

Job Crafting and Off-Job Crafting in the Context of Workplace Change: A Dual-Path Model Based on Self-Identity Theory

Authors: Lin Lin, Lin Lin

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Abstract

Work is not immutable. Even when organizations utilize job design to establish the content and modalities of specific positions, employees will engage in job crafting—that is, proactively adjusting their cognitions about work, as well as their work tasks and interpersonal interactions—to satisfy core needs for maintaining a positive self-image, sense of control, and connection with others, thereby attaining self-worth and meaning. Although research on the antecedents and outcomes of job crafting is relatively well-established, few studies have addressed the core issue of self-identity. In light of this, the present study adopts self-identity theory as its central framework to investigate how individuals, when confronted with major external challenges, respond to environmental changes through two mechanisms—self-enhancement and self-protection—and subsequently accomplish the reconstruction of self-identity via job crafting and off-job crafting. Through four studies, we examine the elimination of self-identity threat as a self-protection mechanism and the capitalization on self-growth opportunities as a self-enhancement mechanism, thereby revealing the mediating mechanisms through which major changes in the work environment stimulate individuals' self-crafting behaviors. Based on the cognitive appraisal model of stress and coping, we investigate the moderating effects of individual characteristics at the primary appraisal stage and organizational contextual features at the secondary appraisal stage. A field intervention study is conducted to explore the effectiveness of job crafting integrated with self-construction. This project reconnects job crafting with self-identity and constructs a dual-path model of individual self-crafting in the context of work environment change, promising contributions to both domains.

Full Text

Crafting for the Changing Workplace: A Dual Pathway Model of Job Crafting and Leisure Crafting Based on Self-Identity Theory

Business School, Central University of Finance and Economics, Beijing 100081, China

Abstract

Work is not static. Even when organizations design jobs to specify what and how work should be done, employees engage in job crafting—actively adjusting their perceptions of work, as well as its tasks and interpersonal aspects—to fulfill core needs for maintaining a positive self-image, sense of control, and connection with others, thereby attaining self-worth and meaning. Although research on the antecedents and outcomes of job crafting is substantial, few studies have addressed the core issue of self-identity. This research therefore employs self-identity theory as its central framework to investigate how individuals respond to major external challenges through two mechanisms: self-enhancement and self-protection. Through job crafting and leisure crafting, individuals reconstruct their self-identity. Four studies examine the mediating mechanisms through which major workplace changes stimulate self-crafting behaviors, with eliminating identity threat as a self-protective mechanism and seizing growth opportunity as a self-enhancing mechanism. Drawing on the cognitive appraisal model of stress coping, we explore the moderating effects of individual characteristics at the primary appraisal stage and organizational contextual features at the secondary appraisal stage. A field intervention study investigates the effectiveness of job crafting integrated with self-construction. This project reconnects job crafting with self-identity and constructs a dual-pathway model of self-crafting in the context of workplace transformation, promising contributions to both domains.

Keywords: job crafting; leisure crafting; self-identity; job design

“After being laid off, I feel anxious every time I browse job websites. My applications disappear like stones sinking into the sea. I begin to doubt whether I’m as competent as I thought, and my salary expectations keep dropping. I feel utterly hopeless, with a bleak future ahead.”

—A laid-off employee

1. Research Background and Questions

Globally, economic slowdown, rapid technological advancement, and intensified organizational competition have created VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) challenges for industries, organizations, and individuals alike.

In response, industries and organizations are accelerating career iteration and profoundly transforming the occupational environment through technological innovation, new business models, organizational forms, and employment patterns. First, individual career trajectories have become increasingly uncertain; the likelihood of a person remaining in the same organization or even the same industry throughout their career is diminishing (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Second, career paths have become discontinuous rather than linear, with individuals frequently transitioning between work roles, identities, occupations, and industries (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). People must fulfill current responsibilities while simultaneously preparing for future transitions. Third, organizational boundaries are blurring, weakening the connection between individuals and organizations and diminishing the role of organizational identification (Ashford et al., 2007). Particularly in the gig economy and shared employee arrangements, where employees maintain limited, transient relationships with employers, workers must consider enhancing their visibility and developing new types of interpersonal interactions (Ashford et al., 2018).

To adapt to the VUCA workplace and achieve personal growth, individuals face two major challenges: employability and self-identity. Updating professional knowledge and skills is insufficient; mastering emotional regulation and stress coping skills is also crucial for finding and succeeding in continuously changing jobs (Ashford et al., 2018). The greater challenge lies in the fact that major transformations can lead to identity threat (Ashford et al., 2018; Collinson, 2003; Elsbach, 2003). Identity threat is the experience that emerges when an individual perceives an event or experience as potentially harmful to their self-worth, meaning, and continuity (Petriglieri, 2011). Such threats often result in negative consequences, including diminished self-worth, weakened work motivation, reduced proactive behavior, and poor job performance (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Petriglieri, 2011). As the laid-off employee quoted at the outset illustrates, major negative career events not only cause financial hardship but also fundamentally threaten self-identity, producing self-doubt, loss of value, and low self-efficacy.

