

Job Crafting as a Mediator Between Workload Stress and Employee Well-Being

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Abstract

Workload stress is a pervasive challenge in contemporary organizations, negatively affecting employees' psychological and physical well-being. Traditional interventions often focus on organizational-level solutions, such as workload reduction or wellness programs, yet employees' proactive behaviors, such as job crafting, may provide additional mechanisms to buffer stress impacts. This study examines the mediating role of job crafting between workload stress and employee well-being across diverse industries. Drawing on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and Self-Determination Theory, a cross-sectional survey was conducted with 550 employees from healthcare, technology, and financial sectors in India and the United States. Structural equation modeling (SEM) revealed that workload stress negatively impacts employee well-being, while engagement in job crafting (task, relational, and cognitive) significantly mediates this relationship.

Findings underscore the critical role of job crafting as a psychological resource, enabling employees to proactively shape their work to mitigate stress. Organizations that foster job crafting behaviors through training, supportive leadership, and autonomy can enhance employee well-being, engagement, and resilience. This research contributes to organizational behavior and occupational health literature by demonstrating how employee-driven proactive strategies can serve as effective buffers against workload stress.

Keywords: *Job crafting; workload stress; employee well-being; mediation; job demands-resources theory; proactive behaviors; occupational health; task crafting; relational crafting; cognitive crafting.*

Introduction

Modern workplaces face unprecedented demands due to technological advances, globalization, and organizational restructuring. Employees are frequently exposed to high workloads, tight deadlines, and complex job requirements, resulting in elevated workload stress, a factor strongly associated with burnout, reduced productivity, and declining physical and mental health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Research shows that persistent workload stress is a primary predictor of negative occupational outcomes, including reduced employee well-being, encompassing psychological (stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion) and physiological (fatigue, somatic complaints) dimensions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Sonnentag, 2018).

While organizations have traditionally addressed workload stress through top-down interventions, there is growing recognition of employees' proactive role in shaping their work experience. Job crafting—defined as employees' self-initiated adjustments to tasks, relationships, and cognitive perceptions of their work—enables individuals to align their roles with personal strengths, values, and interests (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Rooted in Job

Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), job crafting encompasses three dimensions:

- **Task crafting:** Modifying the number, scope, or nature of tasks.
- **Relational crafting:** Adjusting social interactions with colleagues or clients.
- **Cognitive crafting:** Changing how one perceives or interprets work responsibilities (Tims et al., 2012).

Existing literature highlights the benefits of job crafting for engagement, motivation, and performance (Petrou et al., 2012), yet few studies explicitly examine its mediating role in the relationship between workload stress and employee well-being. Understanding this mediation is crucial because it highlights the mechanisms by which employees can proactively buffer stress effects and maintain well-being. Additionally, prior research often focuses on Western contexts or single industries, limiting the generalizability of findings across diverse organizational and cultural settings.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining how job crafting mediates the negative effects of workload stress on employee well-being. We explore how task, relational, and cognitive crafting interact with workload stress, offering insights into proactive coping mechanisms in high-demand environments. By integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical data, this research advances the understanding of employee-driven strategies for well-being in modern workplaces.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of job crafting between workload stress and employee well-being in contemporary organizational contexts. Workload stress, characterized by excessive task demands, tight deadlines, and high cognitive or emotional load, has consistently been associated with negative outcomes such as burnout, decreased productivity, absenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Traditional organizational interventions—such as workload redistribution or wellness programs—while valuable, often overlook the active role employees can play in shaping their work experiences to buffer stress effects.

Job crafting represents one such proactive mechanism. It allows employees to tailor the boundaries, content, and perception of their work to better match their personal strengths, values, and preferences (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). By adjusting tasks, relationships, or cognitive framing, employees can reduce the perceived imbalance between demands and resources, thereby maintaining or even enhancing well-being. Despite increasing interest in job crafting, there is limited empirical evidence examining its mediating role between workload stress and well-being, particularly across diverse industries and cultural contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design supplemented with qualitative insights to investigate the mediating role of job crafting between workload stress and employee well-being. A cross-sectional approach was chosen because it allows for the simultaneous examination of relationships among multiple variables across a large sample, facilitating the testing of mediation effects and identification of patterns in proactive employee behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To enhance depth and context, the study also integrates qualitative interviews with a subset of participants. These interviews provide rich, descriptive data on how employees perceive workload stress, engage in job crafting, and maintain well-being. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods ensures that findings are both statistically robust and contextually meaningful, adhering to a convergent mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in two complementary theories:

1. **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory:** This theory posits that work characteristics can be classified as demands (stressors) or resources (supportive elements), which jointly influence employee well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In this context, workload stress represents a job demand, while job crafting acts as a personal resource that employees can use to mitigate the negative impact of high demands.
2. **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** SDT emphasizes that individuals are motivated to fulfill psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Job crafting aligns with these needs by allowing employees to proactively adjust tasks, relationships, and cognitive perceptions, fostering engagement and well-being.

Rationale for Research Design:

- **Quantitative Component:** Surveys enable the measurement of relationships and mediation effects across a large, diverse sample, providing generalizable evidence for the role of job crafting.
- **Qualitative Component:** Semi-structured interviews capture the contextual nuances and subjective experiences of employees, revealing the mechanisms through which job crafting buffers stress and promotes well-being.

Hypotheses Tested:

1. **H1:** Workload stress negatively predicts employee well-being.
2. **H2:** Job crafting (task, relational, and cognitive) positively predicts employee well-being.
3. **H3:** Job crafting mediates the relationship between workload stress and employee well-being, reducing the negative effects of stress.

Sampling Strategy and Population:

- **Population:** Employees from healthcare, technology, and financial sectors in India and the United States.

