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To craft or not to craft: The relationships between regulatory focus, job crafting and work outcomes

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To craft or not to craft

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The relationships between regulatory focus, job crafting and work outcomes

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147

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine relationships between regulatory focus, job crafting, work engagement and perceived employability. Regulatory focus theory distinguishes between promotion-focused individuals, who strive for growth and development, and prevention-focused individuals, who strive for security. Job crafting refers to changes that individuals make in their work to meet their own preferences and needs. It was expected that job crafting would mediate associations between promotion focus and work-related outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – Questionnaires were collected among 383 registered candidates from a consultancy organization for recruitment, assessment and coaching that operates within the branches pharmacy, medical devices, food, and healthcare. Results were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings – Crafting structural and social resources were positively related to work engagement and employability, whereas negative relationships were found for crafting hindering demands. Promotion focus was associated with crafting resources and challenging demands, while prevention focus was associated with crafting hindering demands. Job crafting also mediated some of the relationships between promotion focus, prevention focus and work outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – This study provided insight into possible antecedents and outcomes of job crafting. Unfortunately, this study used a cross-sectional design.

Practical implications – These insights may help managers to encourage beneficial job crafting behaviors, while taking individuals' foci into account.

Originality/value – This study has provided insight in the relationships between regulatory focus, job crafting, work engagement, and perceived employability.

Keywords Employability, Job crafting, Relationships, Regulatory focus, Work engagement, Promotion-focused

Paper type Research paper

Organizations are nowadays operating in a changing environment. Global, economic and technological developments and competitive pressure force organizations to continually adapt to their environment (Cummings and Worley, 2009). These developments have implications for employees' job design. Traditionally, job design represents a top-down process in which managers are responsible for structuring and modifying employees' jobs (see Grant and Parker, 2009). This approach is being criticized for not taking the changes in work contexts and the growing complexity of jobs into account. Grant and Parker (2009) suggest that management in organizations can no longer design fixed and static jobs, but would rather need flexible jobs. In these jobs employees would be able to change and develop tasks and roles proactively, allowing them to respond to demands and opportunities.



The authors are grateful to Derks & Derks, a consultancy organization for recruitment, assessment and coaching, for giving us the opportunity to conduct research in their network of candidates.

A specific form of proactive behavior is job crafting, whereby individuals make changes in their work to meet their own preferences and needs, within the context of defined jobs (Tims *et al.*, 2013). The goal of the present study is to examine job crafting in relationship to antecedents and outcomes. One of the possible antecedents of job crafting is regulatory focus, as proposed by Tims and Bakker (2010). Regulatory focus refers to a fundamental motivational principle that determines what goals individuals set and how they try to reach their goals (Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory proposes that individuals can have a promotion focus, which refers to an orientation toward aspirations and accomplishments, and/or a prevention focus, which refers to an orientation toward responsibilities and safety (Higgins, 1997). As regulatory focus concerns individuals' fundamental needs and goals and is considered relevant for individuals' behavior at work (see Brockner and Higgins, 2001), it can be expected to influence the way in which individuals craft their job. As such, this study may provide insight into the individual characteristics that make individuals more or less inclined to engage in different forms of job crafting. Furthermore, this study addresses the mediating role of job crafting in the relationships between regulatory focus on the one hand and work engagement and perceived employability on the other hand. By examining these associations, this study will provide more insight into the relevance of job crafting and regulatory focus for employee well-being and career development. To our knowledge, research on these relationships is still relatively scarce.

Job crafting

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 179) introduced the concept of job crafting, which they defined as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries in their work." Physical changes in task boundaries refer to changing the number or form of job activities, whereas cognitive changes in task boundaries point to altering how one sees the job. Changing relational boundaries refers to changing how often and with whom one interacts at work. The core characteristic of job crafting is that employees alter job characteristics on their own initiative (Peeters *et al.*, 2013). Because it is difficult for organizations to create optimal job designs, job crafting is a way to accommodate employees' unique backgrounds, motives and preferences (Peeters *et al.*, 2013). Petrou *et al.* (2012) underline that individuals craft their jobs to create healthy and motivating working conditions. Job crafting may eventually affect the meaning of one's work and one's work identity (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and is considered an important mechanism for career advancement (Tims *et al.*, 2012).