Expanding work skills alone is insufficient to address identity threat. When work environments undergo fundamental change and career development becomes uncertain, the core features of future jobs and how they will evolve are unpredictable. The urgent priority is not only to perform current duties but also to prepare for dramatic and unpredictable career transformations. Consequently, individuals need to proactively shape themselves to cope with unexpected occupational, identity, and role changes (Caza et al., 2018) and to construct and maintain a compatible self-identity (Ibarra, 2003; Petriglieri, Ashford, et al., 2018).

Self-identity refers to individuals' subjective interpretation of "who I am" and "who I want to become," which determines how they think, behave, and feel, and serves as the source of self-worth and meaning (Albert et al., 2000). A clear, stable, and consistent self-identity is the most important psychological foundation for coping with personal and environmental changes. Constructing self-identity

is a core goal of individual growth and development (Erikson, 1994/2018). Self-identity is multifaceted, and individuals can construct it based on demographic characteristics, personal traits, social roles, and group memberships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gecas, 1982).

For working adults, experiences in the workplace are the primary source of self-construction (Albert et al., 2000; Pratt et al., 2006). Research on job crafting provides a new perspective on this process. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) argued that employees do not passively accept organizationally prescribed or assigned job duties and content. Instead, motivated by needs for positive self-image, control, and connection, they actively craft their jobs by adjusting job characteristics at cognitive and physical levels. The fundamental purpose of job crafting is to enhance work meaning and value, ultimately constructing a desired self-identity (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013).

Since Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) introduced the concept, job crafting has rapidly become a hot topic in organizational behavior and management psychology, accumulating substantial research in a relatively short time. Findings consistently show that job crafting helps employees improve work efficiency, enhance work experiences, and maintain physical and mental health (Lichtenhaler & Fischbach, 2019; Rudolph et al., 2017). However, despite this extensive research, two limitations remain. First, most studies reduce job crafting to specific work skills, rarely touching upon the core issue of self-identity and deviating from the original intent of job crafting. Second, by limiting job crafting to skills used in work settings, research has overlooked the importance of leisure activities outside work. Leisure crafting—the reconfiguration of activity and interpersonal boundaries during non-work time—also represents an important pathway for identity reconstruction and meaning-making (Berg et al., 2010; Petrou & Bakker, 2016).

This project therefore uses self-identity theory as its main thread to return to the original focus of job crafting research, viewing crafting as a dynamic process of identity effort. It explores how individuals respond to major external challenges through self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms, and how they reconstruct self-identity through job crafting and leisure crafting. The project examines eliminating identity threat as a self-protective mechanism and seizing growth opportunity as a self-enhancing mechanism, revealing the mediating processes through which major workplace changes stimulate self-crafting behaviors. Based on the cognitive appraisal model of stress coping, it investigates the moderating effects of individual characteristics at the primary appraisal stage and organizational contextual features at the secondary appraisal stage. Finally, a field intervention study examines the effectiveness of job crafting integrated with self-construction. This project reconnects job crafting with self-identity and constructs a dual-pathway model of self-crafting to describe, predict, and explain how individuals use self-crafting to cope with dramatic workplace changes, reconstruct meaning and self-worth, and ultimately achieve both surviving and thriving.

2.1 Self-Identity Threat and Self-Construction

As noted, the dramatic changes in future work constitute identity threats to individuals. To eliminate these threats, individuals adopt a series of coping measures. When handled appropriately, they can not only adapt to environmental changes but also achieve self-growth. The core goals of self-construction are to establish self-identity, obtain values and meaning, demonstrate uniqueness, maintain continuity, and seek belonging (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Individuals achieve self-construction through identity work—various activities through which individuals construct, maintain, consolidate, repair, and revise their self-identity to achieve desired states (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

When facing identity threat, identity work can be either defensive/passive-adaptive or proactive in preparing for identity transformation (Caza et al., 2018). Among Petriglieri's (2011) six self-protective or self-reconstructive behaviors, derogation (protecting self-integrity by negating or reducing the credibility of the threat source) and concealment (hiding one's identity or avoiding self-disclosure when sensing potential threat) reflect a defensive orientation in self-construction. Although these coping behaviors can temporarily alleviate threat, they do not fundamentally change the threat source, which persists and requires continuous struggle. In contrast, positive distinctiveness (demonstrating uniqueness in positive ways to change others' attitudes toward one's identity), importance change (reducing the importance of the threatened identity), meaning change (actively altering one's understanding of the identity's implied meaning), and identity exit (abandoning the threatened identity when it becomes unsustainable) reflect an enhancement orientation. These four responses alter elements of the threat appraisal process, attempting to eliminate identity threat fundamentally. Despite potential negative consequences, such as identity loss from abandoning a specific identity, they create opportunities for self-growth and development, reflecting a self-enhancement orientation.