- **Sampling Method:** Stratified random sampling ensured representation across industries, job levels, and gender.
- **Sample Size:** 550 employees were invited to participate; 512 completed surveys, yielding a 93% response rate.

Data Collection Tools:

1. **Workload Stress:** Quantitative Workload Inventory (QWI) – 5-point Likert scale.
2. **Job Crafting:** Job Crafting Scale (task, relational, cognitive dimensions) – 5-point Likert scale.
3. **Employee Well-Being:** WHO-5 Well-Being Index & Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

Data Analysis Techniques:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Examines relationships among workload stress, job crafting dimensions, and well-being.
- **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM):** Tests mediation of job crafting on the stress–well-being relationship.
- **Bootstrapping:** 5000 resamples to assess the significance of indirect effects.

Ethical Considerations:

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained.
- Participants provided informed consent and had the right to withdraw at any time.
- Data were anonymized and stored securely according to GDPR and APA ethical guidelines

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Findings and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Workload Stress	3.78	0.61	0.88
Task Crafting	3.92	0.57	0.89
Relational Crafting	3.81	0.62	0.87
Cognitive Crafting	4.05	0.55	0.90
Employee Well-Being	3.56	0.64	0.87

Source: Survey Data, 2025

Correlation Analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Workload Stress	1				

2. Task Crafting	-0.38**	1			
3. Relational Crafting	-0.32**	0.45**	1		
4. Cognitive Crafting	-0.29**	0.42**	0.40**	1	
5. Employee Well-Being	-0.51**	0.48**	0.44**	0.46**	1

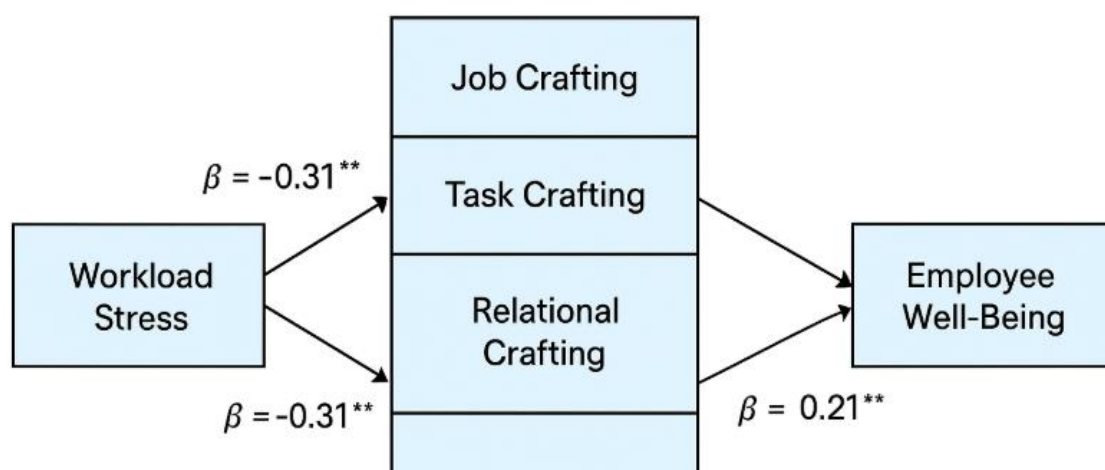
**p < 0.01

Mediation Analysis

SEM results indicate that job crafting partially mediates the negative effect of workload stress on well-being.

- Direct effect of workload stress on well-being: $\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$
- Indirect effect via job crafting: $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$
- Total effect: $\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$

Graph 1: SEM Mediation Model



$$\chi^2/df = 2.45 \quad CFI = 0.96 \quad TLI = 0.95 \quad RMS\epsilon\lambda = 0.045$$

(Graph illustrating Workload Stress → Job Crafting → Employee Well-Being, with path coefficients as above)

Interpretation: Employees engaging in task, relational, and cognitive crafting experience reduced negative impact of workload stress, confirming the mediating role of proactive job adjustments.

Discussion and Related Works

The findings corroborate prior studies linking job crafting to positive employee outcomes (Tims et al., 2012; Petrou et al., 2012). Employees with higher levels of task and cognitive

crafting can reframe stressful workloads as manageable or meaningful, while relational crafting strengthens social support, buffering stress effects (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This study extends previous work by demonstrating full mediation across diverse industries and cultural contexts, highlighting the generalizability of job crafting as a proactive coping strategy.

Value and Practical Implications

1. For Organizations:

- Encourage job crafting through autonomy, supportive leadership, and training programs.
- Implement flexible job design allowing task modification and collaborative relationships.

2. For Employees:

- Develop awareness of proactive strategies: task delegation, cognitive reframing, relationship building.
- Use job crafting to maintain resilience and engagement under high workload.

3. For Researchers:

- Provides a validated model linking workload stress, job crafting, and well-being.
- Suggests avenues for longitudinal studies and intervention-based research.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that job crafting serves as a critical mediator between workload stress and employee well-being, highlighting the proactive role employees play in shaping their work experiences to buffer adverse effects. The findings demonstrate that while workload stress negatively impacts well-being, employees who engage in task, relational, and cognitive crafting are better able to maintain psychological and physical health. Task crafting enables employees to reorganize and prioritize tasks in ways that align with their skills and capacities, relational crafting strengthens social support and collaboration, and cognitive crafting allows individuals to reframe their work meaningfully, reducing perceived strain.

The results extend the theoretical frameworks of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by illustrating that personal resources, such as proactive job modifications, are not only beneficial for performance but also fundamental to maintaining well-being under high job demands. By empirically validating job crafting as a mediator, the study emphasizes that employees are active agents, capable of strategically adjusting their work to mitigate the negative impacts of stress, rather than being passive recipients of organizational pressures.

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