

Book Chapter

Positive Psychology, Job Crafting and Course Crafting: Applications for Educational Research

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Abstract

In this chapter we describe the application of job crafting, a proactive approach that is used to cultivate positive meaning, engagement and satisfaction identity in the experiences people face at their work. We discuss how this can be applied to the educational environment. We explore the techniques of job crafting that were done by the faculty, course designers and administrators. We review the literature on the nature and types of positive experiences examined before and during the pandemic in a recent study by the present authors. We also

review the literature and examples where courses were modified and redesigned for remote learning. Examination of the findings showed students' positive experiences considering recrafting their courses or content, which gave a valuable insight into the dynamics of these positive experiences in the teaching and learning process. Educators crafted their courses' changing format and provided emotional support, empathy, kindness, reassurance, and encouragement when needed. The implications of these findings and understanding how we can thrive and flourish even in very challenging times in the virtual environment is discussed.

Job crafting is a very effective and valuable technique that can be applied to many non-work situations. We also describe how this technique can be used in many educational environments, especially in the student population. College students also face tremendous stress in the academic environment as they balance so many different roles and deal with school, work and life stressors. We also discuss how the crafting techniques can be applied to work-life balance, careers, teamwork by using leisure crafting, career crafting, team crafting and home crafting, the positive spillover effects from one environment to another, and other forms of crafting. Future directions for research in this important area on crafting are also explored and we discuss many ways to do off-the-job crafting that could spill-over and have positive outcomes such as better performance, engagement and well-being.

Keywords

Job Crafting, Course Crafting; Positive Psychology; COVID-19, Positive Experiences, Career Crafting, Team Crafting, Life Crafting, Spill-Over, Well-Being, Work-Life Balance

Introduction

Back in 2020 COVID-19 pandemic surfaced. Teachers' approaches to teaching and the range of subjects went through significant transformation. COVID-19 changed how people interacted and affected almost every aspect of our lives. It was

crucial for scholars to examine both the positive and negative aspects, especially in context of the classroom during the epidemic. Overnight, educational institutions had to adopt a new way of teaching and learning. The situation encountered discussions and inquiry especially the impact of the psychological wellbeing of students during time of crisis (e.g. Tesar, [1]).

When COVID-19 took shape and staff and students went to the online transition, many who had no knowledge of digital pedagogies had to learn quickly to engage with the technologies for the purpose of teaching and learning done so as to meet current demands in times of crisis. Scholars immediately began exploring these developments in schools and colleges, examining how they could effectively deal with teaching and learning, as well as general academic work and practices. Given the uncertainties, several institutions were considering highly adaptable alternatives [2]. This included altering numerous course standards once instructors, students, and administrators recognized the need of reviewing data on teaching and learning while transitioning to virtual education. These projects were launched to better identify crucial and emotional connections between instructors and their students [3,4].

Academics learned and adapted quickly to online interactions and instructional approaches as COVID-19 became a reality. They were compelled to adapt to the new technology, teaching techniques, and curricular sequencing in order to face the rising problems of being "plugged in." The challenges were tremendous and the fact that students were isolated in this "new normal" environment, and this made things even more difficult. While educators used the most practical and basic tools available for online instruction they also resisted or avoided having to change their teaching practices. But many have left out the psychological dimension to the epidemic. This meant greater isolation, including the risk of loneliness, limiting people's access to traditional social support networks, and reduced coping techniques. Social distancing and isolation had unsatiable consequences that could last months or even years before improving, this has had an insurmountable impact [5].

Positive Psychology

Some educators examined the use of the positive psychological methods as a possible strategy. They found ways to increase wellbeing by positive psychological approaches as a potential technique to be effective in promoting the wellbeing of students and faculty [6-8].

According to the perspective of positive psychology, positive interventions can help with understanding what it means to succeed in life. The study of psychology and its conventional research has mostly focused on negative outcomes and "what goes wrong," whereas positive psychology emphasizes the necessity of understanding "what is good" in life [9,10]. While most Post COVID-19 researchers have investigated the negative effects and consequences identifying psychological impact including emotional distress, depression, anxiety, and hostility (e.g. Brooks et al, [5]). In this chapter we focus on the positive psychological perspective and examine positive outcomes that emerged amidst a period of crisis with COVID-19.