Thus, identity threat from workplace transformation, while a negative stimulus, also contains opportunities and serves as a catalyst for self-growth (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Roberts et al., 2009). For most employed individuals, workplace changes are the primary motivation and source for identity construction (Albert et al., 2000; Pratt et al., 2006). When work contexts undergo major transformations or work roles change significantly (e.g., entering new organizations, assuming new roles, transitioning between careers), identity work is often initiated to achieve self-construction (Petriglieri, Petriglieri, et al., 2018). Job crafting theory and empirical research provide new perspectives on how individuals adjust their relationship with work to seek purpose, obtain personal meaning, and complete self-construction in workplace settings.

2.2 Review of Job Crafting Research

Job crafting resonates with two major themes—employee proactivity and the VUCA work environment. Since Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) first pro-

posed the concept less than 20 years ago, research has exploded, accumulating considerable knowledge (Lazazzara et al., 2020; Rudolph et al., 2017). The following sections summarize research progress in three areas: conceptualization and theoretical orientations, antecedents and consequences, and intervention approaches.

2.2.1 Conceptualizations and Theoretical Orientations of Job Crafting

As research has deepened and expanded, conceptualizations of job crafting have evolved, with three theoretical perspectives emerging: role-based, resource-based, and integrated. Meanwhile, researchers have increasingly emphasized job crafting as a specific work strategy and skill, while neglecting the role of self-construction in the job crafting process.

Role-based job crafting. In 2001, Wrzesniewski and Dutton first proposed job crafting based on role theory. The core argument is that to satisfy needs for positive self-image, control, and connection, employees do not passively accept organizationally prescribed or assigned work roles, duties, and content. Instead, they actively craft their jobs by changing job characteristics at cognitive and physical levels to achieve better alignment with the self, thereby enhancing work meaning and self-worth (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting includes three forms: (1) cognitive crafting—changing perceptions of work, including thinking about its positive impact on well-being and life meaning; (2) task crafting—altering the number, type, scope, and execution methods of work tasks; and (3) relational crafting—changing the quantity and quality of interpersonal interactions. Researchers adopting this perspective emphasize that employees should actively change, adjust, and expand their cognitive boundaries of work (both tangible and intangible), thus focusing on approach-oriented job crafting. Based on this framework, Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) and Niessen, Weseler, and Kostova (2016) developed job crafting scales measuring cognitive, task, and relational crafting dimensions.

Resource-based job crafting. In contrast to the role-based perspective, Tims and Bakker (2010) grounded job crafting in Demerouti et al.'s (2001) job demands-resources model, conceptualizing it as employee behaviors of “seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands.” Tims et al. (2013) defined job crafting as the process through which employees proactively change job resources and demands to better align their abilities, needs, and preferences with their work, thereby maintaining motivation and enhancing well-being. Seeking job resources includes seeking social and structural resources; seeking challenges involves requesting new, more attractive tasks and taking on more responsibilities. These three forms constitute expanding job crafting. Reducing hindering demands constitutes reducing job crafting, including minimizing emotional, cognitive, and operational demands and reducing workload (Tims et al., 2012). Thus, resource-oriented researchers limit job crafting to skills and behavioral strategies for actively changing and adjusting job characteristics, excluding cognitive components (Wang, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2017). Additionally, beyond

promoting approach-oriented job crafting, these researchers acknowledge that employees can adopt avoidance-oriented job crafting by actively shrinking work boundaries.

Integrated perspective on job crafting. To reduce theoretical and operational divergence between the two streams and advance job crafting research and practice, Zhang and Parker (2019) attempted integration. They classified job crafting into eight types based on direction (approach/avoidance), form (cognitive/behavioral), and target (job demands/job resources), with each type having clear direction, form, and target. As job crafting research has deepened, this integrated perspective has gained increasing attention. For example, Bruning and Campion (2018) adopted this view, integrating job role theory, the job demands-resources model, and approach-avoidance motivation theory to propose four categories: approach-oriented role crafting, avoidance-oriented role crafting, approach-oriented resource crafting, and avoidance-oriented resource crafting. Bindl et al. (2019) introduced self-regulatory focus theory, classifying job crafting into eight types based on two regulatory foci (promotion/prevention) and four crafting targets (cognitive/task/relational/skill). However, despite attempts to classify job crafting behaviors across multiple dimensions, researchers have increasingly defined it as specific strategies and skills for improving job characteristics, while downplaying the role of self-concept in the job crafting process.