Tims and Bakker (2010) framed job crafting in the context of the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). This model assumes that all job characteristics in a work environment can be categorized in job demands, "physical and psychological aspects of the job that require sustained effort or skills and therefore are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs", or job resources, "physical and psychological aspects of the job that either/or may be functional in achieving work goals, may reduce job demands and the associated costs and may stimulate personal growth and development" (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). The JD-R model proposes two psychological processes that determine employee well-being and performance. The health impairment process refers to the occurrence of job strain through the exposure to job demands, causing a depletion of energy and eventually resulting in health problems. The motivational process refers to the motivational

role that job resources have, leading to the experience of work engagement and stimulating individual growth and achievement.

In the current study job crafting is defined as “the changes that employees may make to balance their job demands and job resources with their personal abilities and needs” (Tims *et al.*, 2012, p. 174). In their definition of job crafting, Tims *et al.* (2012) distinguish between four job crafting dimensions: increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands. Structural job resources refer to design aspects, such as opportunities for autonomy and development, whereas social job resources refer to social aspects of the job, such as support and feedback from colleagues (Tims *et al.*, 2012). Challenging demands are demands that promote personal growth and stimulate individuals to reach difficult goals (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Finally, hindering job demands are stressful demands that barriers personal growth, learning and reaching goals. Employees may decrease their job demands when they perceive them as overwhelming or if they are unwilling to accomplish these demands (Tims *et al.*, 2012).

To craft or
not to craft

Job crafting and work engagement

A positive outcome of job crafting is work engagement (Tims *et al.*, 2012). Work engagement has been defined as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006, p. 702). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience. Dedication can be characterized as involvement in, and commitment to, one’s work. The third dimension, absorption, refers to concentration on and immersion in work, and the difficulty to detach oneself from work.

Several studies have reported positive associations between job resources and work engagement (e.g. Bakker *et al.*, 2007; Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Bakker *et al.* (2007) suggest that job resources have an intrinsic motivational role by facilitating learning and personal development, and have an extrinsic motivational role by providing instrumental help for the achievement of work goals. Tims *et al.* (2013) reported that crafting structural and social job resources had a positive relationship with employee well-being, including high work engagement. Taken together, these studies give empirical and theoretical support for the relationship between crafting job resources and work engagement.

Challenging demands have also been associated with higher work engagement (e.g. Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Challenging demands trigger positive emotions and an active coping style (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Employees who respond to challenging job demands feel more engaged, because they are stimulated to use their skills and abilities, and view these challenges as leading to personal growth and satisfaction with the job (Berg *et al.*, 2008). Challenging job demands also motivate employees to reach difficult goals, even though these goals require more effort (Tims *et al.*, 2012). Petrou *et al.* (2012) and Tims *et al.* (2013) both reported a positive relationship between crafting challenging job demands and work engagement.

Hindering job demands can harm personal growth and tend to trigger negative emotions and passive or emotion-focussed coping styles (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, these job demands are negatively related to work engagement (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Tims *et al.* (2013) suggest that reducing hindering job demands could protect and increase employees’ well-being and reduce their level of burnout. However, a study of Petrou *et al.* (2012) reports a negative relationship between crafting hindering job demands and work engagement. Minimizing the emotional, mental or

physical workload can decrease the optimal level of challenge, which may result in a less stimulating environment and lower one's work engagement (Petrout *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, decreasing hindering job demands is related to withdrawing from work and cynicism (Tims *et al.*, 2013). Cynicism is one of the core dimensions of burnout and the opposite of the dedication dimension of work engagement (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, a negative relationship between crafting hindering job demands and work engagement is expected. Based on the propositions of the JD-R model and research outcomes described above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a. Crafting structural job resources, social job resources and challenging job demands have a positive relationship with work engagement.

H1b. Crafting hindering job demands has a negative relationship with work engagement.

Job crafting and employability

Employability has been defined in variety of ways, often including multiple individual attitudes or competencies, such as using one's competencies or learning new skills (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007). To avoid confounding employability with these individual attitudes and competencies, the current study follows the conceptualization of De Cuyper and De Witte (2008), who define employability as the perception of individuals concerning their opportunity for employment. In this conceptualization, two aspects are included: the opportunity for employment inside vs outside an organization (i.e. internal vs external employability) and the opportunity for better vs other employment (i.e. qualitative vs quantitative employability).