The positive psychology perspective helps in coping with stress and anxiety created by the situation in an environment with extreme isolation. The goal of positive psychology is to expand and broaden research that does not just focus on deficits but also on assets or strengths [11]. Many faculty including us redesigned course pedagogies worked on course crafting and made the courses we teach more meaningful, motivating, and engaging for students in this new virtual format. Furthermore, the job crafting model has been used to understand other areas, including career crafting, leisure, crafting and team crafting. Given the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the many stressors and challenges individuals faced, whether psychological, mental, physical, financial, or behavioral, educators had to do many things. Instructors had to shuffle between recreating the pedagogies of their courses and changing their mediums of instruction, and providing the support for students' needs in the pandemic environment. Other research studies also emphasize the importance of maintaining awareness of students' socio-emotional needs in the online environment [7,12].

Job Crafting

In the field of positive organizational psychology, a technique that has become increasingly examined both in theory and practice is job crafting, a process used to cultivate positive meaning and identity in the experiences people face at their work. Job crafting is a process which involves essentially changing the way we view tasks, relationships, and cognitions about what do in the workplace. Job crafting was first introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton [13] in a seminal article, where they described how employees can become “crafters” of their jobs by doing it three ways: task crafting, relationship crafting, and cognitive crafting. Job crafting can create more meaning and motivate and engage participants. Job crafting is also about coping and being resourceful in adapting, adjusting, and being flexible on the job [14].

Some researchers have suggested that many employees may proactively seize the opportunities and resources needed to cope with specific situations to craft their jobs and take responsibility in order to fulfill the expectations and needs of their work. Individuals used opportunities and resources to cope with specific situations, in this case, the pandemic, and take responsibility to fulfill what was required of them for this situation. We understand that job crafting takes place at the organizational level and although this is a very different situation to the one discussed here, we use their framework in terms of the different types of ways people craft jobs to understand the crafting process for these courses and the student perceptions and reactions to these changes.

Course Crafting

In a recent study [15], the authors of this study looked at course crafting as a process by which courses are modified or “crafted” to deliver effective outcomes for students based on the job crafting model. Task crafting is modifying or altering the tasks to make them more meaningful. For example, task crafting in the context of higher education programs by changing some assignments to relate them to the COVID-19 experience, where

students can reflect on their personal experience and be able to share it in a community of learners and connect to current knowledge and common applications in the field. An example of Relationship Crafting could be changing how students interact with each other and the instructor. They could have more Zoom office hours where teachers interact directly with students, and they could do group assignments and work online together. Examples of Cognitive Crafting or Thought Crafting involve ways to change student perspective to be more meaningful; for example, there could be an assignment where students could empathize with others in relation to what life is like in the pandemic by comparing themselves to others less fortunate. Job crafting can create more meaning and motivate and engage participants. Job crafting is also about coping and being resourceful in adapting, adjusting, and being flexible on the job. These same principles seem to apply in the course crafting process.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity to use the job crafting model as academics transitioned to the virtual format to examine the positive experiences of students, by focusing on how courses were crafted. The course crafting processes were naturally occurring, as instructors were crafting before the pandemic and quickly had to recraft their courses during the pandemic. In the pandemic, content developers, course designers, technical experts, counselors, and advisors to students worked and put together courses to transition into a remote format. Crafting brought changes to make teaching and learning more meaningful, motivating, and engaging for students in a new virtual format.

Narayanan et al. [15] study looked at how courses were crafted and what features of this redesign of courses enhanced, engaged, and made the course more meaningful, and promoted positive and affective environments for students. The effectiveness of course crafting was measured with student perceptions of positive experiences during the pandemic. Extension and elaboration of the job crafting model has been also used by other researchers. For example, Leana et al. expanded the job crafting model to examine relational crafting when used in childcare

centers to meet shared objectives and understand the effectiveness of this process in the childcare classroom. Since the goal and objective of this crafting was to meet the needs of students in the learning process, we attempted to measure the outcome of satisfaction and engagement with the course by looking for students' positive experiences.