2.2.2 Antecedents and Mechanisms of Job Crafting

Numerous studies have examined factors that stimulate or inhibit job crafting. Antecedents can be summarized into four categories (Wang, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2017; Zhang & Parker, 2019): (1) individual differences, primarily personality traits such as the Big Five and proactive personality, plus demographic characteristics; (2) motivational factors, including self-efficacy, basic psychological needs, regulatory focus (promotion or prevention), and work competence—motivational states that directly influence job crafting as proximal variables; (3) job characteristics, such as autonomy, skill variety, workload, work pressure, and task interdependence, most of which can be categorized as job resources or demands; and (4) work environment characteristics, such as leadership behaviors, social support, and interpersonal or team climate. While motivational factors have direct effects as proximal variables, the other three categories typically exert influence by activating certain motivational factors and thus serve as distal variables (Parker et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Zhang & Parker, 2019).

Rudolph et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis using the job demands-resources model orientation revealed significant relationships between individual differences, motivational factors, job characteristics, and job crafting. Specifically: (1) among personality traits, proactive personality, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness positively correlated with approach-oriented job crafting and negatively with avoidance-oriented job crafting; agreeableness correlated positively

with both; neuroticism correlated positively only with avoidance-oriented job crafting; (2) among motivational factors, self-efficacy positively correlated with approach-oriented job crafting and negatively with avoidance-oriented job crafting; promotion focus correlated positively only with approach-oriented job crafting, while prevention focus correlated positively with both; (3) among job characteristics, autonomy positively correlated with approach-oriented job crafting and negatively with avoidance-oriented job crafting, while workload correlated positively only with approach-oriented job crafting.

Leadership behavior is the most prominent factor in employees' work environment. Several empirical studies show that transformational, empowering, and servant leadership can promote approach-oriented job crafting by granting autonomy, creating learning climates, and encouraging employee growth and development (Harju et al., 2018; Wang, Demerouti, & Le Blanc, 2017). Leaders' own job crafting can be learned by employees through social learning mechanisms (Xin, 2017).

2.2.3 Outcomes and Mechanisms of Job Crafting

Extensive research demonstrates that job crafting improves work experiences and enhances performance (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019). For instance, job crafting increases job satisfaction and positive emotions while reducing negative emotions (Slemp et al., 2015), enhances subjective well-being (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014), and reduces job boredom (Harju et al., 2016). It also strengthens work engagement (Yin et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2020) and alleviates burnout (Yu & An, 2018). Job crafting improves job performance (Petrou et al., 2015; Tims et al., 2015) and creative/innovative performance (Lin et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2020). Additionally, it facilitates career development by enhancing career satisfaction and commitment (Kim & Beehr, 2017), career competence (Akkermans & Tims, 2017), employability (Brenninkmeijer & Hekkert-Koning, 2015), and actual promotion (Cenciotti et al., 2016).

However, different directions of job crafting yield distinct effects: approach-oriented job crafting typically has positive effects, while avoidance-oriented job crafting has negative effects (Zhang & Parker, 2019). Rudolph et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis found significant differences between the two types across three outcome categories: (1) work attitudes—approach-oriented job crafting positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively with turnover intention, while avoidance-oriented job crafting showed opposite patterns; (2) behavioral outcomes—approach-oriented job crafting positively correlated with task and contextual performance, while avoidance-oriented job crafting correlated negatively; (3) well-being—approach-oriented job crafting positively correlated with work engagement and negatively with job strain, while avoidance-oriented job crafting showed opposite patterns.

Job crafting operates through two mechanisms. First, it promotes person-job fit (Lu et al., 2014). Employees adjust task and interpersonal boundaries and

change job characteristics to match their needs, abilities, or interests, thereby better leveraging their strengths (Kooij et al., 2017; Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2012). Second, individuals reconstruct work meaning through job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Various job crafting strategies help employees gain work meaning, whether by directly changing work perceptions, autonomously allocating time and energy to complete work in more interesting or valuable ways (Dvorak, 2014), or by expanding and deepening interpersonal interactions to build high-quality relationships that satisfy belongingness needs (Tims et al., 2012).

2.2.4 Job Crafting Interventions

Beyond survey research examining variable relationships, experimental intervention studies have gained attention. Preliminary results show that job crafting interventions can guide and encourage employees to actively adjust their work, enhancing practical value (Xu & Chen, 2018; Li et al., 2019).

Current interventions primarily include three components: stimulating crafting motivation, helping employees develop cognitive crafting, and cultivating crafting behaviors. Intervention procedures typically involve two phases. Phase one is training, where instructors guide participants in self and work analysis to develop job crafting plans. Phase two involves participants returning to their jobs to apply learned skills and plans. Two intervention models exist: role-based and resource-based. Role-based interventions guide and motivate employees to craft jobs based on self-positioning (e.g., work role positioning, interests, strengths) across cognitive, task, and relational dimensions (Kooij et al., 2017; Sakuraya et al., 2016; Schoberova, 2015). Resource-based interventions focus on teaching skills for acquiring resources and reducing hindering job demands. By practicing these skills, employees can secure more job resources, with effects primarily manifested in increased work engagement and improved performance (Gordon et al., 2018; van den Heuvel et al., 2015; van Wingerden et al., 2017a, 2017b).

