



Research on Job Crafting of Front-Line Service Employees Scale Development and Model Construction

Yan Chen¹, Yuhang Wang^{2*}

¹ School of Business, Macau university of science and technology, Macau, China

² Department of electronic information, Zhuhai College of Jilin University, Guangdong Province, China

* Corresponding author: 135137115@qq.com

Abstract. The research on job crafting will help managers to have a deep understanding of the logical relationship between employees and organizations, and also help improve employees' job satisfaction and commitment, so that they can gain more meaning in their work. Bottom-up job crafting and top-down organizational design complement each other and help enhance employees' job adaptability. For the service industry, front-line service employees are located at the customer interface of the enterprise organization and represent the organization to the customer, playing a key role in the service situation. Empirical evidence shows that to the extent that employees are able to provide high-quality service, customers are more likely to have a favorable evaluation of the service experience, experience higher satisfaction, and increase their purchase volume and frequency of future visits. Therefore, front-line service personnel are crucial to the success of the organization, and it is very important to understand the behavioral rules of job crafting and its influencing mechanism for improving the operational efficiency of the organization.

Keywords: job crafting, scale development, psychological empowerment, customer empowerment

1 Introduction

In reality, the service performance of front-line employees in the service industry shows great differences. Why do employees with excellent service performance maintain proactive service status in difficult working conditions? What causes differences in service performance among employees? Studies have shown that proactivity is a key factor affecting service performance, and scholars have called for more research on proactivity in the field of customer service. In the related research on initiative, job crafting is an important and hot concept, which has been proved to be an important method for employees to exert their own positive initiative to improve work experience and results. However, in the service industry, there is still a lack of research on the influencing mechanism of service performance from the perspective of job crafting (Boehnlein & Baum, 2022)[1].

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Job crafting emphasizes bottom-up, initiated by employees themselves, and even completing their own job redesign without the organization's knowledge, so as to gain more work meaning and work identity by changing the relational, task or cognitive boundaries of work. As an initiative behavior of employees, job crafting helps employees create the best conditions to better achieve the balance between work and personal preferences, needs and work (Irfan, Qadeer, Abdullah, & Sarfraz, 2023)[2].

This study studies the influencing factors and process of job crafting of front-line employees in the service industry. In view of the above shortcomings in the theoretical research on job crafting and service performance, this study focuses on the influencing factors of job crafting and its relationship with service performance. The research on job crafting will help managers to have a deep understanding of the logical relationship between employees and organizations, and also help improve employees' job satisfaction and commitment, so that they can gain more meaning in their work. Therefore, front-line service employees are crucial to the success of hotel organizations, and it is very important to understand the behavioral rules and influencing mechanisms of job crafting of this group to improve the operational efficiency of hotel organizations.

2 Research Hypothesis

Self-determination theory has been widely used in the field of management and organization and has far-reaching influence. Under the framework of self-determination theory, the existing literature has carried out research on the influencing factors and results of employees' basic psychological needs from the individual level, external environmental factors and other aspects. However, this theory also has some shortcomings. For example, in addition to autonomy, competence and relationship needs, human beings also have psychological needs such as growth, security, self-esteem and self-realization, which are not covered in the self-determination theory. Although the theory has some shortcomings, it is still worthy of further application and exploration due to its strong explanatory power on individual behavioral motivation.

Since the concept of job crafting was put forward in 2001, scholars have carried out a lot of research on its conceptual connotation, influencing factors and results, and the research results are rich (Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017; Zhang & Parker, 2019)[3][4]. As for the concept connotation of job crafting, it is generally believed that there are two most representative schools: the North American school and the European school. In recent years, the two schools have been integrated to develop the "approachable - avoidance job crafting" theory and the "interest-oriented advantage-oriented job crafting" theory. But the most common ones in empirical studies are still the North American and European schools.

Although the conceptual connotation of job crafting has developed into different schools, they capture similar concepts. No matter how they define job crafting, its essence is that employees actively change work boundaries from bottom to top to meet personal needs and gain work meaning, which represents employees' proactive behavior. What is different is that these schools approach job crafting from different perspec-

tives. As for the measurement of job crafting, predecessors have made different attempts to develop it. Later scholars made appropriate modifications and adjustments according to their own research needs. In terms of measurement, compared with the more exploration by foreign scholars, the relevant domestic research is in the development stage, and the research needs to be further enriched and deepened.

These studies have expanded and enriched the research on job design in the field of human resources and established an increasingly clear theoretical system and research map for job crafting. In addition, scholars are increasingly inclined to conduct refined exploration and integrated research on job crafting, forming different research schools. However, there are still some potential research gaps and problems to be filled.

Job crafting is most often described as a spontaneous behavior that represents the bottom-up change process that employees make at work to balance their job needs and job resources with their personal abilities and needs, And provide more meaning for their work (Oprea, Barzin, Virgă, Iliescu, & Rusu, 2019)[5]. When job crafting is embedded in JD-R theory, four dimensions of job crafting are distinguished (Dubbelt, Demerouti, & Rispens, 2019)[6]: Two focus on increasing work resources (increasing social work resources and increasing structural work resources), and two focus on work demands (increasing challenging work demands and reducing obstructive work demands). In addition to JD-R theory, there are various other theories and perspectives -- enterprise-versus-avoidance oriented shaping, enhancement versus-prevention forging, and optimization needs-versus-development shaping has been used to examine job crafting (Bindl, Unsworth, Gibson, & Stride, 2019)[7].