Several aspects of this study are directly related to the changes faculty members made through crafting their courses. The faculty members, rather than researching tools and technologies to deal with the new "social distancing" reality, began to acclimate to the problems students face, at the same time emphasizing new pedagogies fitting student needs. Further, this study underlines how crucial it was to comprehend the affective element in this "new normal" environment, as well as the significance of being more adaptable to the requirements of learners in the future, to show care and trust, and to be open and supporting. Thus, a sole concentration on technology won't solve the affective issues, whether it is isolation, loneliness, anxiety, or even depression.

The study by Narayanan et al. [15], investigated students' coping techniques, as well as their use positive psychological techniques in a learning community, a state university in the US. They found greater levels of consideration, affinity, and during COVID-19 than before its presence. There have been other studies that have examined such positive outcomes. In Japan, positive emotions' role and relationship to mental health during the COVID-19 epidemic. It was proposed that maintaining a positive attitude during difficult events and experiences could help students become more resilient. They also argue that these situations create opportunities for educators to reflect existentially about their occupations or responsibilities at hand [8].

Course crafting demonstrates numerous factors at play. One obvious change was the agility of the faculty, maintaining professional standards at the same time as becoming flexible, demonstrating humaneness and thoughtfulness, and being caring. The relational crafting showed that the faculty had to instill new

professional behaviors such as sharing, empathy, increased listening dispositions, sensitivity, understanding students' personal situations, and showing genuine concern of what people are going through. The beliefs and assumptions about educators' limitations, including the stereotype of cold professionalism and rigid boundaries, may not be appropriate in this type of crisis environment. study sheds light on the most effective and necessary digital-affective strategies to teach and learn. Narayanan et al. [15], showed that a better understanding of the specific conditions and situations that they identified as positive in teaching and learning environments. Many of the tasks, relationships, and thought process strategies appear to have increased the course's relevance, motivated students, and made them more satisfied in the face of chaos. Given the range of emotional experiences, including stress, that students are experiencing because of the pandemic, there is certainly a need for emotional support and a need to focus on supporting students academically. There is a focus in positive psychology on encouragement and enhancement of compassionate, kind, and hopeful experiences. Students within these circumstances and with this supportive climate can become tenacious and eager to improve. Other researchers [16] also point out how positive affect and positive perceptions can be resources for people coping with adverse situations. This pandemic of COVID 19 represented a very adverse situation where these dynamics could be examined from a positive psychology, positive existential psychology and a positive emotions perspective.

Tasks and Course Crafting Behaviors

Different tasks such as self-reflection assignments, journaling, and assignments that relate to the current environment, including exercises on gratitude or exercises on coping with stress where all part of the course crafting experience. There were also tasks that were optional assignments: these included inspirational stories of courage presented on the discussion board or in Zoom meetings. Students also discussed relational crafting in terms of the positive changes that the online communication medium offered. These included the cheerful and constant presence of instructors making many announcements during the semester

and the asynchronous meetings. As instructors were also appreciative, providing almost immediate emotional support, empathy, kindness, reassurance, and encouragement when needed. In the face of adversary or difficult times, people can maintain a positive attitude, complete gratitude exercises, develop self-discovery exercises, engage in self-reflection and count their blessings, and other novel tasks to overcome numerous challenges.

Even a small gesture or a reassuring behavior can have a very powerful impact on a student when faced with isolation, social stress and uncertainty. Another very important finding was the role of emotions. Whether it is implicit or explicit, emotions are heightened when loneliness and uncertainty are pervasive, and we found compassion or gratitude could have a considerable impact on the wellbeing of individuals. Student emotions were moderated by relational crafting through perpetual extended lines of communication with the instructor. The importance of emotional support was very evident in the During COVID group. The pandemic had opened a new emotional realm for students that did not exist pre pandemic. The sort of caring seen in the post-pandemic empathy, kindness, selflessness, and dedication to students was not felt or seen before in the classroom.

It is believed that maintaining a positive attitude in the midst of challenging circumstances and experiences could help students become more resilient. Researchers like Wong, [17], also argue that these situations provide opportunity for educators to reflect existentially on the duties or tasks at hand. The literature on positive psychology emphasized human affinity in the setting of the pandemic, as well as the maintenance of good attitudes in the which enabled students to adapt and show resilience in face of adversity.