2.3 New Research Topic: Leisure Crafting

As the term suggests, job crafting refers to proactive shaping behaviors within the workplace targeting work characteristics. However, while the work domain is important for identity formation and meaning-making, it is not the only domain. Leisure activities also serve as important avenues for self-construction and identity seeking (Haggard & Williams, 1992; Layland et al., 2018). Scholars have recently noted that when individuals cannot craft their jobs, they turn to crafting their leisure activities for meaning-making (Berg et al., 2010; Petrou & Bakker, 2016). In other words, leisure crafting represents another pathway for identity reconstruction and meaning-making.

Berg et al. (2010) first proposed the concept of leisure crafting. They argued that when personal goals cannot be fully met through work, individuals actively arrange and adjust their leisure activities as compensation, thereby expressing

passion and enacting values and experiencing pleasure and meaning. Thus, leisure crafting complements Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) job crafting. Both are proactive behaviors aimed at seeking meaning, enhancing self-worth, and achieving growth, differing only in context and target—leisure crafting occurs outside work and targets leisure rather than work activities. Building on this, Petrou and Bakker (2016) defined leisure crafting as proactively engaging in leisure activities related to goal setting, interpersonal connection, learning, and personal growth, involving the reconfiguration of activity and interpersonal boundaries during leisure time. Like job crafting, leisure crafting features proactivity, self-growth, and interpersonal development.

Research on leisure crafting is still in its infancy. Berg et al. (2010) used qualitative interviews across industries to conceptualize leisure crafting as an alternative strategy for using leisure time to compensate for unfulfilled occupational callings. They found that individuals experiencing low freedom at work and unable to engage in job crafting were more likely to practice leisure crafting. Petrou and Bakker's (2016) three-week diary study found that employees engaged in more leisure crafting under high job strain and high family autonomy, but not when family pressure was high and autonomy low. Leisure crafting satisfied needs for belongingness and autonomy but not competence. In another three-week diary study, Petrou, Bakker, and van den Heuvel (2017) found that when job crafting opportunities were low, leisure crafting positively correlated with meaning-making, and interacted with increasing challenging job demands and structural job resources to positively affect work engagement one week later.

2.4 Review of Existing Research

Despite accumulating substantial research and becoming a hot topic in organizational behavior, job crafting research has two limitations. First, although the fundamental motivation for job crafting is seeking self-worth and work meaning, the crucial piece of self-identity is missing from most empirical studies. In Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) model, self-identity is central throughout: the need to maintain a positive self-image drives employees to craft jobs, and through cognitive, task, and relational crafting, they ultimately improve work identity and achieve meaning. In this sense, job crafting is essentially a process of identity work (Caza et al., 2018). However, subsequent empirical research has largely equated job crafting with work skills, emphasizing that employees need crafting skills to improve efficiency and well-being, such as increasing job resources, seeking challenges, or reducing hindrances (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019; Rudolph et al., 2017). Thus, existing research has ignored the fundamental motivation for job crafting and lacks direct examination of self-identity's role. A few studies involving self-concept found that job crafting correlates positively with positive self-image (Lyons, 2008) and self-efficacy (Miraglia et al., 2017; Tims et al., 2014), and even with narcissism under high perceived organizational support (Zhu et al., 2017). However, these studies only examined isolated relationships between specific self-identity concepts and job crafting,

failing to leverage self-identity theory to explain job crafting's formation and mechanisms.

Second, by limiting job crafting to work strategies and skills and confining its scope to the workplace, research has overlooked the importance of activities outside work. In fact, both job crafting and leisure activities play important roles in maintaining positive work states and enhancing efficiency (Vogel et al., 2016). From a self-identity perspective, leisure crafting is also an important pathway for identity reconstruction and meaning-seeking, especially when job crafting becomes difficult (Berg et al., 2010). Empirical research on leisure crafting is still nascent but already demonstrates unique explanatory power (Petrou & Bakker, 2016; Petrou et al., 2017). Through the lens of self-identity theory, both job crafting and leisure crafting share the same fundamental motivation and goal: constructing a clear self-identity, manifested as individuals changing the type, content, method, time allocation, prioritization, and interpersonal scope of their activities. The two forms differ only in spatiotemporal characteristics: the former targets formal work-related activities in work settings, while the latter occurs in leisure settings, typically targeting personal activities outside work. Simultaneously incorporating both into a research framework to systematically examine how they complement and facilitate each other will have significant theoretical and practical value for guiding employees toward self-construction through dual pathways of self-crafting.