Nowadays, career and personal development of employees is considered to depend more and more upon the investments and initiatives of the employee (Boselie, 2010). Careers within the context of a limited number of organizations have been replaced by boundaryless careers within the context of multiple organizations (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Employees view organizations as places where skills can be used and developed, and no longer as communities of lifelong employment (Grant and Parker, 2009). Van der Heijden (2002) argues that continuous development of individuals in their job enables individuals to make optimal use of their qualities and capabilities, and may in this way increase their employability.

As personal initiative becomes more important for career development, job crafting can be expected to contribute to individuals' employability. Fugate *et al.* (2004) argue that the ability of individuals to adapt and change proactively is associated with employability. Job crafting has indeed been proposed as an effective mechanism for career advancement (Tims *et al.*, 2013). When individuals increase their structural and social resources and challenging demands, they may perceive this as helpful for their chances to keep their employment or obtain better employment. Crafting hindering demands, however, could lead to less positive perceptions of one's career options. Tims *et al.* (2012) suggest that by crafting hindering job demands, employees show implicitly that they are unable to fulfill the demands in their job. Crafting hindering demands may therefore be perceived as lowering one's chances to keep employment or obtain better employment. Based on the research findings and reasoning presented above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H2a. Crafting structural job resources, social job resources and challenging job demands have a positive relationship with perceived employability.

H2b. Crafting hindering job demands has a negative relationship with perceived employability.

Regulatory focus and job crafting

One of the possible antecedents of job crafting is regulatory focus. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) distinguishes between two separate and independent self-regulatory orientations that are fundamental to human behavior: promotion and prevention focus. Individuals with a promotion focus strive for growth and development and aim to maximize positive outcomes, whereas individuals with a prevention focus strive for safety and security and aim to minimize negative outcomes. Furthermore, promotion-focussed people aim to reach goals related to their ideal self, referring to their hopes, wishes and aspirations, while prevention-focussed people aim to fulfill goals related to their ought self, referring to their duties, obligations and responsibilities (Higgins, 1997). It is important to note that promotion and prevention focus are considered orthogonal constructs (Higgins, 1997). Hence, individuals can score high on one focus but not on the other, on both foci, or on neither. Regulatory focus has been related to a variety of behaviors, such as decision-making (Liberman *et al.*, 1999), risk-taking (Hamstra *et al.*, 2011), and stereotype threat (Ståhl *et al.*, 2012).

In the field of Work and Organizational Psychology, the concept of regulatory focus may have important implications (see Brockner and Higgins, 2001). Brockner and Higgins describe the relevance of regulatory focus theory for a variety of emotions and behaviors at the workplace, and plead for more research on regulatory focus in the field of Work and Organizational Psychology. In line with this suggestion, the concept of regulatory focus has been applied to issues like organizational citizenship behavior (Dewett and Denisi, 2007), leadership processes (Kark and Van Dijk, 2007), and resistance to change (Tseng and Kang, 2008). Bakker and colleagues (Bakker *et al.*, 2008) regard self-regulatory processes as important contributors to employee work engagement.

Tims and Bakker (2010) suggest that regulatory focus may be a possible antecedent of job crafting. The authors assume that individuals with a promotion focus may be more likely to change aspects of a job in order to be more satisfied and effective. Promotion-focussed people are more open to change compared with prevention-focussed people (Liberman *et al.*, 1999). An opportunity for change has the benefit of providing advancement and accomplishment, but also entails the risk of failure. Individuals with a promotion focus will take the opportunity to change, whereas individuals with a prevention focus will rather not take a risk, in order to maintain safety and security. However, it can be argued that the relationship between promotion focus and job crafting will depend on the specific form of job crafting.

