

Job Crafting

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Have you ever noticed something like this going on at work?

It's now about six months since the arrival of a new Program Office Administrator, and the focus of the job has changed subtly. The previous post-holder, Rebecca, did a great job, using her competence in finance to develop new procedures for checking the monthly financial reports for all of the projects in the program.

Her successor, Stephen, however, has a particular flair for graphic design. He's now enhancing the different progress reports to make key information stand out more effectively. Overall, though, they've both been really good performers, making a big contribution to the efficiency and organization of the team.

So, what's going on? The answer is that both Rebecca and Stephen have been using the concept of job crafting. The idea here is that many jobs are actually quite flexible, meaning that their focus can be adjusted to fit the skills and preferences of the current job-holder. By subtly redesigning your job like this, you can play to your strengths, improving both satisfaction and performance. You shift the emphasis of the job towards things that you can do really well, and away from those where your performance is likely to be weaker.

Job crafting may seem like a simple idea, but what makes it a really powerful tool is that it allows you to increase the control you have over your own professional life, while "wowing" your employer at the same time. Practically any job can be crafted, at least to some extent, and you can start whenever you want, without necessarily consulting managers or having to wait for their approval.

How to Start Crafting Your Job Today

To "craft your job", follow these steps:

1. Decide what you want to change.
2. Evaluate how the change will impact you and your work environment.
3. Act to put positive change in place.
4. Check on progress, adjust and continue.

Let's look at each of these steps in more detail.

Step 1: Decide What You Want to Change by Crafting Your Job

You can make changes in one or more of the following areas to craft the way you work, so that it's closer to your "ideal" job.

- **Task content:** This involves improving the way that things are done, using skills that you already have; or using your knowledge to change working methods, so that you can generate better results. The ways that that Rebecca and Stephen crafted their work as Program Office Administrators fell into this category.

In short, it's about creating opportunities to play to your strengths. (If you're not sure what your strengths are, use the [Reflected Best Self™](#) exercise to explore them.)

- **Relationships:** Here, you might look for ways to have more satisfying interactions with other people during the course of your work each day. In our example, Stephen might volunteer to mentor new hires.
- **Purpose:** You can also redefine your existing work to reflect what you see as being the real impact of what you do at work. For example, a programmer working in the IT department of an airline could reframe his or her work from "writing code" to "helping people enjoy trouble-free travel". For more on this, read our article on [Creating Job Satisfaction](#).

Adapted from Wrzesniewski, A. and Dutton, J.E. (2001) 'Crafting a Job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of Their Work,' *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2001, 179-201.

Note:

Crafting job purpose doesn't involve any actual changes in the content of your work, and while this can certainly add to your enjoyment of your work, it won't help you to expand your skills or affect your output greatly. So look for things you could change in the first two categories to get the most out of job crafting.

Step 2: Evaluate How Crafting Your Job Will Impact You and Your Environment

Next, you need to assess the potential impact of these possible changes on your wider work environment. Here, you should take into account your clients, your colleagues, your supervisor or manager, and the organization as a whole.

Remember that effective job crafting usually depends on finding a win-win solution. For example, you may have significant experience in using your organization's internal accounting system. You could volunteer to train new-hires on the system, or provide updates on system changes for your colleagues. What **you** get out this could be simple enjoyment because you enjoy teaching people things, or a boost to your own self-esteem, or more interaction with people from other departments. What your **organization** gets from this is a better-trained, more effective workforce.

Avoid any temptation to turn a job crafting exercise into a win-lose situation. For example, if you dislike having meetings with your supervisor, you might be tempted to craft your job so that you spend more time in the test lab, where she's less likely to find you! You might achieve your

short-term goal of avoiding these meetings, but the overall impact may well be negative.

So make sure you're headed for a mutually beneficial outcome, or at least that your job crafting is compatible with your work environment. If this isn't the case, go back to **Step 1**, and see if other job crafting changes might work better!

Also, if you have any managerial responsibilities, you need to take them into account when you consider any job crafting. When you have a number of other people to supervise, even small changes in how you work can have significant effects on the people who depend on you.

Step 3: Act to Put Positive Job Crafting Change in Place

At this stage, the key is to get rid of any symptom of what psychologists call "learned helplessness". This is the phenomenon whereby people have become so accustomed to indifference to their contributions that they believe that no matter what they do, nothing will come of it.

Job crafting gives you the chance to turn this situation around. By refocusing your job in this way, **you** decide what's going to make you feel better valued and more productive, and **you** decide to make the necessary changes. The only condition is that your decisions must have positive outcomes for your organization, as mentioned in Step 2.

Step 4: Check on Your Job Crafting Progress, Adjust and Continue

Having gone through Steps 1, 2 and 3 above, it's time to put your job crafting into practice, check that it gives you what you want; ensure that your boss and clients are happy with what's going on; and make sure that it really is compatible with your wider work environment. If everything checks out, and you feel good about what's happening, you can let your changes become a habit.

What Job Crafting Can Do for You

The benefits of job crafting can include:

- Giving you greater enjoyment from what you do at work.
- Helping you approach your work with more energy and enthusiasm.
- Encouraging real personal development by improving skills.

And of course, perfecting the skill of job crafting can, in itself, lead to career enhancement opportunities.

Tip 1:

You can always ask your manager's opinion about how you're crafting your job. But don't wait for, or expect, managerial input or approval before you start. In job crafting, you take the initiative!

Tip 2:

Don't expect to be able to redefine your job completely. After all, your employer wanted someone to carry out your duties, and you accepted that when you were hired! Make absolutely sure that, within your recrafted job, you're fully meeting the objectives you've been set.

Tip 3:

For pointers on how you might set about job crafting, compare notes with other colleagues who are appreciated at work and who clearly enjoy their jobs. By categorizing their experiences according to the list in Step 1, you may uncover some interesting ideas, and so find out what might also work for you.

Key Points

Job crafting is something that you decide to do, in order to change aspects of your current job, so that it suits you better. There are four basic steps: you decide what you want to change, you look for a win-win solution, you put the changes into practice, and then, having checked they're having a positive effect, you make sure they become a habit.

An important element of successful job crafting is that it's you who takes the initiative: you don't need to wait for your manager or supervisor to give you instructions. The benefits you can get from crafting your job include boosting results, increasing enjoyment, building skills and increasing your general ability to cope with your work. Start crafting today!

The Center for Positive Organizations (POS) at the University of Michigan has a useful [Job Crafting Exercise](#). This is a template that you can buy on-line to help you apply the ideas discussed here.