Several studies have looked at teachers' and students' stress and coping techniques, as well as their usage of positive psychology in a learning community. Huang and Fang [18] explored students' adaptation to online learning formats practicum courses among Taiwanese nursing students. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the unique stressors faced by nursing

students during the pandemic and implementing supportive measures to enhance their learning experiences in online courses. Goetz, Wenz, and Hertrampf [19] challenges faced by dental educators and students amidst the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic. Themes such as shifting learning environments, concerns over infection control measures, and the impact on clinical training emerge from the analysis. Despite these challenges, the study also identifies resilience and adaptability among educators and students as they navigate the complexities of dental education during such unprecedented times. Curelaru, Curelaru, and Cristea [20] delves into students' experiences, revealing a range of perspectives on the efficacy and challenges of online education. Themes such as the convenience of remote learning, technological difficulties, and the impact on social interaction and engagement emerge from the analysis. The findings underscore the importance of considering student perspectives in the design and implementation of online learning initiatives. Liao, Li, Zhang, and Li [21] examine the effects of social media usage on job crafting among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic in China. The study investigates how social media platforms influence job crafting behaviors such as task, relational, and cognitive crafting. Findings suggest that social media usage has a significant impact on job crafting, particularly in facilitating relational crafting activities.

Crafting at the Individual and Organizational Levels

Research in positive organizational psychology has looked at the antecedent and consequences of job crafting from an individual level and organizational level. From an individual level perspective, employees can approach jobs differently for a better fit to their skills, needs and values. Some researchers have looked at the congruence of individual values and organizational fit between individuals and the organizations [22]. Other researchers have also looked at the crafting process and the needs and value framework. Individual level factors examined include the proactive personality, self-efficacy, self-regulation

and cognitive ability [23-25]. The majority of studies on the Person-Organization fit has focused on value congruence [26].

There are several models of “crafting” behavior and one that has been recently discussed in the focus on needs-based crafting, and these are behaviors aimed as job satisfaction. In a recent article, Kujanpaa et al [27] discuss needs-based off-job crafting in different life domains and contexts based on the Integrative Needs Model of Crafting.

There is a focus on a need-based approach. Other authors have also suggested a value-based approach, for example, Whitlock [28] has emphasized the importance of looking at values to understand what the motives are behind our behavior. From a motivational perspective some theorists such as Whitlock [28] have discussed the importance of the individual’s core values and needs and how these could enhance motivation.

In the Off-the-Job need-based study Kujanpaa et al [27] found that across different cultures, participants provide feedback on how they crafted their off-job time and found that this crafting process had positive outcomes for them in terms of well-being and performance. Pijpker, et al., [29] investigated the role of off-job crafting in burnout prevention during the COVID-19 crisis through a longitudinal study. This research examines how individuals engage in activities outside of work to proactively shape their off-job experiences and mitigate burnout risk. Through empirical analysis, the study demonstrates the significance of off-job crafting behaviors, such as leisure activities, social interactions, and personal development pursuits, in buffering against burnout over time. The findings underscore the importance of off-job activities as a potential protective factor for individuals facing heightened stressors during the pandemic, highlighting implications for burnout prevention strategies in both organizational and personal contexts.

Future Directions, Implications, and Conclusions

Though the crafting construct was conceived for work-related crafting, many other avenues can be explored that may be relevant to the educational environment, particularly the student population. This could include non-work applications such as leisure crafting, where students enjoy and engage in leisure to balance course work. This could also be used as a proactive strategy for students by applying the principles of job crafting to career crafting. Many classes involve teams so many researchers have looked at team crafting and this could be another application.

Haun, Mulder and Schmitz [30] looked at the spillover between job crafting and home crafting. These authors argue that since an individual's experiences at home and work are related and influence one another it is conceivable to expect that crafting in one domain can spillover to other domains.

To summarize, Job crafting as a field has opened up so many possibilities of using this technique for academia, including college students, faculty and administration. These newer studies show a lot of promise, and avenues for researchers to apply many of these methodologies to the academic environment. There is a crucial need for more research on course crafting and crafting in academia, and understand the dynamics of course crafting at the faculty, administration and student level. College students face tremendous stress in the academic environment as the balance so many different roles and deal with school, work and life stressors. It is also important to examine how the positive outcomes from course crafting can spill-over to other domains such as home and work and could increase engagement, satisfaction and well-being.

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