In general, promotion-focused individuals tend to be alert to positive outcomes and seek for possibilities that are relevant for attaining success and personal growth (Higgins, 1997). As mentioned above, job resources can be functional in achieving work goals and stimulate personal growth, learning and development (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). For instance, by asking feedback and help from one's supervisor, individuals may be better able to learn and to develop themselves. Similarly, by creating autonomy, individuals may be able to experiment and to choose for methods that work best for them, which may eventually contribute to their performance and personal growth. Since promotion-focussed people aim to grow and develop themselves, it is expected that they will be more inclined to increase their structural and social job resources. It is also likely they want to take hold of and increase their challenging job demands, such as taking on extra responsibilities, to meet their needs and goals for growth and advancement. For the same reason it is less likely that individuals with a promotion focus will decrease their hindering job demands. By diminishing hindering demands, opportunities for growth

and development that could result from the mastery of these demands might be reduced. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3a. Promotion focus has a positive relationship with crafting social job resources, structural job resources and challenging job demands.

H3b. Promotion focus has a negative relationship with crafting hindering job demands.

Individuals with a prevention focus tend to be alert to negative outcomes, such as failures (Higgins, 1997). Prevention-focussed people may respond actively to job demands when these demands barrier the fulfillment of their obligations. When feeling overwhelmed by these hindering job demands, it is possible that they will decrease these demands to obtain safety and stability. On the other hand, according to Liberman *et al.* (1999) it would be less likely that prevention-focussed individuals will take the opportunity to change. Furthermore, prevention-focussed individuals probably feel responsible for filling their duties, and this may include duties that arise from hindering job demands. Because of the multiple ways prevention focus could relate to crafting hindering demands, this relationship was examined exploratively. We also explored the relationships between prevention focus and the other three forms of job crafting.

Mediation effects

It is likely that a promotion focus, by influencing job crafting, may eventually lead to work engagement and perceived employability. Previous research indicated that individuals with a strong promotion focus were more engaged in their work, that they experienced more affective commitment, and were more satisfied with their job (Brenninkmeijer *et al.*, 2010). Brenninkmeijer *et al.* suggested that regulatory focus, by influencing employee well-being and motivation, could also be relevant for individuals' career development. Job crafting could be a mechanism that explains why individuals with a promotion focus score higher on work engagement and perceived employability. As explained above, these individuals may be more inclined to raise their job resources and challenging job demands, which may eventually affect their work engagement and perceived employability. As they are less inclined to diminishing hindering job demands, they may increase their opportunities for experiencing work engagement and gaining confidence in their chances on the labor market, as described above. Hence, promotion focus may be associated with stronger work engagement and perceived employability through positive associations with crafting structural resources, social resources, and challenging demands, and through a negative association with crafting hindering demands. We therefore expected that all forms of job crafting could act as mediating factors between promotion focus, work engagement and perceived employability, leading to the following hypotheses:

H4a. Job crafting mediates the relationship between promotion focus and work engagement.

H4b. Job crafting mediates the relationship between promotion focus and perceived employability.

Method

Participants and procedure

Data were collected among candidates from a Dutch consultancy organization for recruitment, assessment and coaching. This company operates within the branches

pharmacy, medical devices, food and health care, and focuses on higher educated professionals. Participants were first approached via e-mail and the company's web site with a newsletter that contained an introduction to the study. This briefing explained the purpose of the study and emphasized the anonymity and confidentiality of the results. A week later a second e-mail was sent, which contained a link to an online survey. The link was also spread via other channels, such as LinkedIn.

A total of 162 women (42.3 percent) and 221 men (57.7 percent) participated in the study. The average age of the participants ranged from 18 to 70 years ($M = 44.9$, $SD = 9.29$). Participants mostly had higher vocational education (38.6 percent) or university education (52.2 percent). Some of the participants were entrepreneur (13.3 percent). No large differences were found between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs. Therefore, the group of entrepreneurs was not removed from the current study. Table I shows the branches in which the participants were employed.

