job which is sometimes even unnoticed by the managers. It is a personal initiative taken by the employee to alter the demands and resources of the job (Rudolph, Lavigne, Katz, & Zacher, 2017; Kooij, Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, & Denissen, 2017; Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2015; Berdicchia, 2015; Niessen, Weseler, & Kostova, 2016).

According to Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), job crafting is possible either through Task Crafting, i.e. altering the amount, methods, content and scope of tasks; Relationship Crafting, i.e. altering the relationships with the people they interact at work; or Cognitive Crafting i.e. altering the cognitive understanding of the job by considering it to be more meaningful. By making all or any of such changes, the employees actually start getting involved into their jobs and make changes in certain aspects of their jobs and the work environment which brings harmony and well-being for them.

2.2 Job Crafting and the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R)

The classical Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001) model is limited to the job crafting in terms of task, relations and understanding. This concept has been extended further by other researchers. While crafting their jobs, employees amend not only the dimensions but the demands and resources involved. Researchers have explained this phenomenon using the JD-R Model (Job Demands and Resources model). This model elaborates the fact that every job is shaped by a combination of demands and resources. The demands and resources are two distinctive sets of job characteristics that picture the job extensively (Nielsen, Antino, Vergel, & Muñoz, 2017; Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015; Kim & Lee, 2016).

Job demands comprise of all such factors that require physical and mental efforts to perform the jobs and are ultimately associated with any physical or psychological cost. Demands trigger the effort-driven process, thus causing strain on employees, if exceed their mental or physical capabilities (Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2015; Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015; Bakker, Demerouti, Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003). But there is not the negative side of the picture only. Researchers have classified demands of jobs into challenging and hindering aspects. The challenging aspects like workload, variety of tasks and time pressure bear positive impact on employees resulting into their growth, well-being and work engagement. The hindering aspects like work pressure, poor working environment and emotional interactions with people on jobs demand excessive exertion resulting into burnout and distress. Job Resources, on the other hand, are the means to complete objectives of job. Thus, initiating the motivation-driven process, the job resources reduce the demands and associated costs as well as enhance the growth of employees. The resources can either be in the form of salary, worker relationships, career opportunities, autonomy, or other such factors allied to job accomplishment. The resources play pivotal role in motivating employees and exhibit better performance on jobs. Various studies have been conducted to test the consequent effects of job demands and job resources on psychological and physiological well-being of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2015).

In consideration to the JD-R model, job crafting can now be better conceptualized. The extent to which an employee would be inclined to craft a job is much dependent on the demands and resources of the job. This research focuses significantly on the role job demands play in employees' job crafting discretion and the subsequent effect of psychological empowerment. The demands are studied from the perspective of challenges and hindrances they pose to employees on job.

2.3 Psychological Empowerment

Different researchers have elaborated the concept of empowerment from the perspectives of power, control and motivation. Spritzer (1995), defines empowerment as a psychological phenomenon associated with one's perception of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. His research consolidates psychological empowerment into multifaceted dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact that

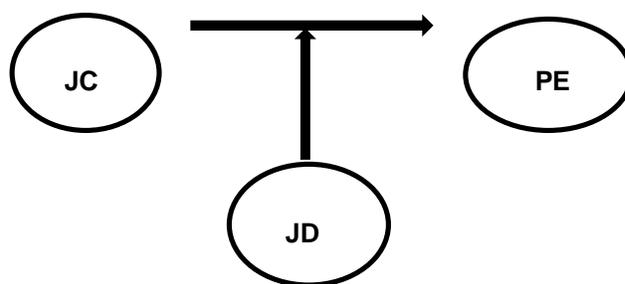
altogether define an individual orientation towards the work role. This orientation depicts the employee's perception of control on work and related aspects (Sprietzer, 1995; Ambad & Bahron, 2012; Stander & Rothmann, 2010).

The dimension of meaning refers to the value of the work perceived by the individual with respect to his/her own beliefs. It represents a cognitive fit between job requirements and individual values. Competence refers to self-efficacy that demonstrates competence of an individual related to the work role. It is in fact one's expectancy to exhibit mastery on job by exhibiting related skills and behaviors. Another dimension of self-determination reflects an individual's discretion of initiating change related actions. Thus it represents autonomy in making work-related decisions. The last determinant of impact refers to influence exerted by an individual over work and related systems (Ambad & Bahron, 2012; Sprietzer, 1995; Stander & Rothmann, 2010).