3.1 Overall Research Objectives

This project returns to the origins of job crafting research, drawing on self-identity theory to view crafting as a dynamic identity effort process. It systematically explores how self-identity influences self-crafting and its boundary conditions when individuals face major external challenges. The overall objective is to reveal how individuals use self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms to respond to environmental changes, engage in different forms of self-crafting (job crafting and leisure crafting) across work and non-work domains (Petriglieri, Petriglieri, et al., 2018), and thereby reconstruct meaning and self-worth to achieve both surviving and thriving. The project aims to achieve three specific goals: (1) reveal the self-protective and self-enhancing mechanisms through which major workplace changes stimulate self-crafting, specifically how appraising changes as identity threat or growth opportunity influences both forms of crafting; (2) examine boundary conditions, including how individual and organizational contextual characteristics moderate the effects of self-appraisal on self-crafting; and (3) investigate whether self-crafting in different domains (job vs. leisure) leads to different personal growth outcomes.

To achieve these goals, four formal studies are proposed. Study 1 addresses goal 1 by revealing how individuals employ self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms to engage in self-crafting when facing workplace transformation challenges. Studies 2 and 3 correspond to goal 2, examining moderating effects of individual and contextual characteristics, respectively. Study 4 addresses goal

3 through a field intervention study that designs intervention protocols based on self-identity theory to examine how different interventions stimulate job and leisure crafting and compare their outcome differences.

3.2 Self-Protective and Self-Enhancing Mechanisms in Workplace Transformation

As the starting point for the quantitative studies, Study 1 draws on the cognitive appraisal model of stress coping (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to reveal how individuals use self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms to engage in self-crafting when facing workplace transformation challenges. The model's core proposition is that individuals' responses to external stress depend primarily on their cognitive appraisal, which occurs in two stages: primary appraisal, where individuals consider the significance of external stimuli for the self (e.g., whether it constitutes harm); and secondary appraisal, where individuals decide how to cope by considering available options and selecting appropriate behaviors.

Self-crafting is precisely the coping behavior adopted after individuals conduct these two-stage appraisals of workplace changes. In primary appraisal, individuals may perceive changes as threatening to the self (Belmi et al., 2015) or as opportunities for growth and development (Brown & Coupland, 2015). Thus, primary appraisal can yield both threat and opportunity perceptions, which influence subsequent coping behaviors. When changes are viewed as identity threats, individuals are more likely to adopt withdrawal behaviors (Petriglieri, 2011), reducing self-crafting. When viewed as opportunities, individuals are more likely to take proactive, positive measures (Brown & Coupland, 2015), increasing willingness to engage in self-crafting. In other words, environmental changes influence self-crafting through two mechanisms: identity threat as a defensive mechanism that inhibits job or leisure crafting, and growth opportunity as an enhancing mechanism that stimulates both forms. Notably, because these mechanisms operate in opposite directions, their effects may cancel each other out, potentially rendering the main effect of environmental change on self-crafting non-significant.

3.3 Individual Characteristics as Boundary Conditions for Appraisal Effects on Self-Crafting

The cognitive appraisal model (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and job crafting model (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) clearly state that whether individuals proactively engage in self-crafting to cope with environmental changes is constrained by numerous individual and situational factors. At the primary appraisal stage, individual characteristics are important boundary conditions for how individuals evaluate workplace changes. Drawing on self-regulation theory (Higgins, 1996; Lockwood et al., 2002), Study 2 examines how regulatory focus influences appraisals of workplace changes. Regulatory

focus distinguishes between promotion focus (concerned with achieving positive outcomes) and prevention focus (concerned with avoiding negative outcomes) (Lockwood et al., 2002). Facing the same challenge, individuals with different regulatory foci make different cognitive judgments. For promotion-focused individuals, change may contain opportunities, making them more likely to view it as a chance for growth. For prevention-focused individuals, change implies uncertainty and risk, constituting a threat. Thus, regulatory focus moderates appraisal outcomes: prevention focus positively moderates the effect of environmental change on identity threat, such that more dramatic changes produce greater perceived threat, while promotion focus positively moderates the effect on growth opportunity, with opportunity perception proportional to change magnitude.

Other individual characteristics, such as goal orientation and work motivation, exhibit similar moderating effects. Goal orientation refers to the fundamental goal or motivation behind behavior, distinguishing between approach and avoidance orientations (Elliot, 2006). Approach-oriented individuals set goals and are driven by achieving positive outcomes, whereas avoidance-oriented individuals are motivated by avoiding negative outcomes. Self-determination theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In work contexts, individuals with controlled motivation work primarily for rewards or to avoid guilt and shame, while those with autonomous motivation work out of personal interest, will, beliefs, and values. In the workplace, goal orientation and work motivation interact with environmental changes to determine primary appraisal outcomes. Specifically, avoidance orientation (or controlled motivation) positively moderates the effect of environmental change on identity threat, while approach orientation (or autonomous motivation) positively moderates the effect on growth opportunity.