Measures

Job crafting was measured with the 21-item job crafting scale developed by Tims *et al.* (2012). The scale encompasses four dimensions, including structural job resources (five items, $\alpha = 0.71$, e.g. "I try to learn new things at work"), social job resources (five items, $\alpha = 0.78$, e.g. "I ask others for feedback on my job performance"), challenging job demands (five items, $\alpha = 0.69$, e.g. "When there is not much to do at work, I see it as a chance to start new projects"), and hindering job demands (six items, $\alpha = 0.73$, e.g. "I make sure that my work is mentally less intense"). Participants could respond to these statements on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "never" (1) to "often" (5). A principal component analysis showed that five components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 54.46 percent of the variance. The screen plot indicated that the slope of the curve leveled out after four factors. Therefore, four factors were specified to extract. These four factors explained 49.62 percent of the variance. The Rotated Component Matrix showed that all items had significant loadings on the intended factors, except for two items of the dimensions concerning structural job resources and challenging job demands. After removal of these items, all items had significant loadings on the intended factors with a total explained variance of 51.55 percent. Cronbach's α increased for structural job resources ($\alpha = 0.74$), but decreased for challenging job demands ($\alpha = 0.66$).

Regulatory focus was assessed with the work regulatory focus scale, developed by Neubert *et al.* (2008). The scale consisted of two dimensions: promotion focus (nine items, $\alpha = 0.82$, e.g. "I take chances at work to maximize my goals for advancement") and prevention focus (nine items, $\alpha = 0.84$, e.g. "I do everything I can to avoid loss at work"). Participants could respond to these items on 6-point Likert scale that ranged from "never" (1) to "always" (6).

Branch	% of the participants
Food industry	9.2
Pharmacy/biotechnology industry	43.0
Medical devices/laboratorial supplies	13.0
Health care	11.1
Other	23.7

Table I.
Branches in which
the participants
are working

Work engagement was measured with the 9-item version of the utrecht work engagement scale (UWES; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). The UWES assesses the three dimensions of work engagement: vigor ($\alpha = 0.88$, e.g. "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"), dedication ($\alpha = 0.92$, e.g. "I am enthusiastic about my job") and absorption ($\alpha = 0.82$, e.g. "I am immersed in my work"). The scale uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (0) to "always" (6). Cronbach's α of the total scale was 0.93.

Perceived employability was measured with a Dutch version of the eight-item scale of De Cuyper and De Witte (2008), composed by Akkermans *et al.* (2013). This scale consists of two dimensions that lead to the following four factors: internal qualitative employability, external qualitative employability, internal quantitative employability, and external qualitative employability. The scale consists of a five-point Likert scale ranged from "totally disagree" to "totally agree." A sample item of this scale is: "I could find a different, better, job if I would want to." Cronbach's α for the total scale was 0.80.

Statistical analysis

We performed structural equation modeling (SEM) using the Mplus computer program to test our hypotheses (Muthén and Muthén, 2010). All variables were included as endogenous observed variables. We tested a meditational model that includes structural paths from promotion focus and prevention focus to the job crafting scales, work engagement, and employability, and from the job crafting scales to work engagement and employability. The model also allows for correlations between promotion focus and prevention focus, between the job crafting scales, and between work engagement and employability. To assess the significance of the indirect effects, we performed bootstrapping over 5,000 samples and computed 95 percent confidence intervals for the estimates (Shrout and Bolger, 2002). As our meditational model is a saturated model, we focused on the significance of the direct and indirect paths in our model, instead of model fit.

Results

Correlational analyses

Table II displays the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables. The job crafting scales and promotion focus were, in most cases, significantly correlated with the outcome measures work engagement and perceived employability.

Direct effects

Our SEM analyses yielded a number of significant direct effects. An overview of all significant structural paths can be found in Figure 1.

Work engagement was positively associated with crafting structural resources ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$), crafting social resources ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$), but not with crafting challenging demands ($\beta = 0.10$, ns). We predicted that crafting structural job resources, social job resources and challenging job demands would have a positive relationship with work engagement (*H1a*). *H1a* was therefore confirmed for crafting structural and social job resources. In line with *H1b*, work engagement was negatively associated with crafting hindering demands ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$).