The four dimensions demonstrate the concept of psychological empowerment as an individual intrinsic paradigm which is portrayed by the work context, not the personality. It may differ pertaining to the work environment, holding different levels among employees. These dimensions converge psychological empowerment into a significant whole. The absence of any may not let the employees feel empowered. Diversified literature on empowerment reveals its consequent effects on employees and organizations in terms of enhanced managerial effectiveness, innovation, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Sprietzer, 1995; Ambad & Bahron, 2012; Menon, 2001; Cekmecelioglu & Ozbag, 2014; Miller, 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework



4. Research Questions & Hypothesis

Based on the literature review and the theoretical model shown above, this research aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Does job crafting impact the psychological empowerment of employees?

RQ2: Does the type of job demand influences the relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment?

The following alternate hypotheses are generated to test the relationship between the constructs:

H1: Job crafting has a positive impact on psychological empowerment of employees.

H2: Job demands moderate the relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment in an enhancing manner.

5. Research Methodology

This quantitative study used deductive approach with mono method of analysis using survey technique. The Higher Education Institutes of Karachi was the target population. The faculty members in different universities in the city were randomly selected to participate in the study by responding to the questionnaire given. Out of 250 questionnaires, 209 were returned. Therefore, the final sample for the study comprised of 209 participants (N = 209) with 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error.

6. Instrumentation

The 15 items of Slemp and Vella's Job crafting questionnaire (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013) were used to measure Job crafting. The psychological empowerment was measured through a 12 item based questionnaire developed by Spreitzer (Spreitzer, 1995). Job demand was measured through JDRS developed by Rothman and Jackson in 2005 (Rothmann, Mostert, & Strydom, 2006).

7. Pilot Test

The pilot test was conducted on 50 participants. Pilot testing found the questionnaire suitable for data collection. The SPSS version 21 was used for statistical analysis of correlation and regression. The analysis for moderating effect of JD was analyzed through the Process Macro in SPSS. The Cronbach's alpha was assessed for reliability of the tools used. The reliability measures for each tool was found to be satisfactory and are reported in Table 1.

Table No. 1: Reliability of Tools

Dimension	No. of Items	α
Job Crafting	15	.75
Psychological Empowerment	12	.77
Job Demands	9	.80

8. Data Analysis

The JC (Job Crafting) data collected from the sample of 209 participants is slightly negatively skewed and slightly peaked depicting a normally distributed data. The population mean for JC is 3.76 on a scale of 1-5 with a SD=0.6. The PE (Psychological Empowerment) data is also slightly negatively skewed with a slight peak being normally distributed. The population mean for PE is found to be 3.84 with a SD=0.67. Similarly, the JD data represents a normal distribution through a slight negative skewness and a peak with mean 3.64 and SD= 0.74. The slightly negative skewness indicates mean that the people's responses for JD on the Likert scale are not symmetrical, more people are responding in values less than the mean value.

Table No 2: Correlation between JC, PE and JD

		JC	PE	JD
JC	Pearson Correlation	1	.796**	-.021
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.764
	N	209	209	209
PE	Pearson Correlation	.796**	1	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.772
	N	209	209	209
JD	Pearson Correlation	-.021	-.020	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.772	
	N	209	209	209

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis shows a strong, significant positive correlation of 0.796 between Job Crafting and Psychological Empowerment. Unexpectedly, the relationship between Job Crafting and Job Demand and similarly between Job Demand and Psychological Empowerment is found to be insignificant.

H1: Job crafting has a positive impact on psychological empowerment of employees.

The results of regression analysis show that 63.3% of variance in Psychological Empowerment is significantly explained by the Job Crafting. ANOVA shows a significant F-value of 177.8. Thus the alternate hypothesis that Job crafting has a positive impact on Psychological Empowerment of employees, is accepted.

H2: Job demands moderate the relationship between job crafting and psychological empowerment positively.