3.4 Contextual Characteristics as Boundary Conditions for Appraisal Effects on Self-Crafting

Self-crafting includes both job crafting and leisure crafting. While Studies 1 and 2 did not distinguish between them, Study 3 will do so and further examine boundary conditions for how self-appraisals stimulate both forms, focusing on situation strength and job autonomy as key organizational contextual features.

First, this project proposes that self-appraisal outcomes affect the two crafting forms differently: identity threat inhibits job crafting but stimulates leisure crafting, whereas growth opportunity stimulates both. The contexts differ: job crafting occurs in work settings, while leisure crafting mostly occurs outside work. When employees experience identity threat at work, self-protection needs likely lead them to withdraw from the workplace (Petriglieri, 2011), reducing job crafting. Additionally, after workplace setbacks, employees are more likely to seek identity outside work, so identity threat may actually stimulate leisure crafting. In contrast, employees who perceive growth opportunities have stronger motivation for self-improvement in both work and leisure contexts, so

growth opportunity effectively stimulates both crafting forms.

Second, this project further examines boundary conditions for how threat or opportunity appraisals stimulate self-crafting. How individuals engage in self-crafting is also constrained by organizational contextual features (Berg et al., 2010), particularly whether the organization and position provide crafting opportunities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Situation strength is an important contextual characteristic (Mischel, 1973; Tett & Burnett, 2003). In strong situations, behavior must conform to prescribed patterns, heavily constraining actions; in weak situations, people have considerable autonomy and freedom to determine their behavior. In weak organizational environments where employees have more opportunities to change work content, methods, or interpersonal patterns, they can devote most time and energy to optimizing work processes and interpersonal climates. However, because work can satisfy self-needs, the necessity for leisure crafting decreases, and limited time and energy remain for leisure activities, reducing leisure crafting. Conversely, in strong situations where job crafting opportunities are limited, employees turn to leisure activities to cope with identity threat or pursue growth, developing skills and interests. Therefore, organizational situation strength weakens the effects of both identity threat and growth opportunity on job crafting while strengthening their effects on leisure crafting.

Similarly, job autonomy in one's position is another important boundary condition. Job autonomy refers to employees' discretion in deciding and adjusting how, when, and by what methods tasks are executed—a core job design characteristic (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). When job autonomy is high, employees have more job crafting opportunities, strengthening the effects of identity threat and growth opportunity on job crafting. When autonomy is low, employees lack conditions for job crafting and have stronger desire to use leisure crafting to cope with workplace changes, strengthening the effects of both appraisals on leisure crafting.

3.5 Intervention Study Based on Self-Identity Theory

Studies 1-3 focus on variable relationships. Study 4 will employ an intervention approach for two reasons: first, to integrate previous findings and test their practical applicability; second, to use experimental methods to complement the correlational survey methods of Studies 1-3, thereby enhancing internal validity through methodological triangulation.

Prior analysis revealed two intervention models: role-based interventions that guide employees to re-examine work role meaning, arrangements, and interactions to develop role adjustment skills; and resource-based interventions that teach skills for acquiring resources and reducing hindering demands. However, as noted, current job crafting interventions focus on skill transmission while ignoring the fundamental motivation: employees craft jobs to maintain positive self-images and seek self-worth and meaning (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

In essence, job crafting is identity work aimed at self-construction. This project brings self-identity theory back into job crafting research as the main thread for intervention. Specifically, the intervention will teach job crafting skills while also prompting employees to engage in self-construction, comparing effects across groups.

The intervention will be conducted in actual work settings with employed participants, using three experimental groups: (1) traditional work skills training group, teaching skills for adjusting role cognition, task arrangements, increasing job resources, and reducing hindering demands; (2) enhanced group adding self-construction training to traditional content; and (3) control group receiving general business skills training unrelated to crafting or self-construction.

Short-term and long-term effects will be measured. Short-term effects refer to actual self-crafting behaviors adopted after training. Long-term effects will be measured from surviving and thriving perspectives (Ashford et al., 2018). Surviving indicators include fulfilling current job responsibilities, measured by job performance, work states (engagement, burnout, emotional states), and attitudes (satisfaction). Thriving indicators include self-growth, such as self-values, meaning, self-efficacy, and self-clarity. The project expects both experimental groups to show more job crafting (short-term) and better work states and efficiency (long-term) than the control group. Between experimental groups, the self-construction integrated intervention (Group 2) is expected to show advantages in: (1) more leisure crafting behaviors, and (2) stronger self-meaning and value.

4. Theoretical Framework

Based on self-identity theory, this project systematically explores how individuals facing revolutionary workplace changes and challenges ranging from work skills to self-concept use self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms to appraise environmental changes, and how they reconstruct themselves through dual pathways of job crafting and leisure crafting to adapt to changes, maintain well-being, and promote growth, ultimately achieving both survival and development. Individual and contextual factors serve as important boundary conditions influencing appraisal outcomes and crafting choices. Integrating the four studies, this project constructs a theoretical model illustrating the dual-pathway model of self-crafting in response to workplace transformation (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]).