The results concerning employability showed a similar pattern. Employability was positively associated with crafting structural resources ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$), crafting social resources ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$), but not with crafting challenging demands

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Crafting structural resources	3.74	0.62	0.42**	0.50**	-0.05	0.40**	0.06	0.48**	0.25**
2. Crafting social resources	2.65	0.69		0.38**	0.11*	0.29**	0.06	0.32**	0.28**
3. Crafting challenging demands	3.16	0.72			-0.05	0.39**	0.01	0.35**	0.20**
4. Crafting hindering demands	1.82	0.51				0.02	0.19**	-0.20**	-0.06
5. Promotion focus	4.27	0.69					0.14**	0.23**	0.24**
6. Prevention focus	4.03	0.80						0.02	-0.06
7. Work engagement	4.85	1.03							0.30**
8. Perceived employability	3.23	0.65							

Notes: *n* = 383. **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01

To craft or
not to craft

Table II.
Means, standard
deviations and
intercorrelations
between the study
variables

($\beta = 0.02$, ns). *H2a* was therefore confirmed for crafting structural and social job resources. In line with *H2b*, employability was negatively associated with crafting hindering demands ($\beta = -0.07$, $p < 0.01$).

We found positive associations between promotion focus and crafting structural resources ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), crafting social resources ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), crafting challenges ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), in line with *H3a*. The association between crafting hindering demands and promotion focus was not significant ($\beta = -0.01$, ns). *H3b*, which stated that crafting hindering demands would have a negative relationship with promotion focus, was therefore not supported. Prevention focus was only associated with crafting hindering demands ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$).

The direct effects of promotion and prevention focus on work engagement were not significant for work engagement ($\beta = 0.01$ and 0.02 , respectively, ns). Promotion and prevention focus did have significant direct effects on employability ($\beta = 0.15$ and -0.09 , respectively, $p < 0.05$) (Figure 1).

Indirect effects

In *H4a* it was expected that the relationship between promotion focus and work engagement would be mediated by job crafting. An overview of the indirect effects on work engagement can be found in Table III. For the relationship between promotion focus and work engagement, the indirect effects were significant for crafting structural and social resources (standardized specific indirect effect = 0.14 , $p < 0.01$, and 0.04 , $p < 0.05$, respectively). *H4a* was therefore confirmed for crafting structural and social resources.

H4b predicted that the relationship between promotion focus and perceived employability would be mediated by job crafting. The indirect effects on employability can be found in Table IV. Crafting structural resources and crafting social resources mediated in the relationship between promotion focus and employability (standardized specific indirect effect = 0.04 , and 0.06 , respectively, $p < 0.05$, respectively). *H4b* was therefore partly confirmed. Crafting hindering demands mediated the relationship between prevention focus and employability (standardized specific indirect effect = -0.01 , $p < 0.05$).

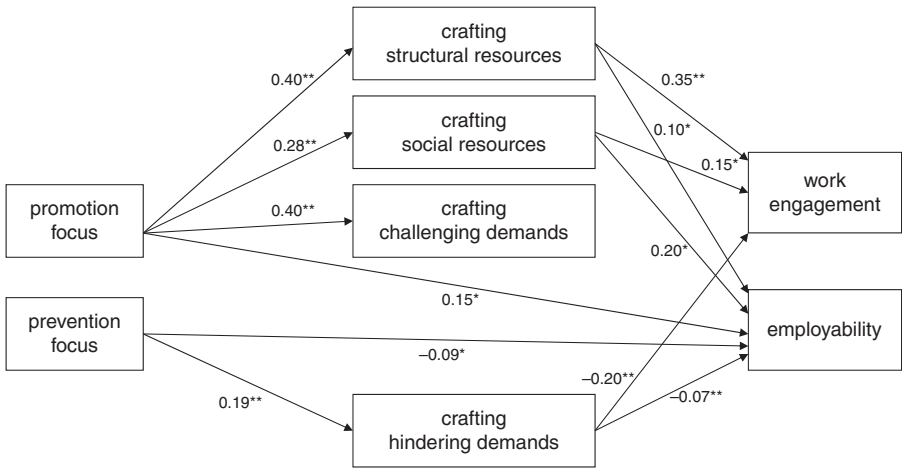


Figure 1.
Significant structural
paths

Notes: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

Table III.
Standardized specific
indirect effects with
work engagement as
dependent variable

Independent variable	Mediator	Estimate	SE	95% confidence interval
<i>Promotion focus</i>				
	Crafting structural resources	0.14**	0.02	[0.109, 0.171]
	Crafting social resources	0.04*	0.02	[0.001, 0.085]
	Crafting challenging demands	0.04	0.03	[−0.010, 0.093]
	Crafting hindering demands	0.00	0.01	[−0.010, 0.012]
<i>Prevention focus</i>				
	Crafting structural resources	0.00	0.03	[−0.052, 0.056]
	Crafting social resources	0.00	0.02	[−0.032, 0.037]
	Crafting challenging demands	−0.01	0.00	[−0.012, 0.003]
	Crafting hindering demands	−0.04	0.02	[−0.080, 0.006]