In order to test this hypothesis a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted through Process Macro. Job Crafting and Job Demand accounted for 63.3% significant variance in Psychological

Empowerment of employees ($R^2 = .633$, $F = 85.3$, $p < 0.001$) To avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term, the variables were centered and an interaction term between JC and JD was created (Aiken & West, 1991). Next, the interaction term between Job Crafting and Job Demand was added to the regression model, which did not account for any significant proportion of variance in the Psychological Empowerment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $\Delta F(1,205) = 0.0015$, $b = -.0022$, $t(205) = -.0384$, $p > .005$). Therefore, the alternate hypothesis that job demands moderate the relationship between Job Crafting and Psychological Empowerment, is rejected.

9. Discussion & Conclusion

Underpinning the workplace trends and challenges, the objective of the study was twofold: to identify the effect of job crafting on psychological empowerment of the HEI academicians and secondly, to identify whether the challenging job demands moderate the relationship between the job crafting and psychological empowerment for HEI academicians.

The results of the study have been found to be interestingly novel. While job crafting and psychological empowerment are significantly correlated, augmenting previous researchers by Peral and Geldenhuys (2016) and Miller (2015), however, the noteworthy contribution of this study is that in contradiction to previous researches, of Tim, Bakker and Derks (2013), the correlation of job demands with psychological empowerment and job crafting is insignificant. The demanding aspects like work load and time pressure do not account for any hindrance in faculty's job crafting initiatives. On the other hand, the demand of interaction with people which is generally considered a strain on employees is in fact not bothersome for faculty members. Hence, it may be inferred that the job demands in the HEIs in Pakistan do not effect employees' job crafting initiatives in order to empower them psychologically.

This insignificant effect might be attributed to the nature of demands from a faculty's perspective. Similarly, the JDR model studies the effect of resources also, which were not included in this research due to time and financial resources' constraint. A future avenue might be to study the demanding job and resources together in studying the moderation relationship.

Another contribution of the study is credited to the effect of job crafting on psychological empowerment of employees. The results represent 63.3% variance in psychological empowerment indicating job crafting as a strong predictor. The literature shows a gap in identifying the effect of job crafting. Though the study of Miller (2015) identified the strong correlation between the two but the need to examine the influence on each other was still to be tested. This finding is more meaningful for the HRD practitioners and employers while designing jobs for employees. Since, the academicians in the HEIs are required to do research and teach, they seek to craft different tasks and develop collaborations with fellow members in order to produce the innovative output. The faculty's role majorly consists of the necessary elements of autonomy, skill variety and task significance which results into satisfaction and meaningfulness. Thus the academicians usually exhibit higher levels of cognitive crafting as well. This ultimately evokes psychological empowerment among the faculty members.

The results of moderating effect of job demands while job crafting influencing the psychological empowerment turns out to be insignificant. Though the job demands have never been tested before as a moderator, however the study by Tims and Bakker (2010) pointed out that the employees may craft to increase or decrease the challenging demands in their jobs. Interestingly, this effect is seemed to be insignificant in this research. This pertains to the fact that the demands of teaching at HEIs actually do not play any role in the employees' willingness for job crafting. No matter how much work load, time pressure and other environmental challenges persist, the meaningfulness of the job itself is sufficient enough to motivate employees to craft their jobs when needed.

This research has significant implications for employers while designing jobs. Job crafting is one such unique measure through which employees gain ownership of their roles. The employers must focus on developing an environment with facilitating resources and opportunities for employees to participate in redesigning their roles. This can result into a better design of jobs with productive elements into them. Also it is a motivational strategy to keep the engaged workforce acknowledged for their initiatives.

Another implication of this research opens up new avenues of research for future. Since, job crafting is still considered a new approach, it can further be studied by exploring more factors that can impact psychological empowerment. The personality of employees, nature of job demands and resources and organizational culture can also contribute towards the effect of job crafting and are recommended for further investigations.

This is high time for employers to realize that the employees must be given freedom to craft the elements of their jobs in order to bring employee well-being, empowerment and engagement. It is equally important to highlight the significance of job characteristics which bring meaningfulness into a role (Demerouti, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2016).

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