4.1 Core Propositions of the Dual-Pathway Model

The dual-pathway model of self-crafting has four core propositions. First, actions individuals take to cope with future workplace changes are essentially self-construction processes for establishing self-identity. While revolutionary changes in work environments and forms are foreseeable, how future jobs will change remains unpredictable. In highly uncertain contexts, a clear, stable, and

consistent self-identity is the most important and reliable psychological resource for coping with personal and environmental changes. Therefore, to adapt to future changes, individuals must actively construct an uncertainty-compatible self-identity beyond merely upgrading skills and performing current jobs, enabling them to embrace unexpected occupational, identity, and role transformations. Thus, seeking self-growth while ensuring survival constitutes the dual goals of self-construction.

Second, the two forms of self-crafting—job crafting and leisure crafting—represent two pathways to self-construction. They differ in that job crafting occurs in work settings targeting one's work role and tasks, while leisure crafting occurs during non-work time and can target either work-related or personal interest activities. However, both share the same fundamental motivation: seeking autonomy and competence, building interpersonal connections, pursuing meaning and value, and ultimately achieving self-growth (Berg et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Third, individuals rely on self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms to cope with environmental changes, with appraisal of changes determining the direction of self-construction. Facing the same stimulus, individuals differ significantly in their appraisals. Some may attribute it as a hindrance, perceiving threat to self-image and value, thus experiencing identity threat. Others may view it as a challenge, discovering growth opportunities despite pressure and anxiety. Appraisal outcomes determine subsequent self-crafting behaviors. Those experiencing identity threat are more likely to withdraw (Petriglieri, 2011), activating the self-protection mechanism that inhibits self-crafting. Those viewing changes as opportunities are more likely to take proactive measures (Brown & Coupland, 2015), activating the self-enhancement mechanism that promotes self-crafting. Notably, appraisals of identity threat and growth opportunity are not opposite ends of the same dimension but represent an oblique relationship—they coexist with moderate negative correlation rather than being mutually exclusive. Thus, individuals can simultaneously perceive both threat and opportunity, with individual differences in the relative weighting of these appraisals.

Finally, self-construction processes are constrained by individual and situational factors. Self-construction begins with individuals' appraisal of workplace changes. Drawing on the cognitive appraisal model (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the dual-pathway model posits that individual and environmental factors influence primary and secondary appraisal processes as boundary conditions. At the primary appraisal stage, individuals identify identity threats and growth opportunities from changes, with individual traits (regulatory focus or self-structure) influencing appraisal results as first-stage constraints. At the secondary appraisal stage, individuals decide self-crafting forms and directions based on available resources, with situational factors (situation strength) exerting moderating effects. Future research can explore other individual and contextual characteristics or examine contextual effects at the primary appraisal stage and individual effects at the secondary appraisal stage.

4.2 Innovations and Theoretical Contributions

In summary, this project's dual-pathway model of self-crafting, grounded in self-identity theory, reveals self-protective and self-enhancing psychological mechanisms for coping with environmental changes and proposes two behavioral pathways of job crafting and leisure crafting. The model clarifies the relationship between external threats and self-construction, providing an integrative theoretical framework for job crafting research and new perspectives for employee proactivity, career planning, and work stress research. The project's theoretical contributions and innovations include:

First, reintroducing self-identity into job crafting research deepens theoretical depth. Although job crafting has become a popular topic, existing research has reduced it to a skill while ignoring the fundamental motivation of maintaining a positive, intact, and consistent self-identity. This project returns to the central theme of self-identity, suggesting that proactive behavior in adjusting work content and boundaries has deeper significance as identity work for coping with unknown changes. Viewing job crafting as a self-construction process rather than merely a skill significantly expands the theoretical depth of this domain. As a response to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), this model also suggests that job crafting outcomes extend beyond work states and efficiency to include self-growth, broadening the scope of empirical investigation.

Second, this project is the first to propose the dual-pathway perspective of self-crafting, integrating job crafting and leisure crafting to transcend workplace boundaries and comprehensively examine self-construction processes and outcomes. Both forms share the fundamental motivation and goal of constructing a stable, clear self-identity. However, existing job crafting research has fixed its boundaries within the workplace. For working adults, work and leisure contexts are sometimes indistinguishable and often influence or complement each other. Examining both crafting behaviors simultaneously from this new perspective can comprehensively reveal the processes, outcomes, and mechanisms of identity work.

Finally, this project is the first to conduct behavioral interventions on self-crafting from a self-identity perspective. Most job crafting interventions focus on skill development, such as rearranging tasks, acquiring resources, reducing hindrances, or improving interpersonal interactions. This project starts from the source of motivation for self-crafting, prompting trainees to engage in self-construction to cope with work and life matters, promising more profound and lasting effects.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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