Notes: $n = 383$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table IV.
Standardized specific
indirect effects
employability as
dependent variable

Independent variable	Mediator	Estimate	SE	95% confidence interval
<i>Promotion focus</i>				
	Crafting structural resources	0.04*	0.02	[0.002, 0.078]
	Crafting social resources	0.06*	0.03	[0.004, 0.111]
	Crafting challenging demands	0.01	0.03	[−0.047, 0.059]
	Crafting hindering demands	0.00	0.00	[−0.002, 0.003]
<i>Prevention focus</i>				
	Crafting structural resources	0.00	0.01	[−0.018, 0.019]
	Crafting social resources	0.00	0.02	[−0.034, 0.040]
	Crafting challenging demands	0.00	0.00	[−0.008, 0.007]
	Crafting hindering demands	−0.01*	0.01	[−0.023, −0.001]

Notes: $n = 383$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the associations between regulatory focus, job crafting, work engagement, and perceived employability. These relationships were assessed in a sample of 383 candidates from a consultancy bureau for recruitment and selection, assessment, and coaching that operates within the branches pharmacy, medical devices, food, and healthcare.

Job crafting, work engagement, and perceived employability

We expected that crafting job resources and challenging job demands would be positively related to work engagement. The results from our analyses using SEM confirmed these expectations for crafting structural and social job resources. This suggests that it is important for employees to craft social and structural job resources in order to increase their experience of work engagement. Especially crafting structural job resources, such as opportunities for autonomy and development, appeared to have a positive association with work engagement. By crafting structural job resources individuals may be better able to use their skills and abilities, resulting in more work engagement (Tims *et al.*, 2012). The association between crafting challenging job demands and work engagement was not significant, although it did reach significance in the correlation matrix ($r = 0.35$). It is likely that shared variance in the job crafting

scales could account for the non-significant contribution of crafting challenging demands. The expectation that crafting hindering job demands would be negatively related to work engagement was confirmed. This result corresponds with previous research of Petrou *et al.* (2012), who suggest that decreasing job demands lowers motivational outcomes at work.

We also found positive associations between crafting structural and social job resources and perceived employability. To remain employable, it is therefore important for employees to learn new skills, to use their capacities to the fullest, and to ask colleagues and supervisors for advice and feedback (see also Tims *et al.*, 2012). Especially social job resources appeared to be relevant, which is in line with other studies that underline the importance of social networking to find a better or another job (e.g. Akkermans *et al.*, 2013). Again, we found no significant association for crafting challenging job demands, despite a significant correlation with perceived employability ($r = 0.20$). In line with our expectation, we found that crafting hindering demands was negatively related to employability.

Regulatory focus and job crafting

The current study confirms the expectation that promotion focus would be positively associated with crafting structural and social job resources and challenging job demands. This means that employees who score high on promotion focus are more likely to actively increase the resources and challenges in their job (see also Tims and Bakker, 2010). As promotion-focused individuals are motivated to bring themselves into alignment with their ideal selves (Brockner and Higgins, 2001), crafting job resources and challenges could be an effective mechanism to achieve these goals.

We also found that crafting structural and social job resources mediated the relationship between promotion focus and work engagement. Previous research indicated that individuals with a strong promotion focus were more engaged in their work (Brenninkmeijer *et al.*, 2010). The current study adds to the existing literature by clarifying the role of job crafting in this relationship. Crafting structural and social resources also mediated in the relationship between promotion focus and perceived employability. Hence, it seems that crafting job resources may help promotion-focused individuals to obtain more confidence in their career options as well.