Zhang & Parker (2019)[4] reviewed the job crafting literature and proposed that the motivation of making behavior is either problem-centered or improvement-oriented goals (i.e., aggressive crafting), or avoidance and preventions-oriented goals (i.e., avoidance crafting). These orientations will then be translated into behavioral or cognitive changes in the job demands, resources of employees at work. No matter how different the manifestations and characteristics of job shaping in the literature, the essence is the active agency of employees in modifying (adding or reducing) work, which may involve managing behavior or the physical environment. Three meta-analyses quantitatively summarized the antecedents of job crafting: job crafting is constrained by personal personality (e.g., proactive personality) and work environment (e.g., job design, human resource management practices, leadership, job requirements) (Lichtenhaler & Fischbach, 2019)[8].

However, some studies have failed to demonstrate this relationship (Pindek, Krajcevska, & Spector, 2018; Harju, Kaltiainen, & Hakanen, 2021; Tuan 2022)[9][10][11], or have emphasized the potential negative psychological costs of engaging in proactive behaviors (e.g., job stress). This relationship may be negative.

Predecessors have established sufficient evidence showing the positive impact of job crafting on job performance (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000)[12]. However, in the service industry, there is still a lack of research on the influencing mechanism of service performance from the perspective of job crafting (Lu, Liu, Wu, Wu, & Pei, 2022; Meijerink, Bos-Nehles, & de Leede, 2020) [13][14]. In our view, proactive be-

havior in job shaping is the key missing factor in explaining the inconsistent relationship between organizational bondage and employee performance. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Customer empowerment behavior positively affects the psychological empowerment of service employees;

H2: Psychological empowerment positively affects job crafting;

H3: Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role between customer empowerment behavior and service employees' job crafting;

H4: The job crafting of service employees positively affects the service performance of hotel employees;

H5: Service employees' empathy has a positive impact on their job crafting;

H6: Customer empowerment behavior positively strengthens the positive relationship between empathy and job crafting;

H7: Leadership positively strengthens the positive relationship between customer empowerment behavior and psychological empowerment of service employees.

3 Research Design

3.1 Operability Definition and Measurement

The steps of scale construction and revision in this study are mainly in line with the paradigm advocated by Carlson et al., (2000) and Lazazzara, Tims, & de Gennaro (2020)[12][15]. This paradigm is not only simple and clear, but also widely used in academia. The revision and compilation process of the front-line service employee scale includes the following three steps: Qualitative phase of scale revision development - initial item generation; The first phase of data collection and scale cleansing; The second phase of data collection and scale re-purification.

In the initial item generation phase, data were collected mainly through literature review and on-site focus group interviews to determine the initial scale items. Then, the initial scale developed was tested by factor analysis in two stages to optimize and determine the final scale. In the two stages, questionnaires were distributed to the front-line service personnel of the service industry in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as samples.

The job crafting scale of front-line service personnel will be developed through this research scale. Empathy is measured by the eight-item scale developed by Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter. The 8-item scale developed by Dong, Liao, Chuang, Zhou, & Campbell is used to measure the customer empowerment behaviors perceived by employees. The 12-item scale of Spreitzer is used for psychological empowerment. Benevolent leadership is measured by the benevolent leadership subscale of paternalistic leadership developed by Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh. , with a total of 5 items. Service performance adopts the seven-item scale developed by Liao & Chuang.

The scoring method of all scales is measured by Linkert five-level scale, and "strongly disagree," "disagree," "uncertain," "agree" and "strongly agree" are 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 points respectively. In order to improve the validity and reliability of the results of this study, according to previous studies, this study controls the potential impact of

statistical variables such as gender, age, marriage, education level, years of service in the industry and years of service in the company on the results of the study.

3.2 Sampling Design

In this study, online questionnaires were distributed to obtain samples to ensure a high questionnaire recovery rate. Firstly, this study contacted the general manager or human resources director of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in China, explained the purpose and significance of the research to the other party, and obtained their recognition and support. Next, the list of front-line service members who provided participation in the survey and their team ids were obtained for data matching. Before filling out the questionnaire, emphasize the main content, significance and confidentiality of the survey to the respondents. In each round, the HR manager reiterated the significance and principles of filling in the questionnaire to ensure that participants filled in the questionnaire carefully and truthfully. The questionnaire was sampled using a snowball method.

In terms of data analysis, structural equation model can help researchers distinguish exogenous and endogenous variables and formally assume the theoretical relationship between variables. Its advantage is that measurement error is taken into account, which makes the analysis results more reliable, especially when testing complex mediating relationships, and it is also conducive to model comparison. Therefore, this study adopts the structural equation modeling method as the main model testing and analysis method. In terms of analysis tools, statistical software such as SPSS25.0 and AMOS22.0 are used as statistical analysis tools to conduct descriptive statistical analysis, factor analysis, correlation analysis, multilevel regression analysis and structural equation model analysis on the empirical survey results, so as to correctly describe the statistical characteristics of front-line employees' job crafting behaviors. To deeply reveal the influencing factors and mechanisms of their job crafting behaviors.

4 Conclusion

The core concept of this study is the job crafting of front-line service personnel, focusing on the front-line service personnel in the service industry and focusing on the research issues related to the job crafting of front-line service employees (Costantini, Demerouti, Ceschi, & Sartori, 2022; Shin, Hur, & Choi, 2020; Oprea, Păduraru, & Iliescu, 2022)[16][17][18]. The main theoretical basis is self-determination theory, and qualitative research and quantitative empirical research methods are adopted to carry out the sub-research, and the following conclusions are obtained respectively: 1. The job crafting of front-line employees shows the characteristics of customer-and service-oriented behaviors; 2. Customer empowerment behavior positively affects the job crafting of front-line hotel staff, and psychological empowerment plays a mediating role; 3. Job crafting is an important antecedent of service performance and an important per-

spective to explain the difference in service performance; 4. Benevolent leadership negatively moderates the relationship between customer empowerment behavior and job crafting of front-line hotel employees..

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