Unlike expected, no evidence was observed for a negative association between promotion focus and crafting hindering job demands. However, we did find a positive relationship between prevention focus and crafting hindering job demands. Prevention focus also appeared to have an indirect negative association with employability through crafting hindering demands. The finding that prevention-focused individuals may take the opportunity to change hindering aspects of their job is in contrast with the assumption of Liberman *et al.* (1999) that these individuals would generally be less open for change. It could be that prevention-focused people lower hindering job demands that interfere with their perceived duties and obligations. They may also be more sensitive to job demands in general, and experience more health impairment from these demands, as has been reported by Brenninkmeijer *et al.* (2010), which urges them to reduce these demands. Our results suggest that reducing hindering demands may in turn lower individuals' perceptions of their employability.

Limitations of the current research

The findings reported should be interpreted against some limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study hinders cause and effect inferences. Reverse causality is

possible for all relationships that were found. A longitudinal study with a three-wave design could give more insight into the effects of regulatory focus and job crafting on employee well-being and the development of their career. Furthermore, such a design could include potential other mediators in the relationship between regulatory focus and work outcomes. Although we found several indirect effects of job crafting, some of these reported effects were quite modest, hinting at the relevance of other mediating variables.

A second limitation is that this study relied on self-report data, which could bias the results (Conway and Lance, 2010). Although it can be argued that personal constructs such as work engagement are difficult to assess with objective measures (see Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007) and although associations between self-report measures are not necessarily upwardly biased (Conway and Lance, 2010), future research could benefit from integrating more objective data. For instance, we would recommend including managers' or colleagues' opinion about individuals' employability.

A third limitation concerns our measurement of job crafting. Factor analyses indicated that two items of the job crafting scale should be removed from the scale. After the reduction of these items, the subscale of crafting challenging job demands had a Cronbach's α of 0.66, which is lower than the recommended level of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Future research could be conducted to further improve the factorial validity and reliability of measures for assessing job crafting. Future studies may also want to address the more cognitive aspects of job crafting, following the conceptualization proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001).

Finally, future research could examine the generalizability of our results to other groups of workers. The majority of the participants of the present study was highly educated, and may consequently have been more inclined to craft their jobs (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). It would therefore be interesting to include lower or intermediate educated workers in future research. Furthermore, a large percentage of the sample was deployed in the pharmacy or biotechnological industry. These branches have a highly regulated work environment, which may affect the opportunity for job crafting (see Tims and Bakker, 2010). Future research could examine job crafting, in relation to regulatory focus and outcome variables, within other work settings.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study adds to the existing literature concerning the consequences of job crafting. By demonstrating positive relationships between work engagement and crafting job resources, results of previous research are confirmed (Tims *et al.*, 2013; Crawford *et al.*, 2010). The finding that crafting hindering job demands is negatively associated with work engagement may contribute to theorizing about this specific form of job crafting in relation to work outcomes (Tims *et al.*, 2013; Petrou *et al.*, 2012). By pointing toward the relevance of crafting job resources for individuals' employability, this study may contribute to the literature concerning career development as well.

This study also provides insights in the relationships between job crafting and regulatory focus. Depending on individuals' regulatory focus, individuals may be more or less inclined to engage in different forms of job crafting. These findings underline the relevance of self-regulatory inclinations for job crafting. Furthermore, the mediating effects of job crafting may have implications for theories about the impact of individuals' regulatory focus on employee well-being and career development (Brenninkmeijer *et al.*, 2010).

Our results suggest that it is important for managers to provide opportunities and to stimulate employees to craft their structural and social job resources, in order to foster employee engagement. Crafting resources may also enhance employees' confidence in their employability. Furthermore, managers should be aware of the potentially negative effects of crafting hindering job demands on employee engagement and employability. Lastly, the current study suggests that stimulating job crafting with respect to job resources and challenges may be particularly relevant for individuals with a low promotion focus, as they are less inclined to engage in these behaviors by themselves.

Conclusion

The present study has extended our insights in the relationships between regulatory focus, job crafting, work engagement, and perceived employability. The results suggest that crafting job resources can be effective mechanisms for employees to increase their engagement and employability, whereas crafting hindering job demands may have unfavorable effects on these outcomes. Moreover, depending on individuals' regulatory focus, individuals may be more or less inclined to engage in different forms of job crafting. These insights may help managers to encourage beneficial job crafting behaviors, while taking individuals' foci into account. After all, job crafting is a promising opportunity for organizations to foster work engagement and career development.

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Further reading

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