ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Lesson 11

AUTONOMY and PROACTIVITY in traditional work activities

AUTONOMY in more traditional work settings

- We looked at the benefits (and also some problems) with autonomy in pretty unconventional work settings and organizations, where the principle of autonomy is applied quite radically
  - 3M, Google, Netflix, Valve etc

- What about more traditional companies?
- What about more traditional work activities and jobs?
  - for example, where routine and standardized tasks are significant or even prevalent?

- Does autonomy provide benefits in such situations, or instead the need for top-down coordination prevails?

A bit of history: from Taylor to «enlarged» and «enriched jobs»

- Classic TAYLORISTIC job design leaves no room for autonomy
  - Job is a «stable attribution of elementary tasks»
  - Autonomy is completely absent
  - the only motivation that matters is extrinsic
- Over time, job design evolved to incorporate more features in order to «enlarge» and «enrich» jobs

THE DETROIT JOURNAL

LAST EDITION

HENRY FORD GIVES $10,000,000 IN 1914 PROFITS TO HIS EMPLOYES

HOUSES SWEPT INTO ATLANTIC BY STORM; CREW OF 32 DROWNS

NATION-WIDE STRIKE IS BEING DISCUSSED BY LABOR LEADERS

GOV. FERRIS IS ON WAY TO CALUMET

Motor Kings Who Share Profits With Worker

DOUBLES PAY OF 25,000 IN AUTO WORKS

GRANT EIGHT-HOUR DAY AT $5 WAGE

job key features in the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman e Oldham 1975, 1980):

- skill /task variety
- autonomy
- task identity
- task significance
- feedback
- etc.

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Classic critiques and problems of the classic approach

- top-down approach
  - Subjects perceive the general design of their job as something that is pre-determined, imposed by the hierarchy
  - Management is in charge to define jobs (however «enlarged» or «enriched»)
  - In the best cases of very enriched / enlarged jobs, autonomy is limited to execution, but it is not allowed in relation to the actual design of the job
  - in other words, autonomy is conceived as «allowed flexibility within a predefined boundary»
  - why? beacuse coordination and predictability are still seen as the prevailing, most important need
    - but … is it really true? is it always true? What about 3M? Google? And many similar cases? Are these companies completely wrong?

- one size fits all
  - No or little consideration of subjectivity, personal attitudes, preferences, abilities, passions
  - Increasing intrinsic motivation is not considered a primary goal of job design

the Zappos case

- American online retailer (shoes and clothing)
- Founded in 1999 and acquired by Amazon in 2009

- Famous for the "holocratic" approach to its internal work organization
  - Role-Based Structure (Not Job Titles)
    - the unit of work is the "role", not the person.
    - each employee holds multiple roles across different teams (called circles), each with clearly defined purpose, accountabilities, and domains (areas of control).
    - roles are fluid and can be updated regularly through governance meetings
  - Circles are self-organizing teams responsible for a particular function or purpose.
    - Circles contain roles and can be nested inside other circles (like sub-teams)
    - Each circle has autonomy to make decisions and evolve its own structure
    - There are special roles in each circle, to ensure alignment with the broader organization

Customer service: cost or investment?

- In call centers of most companies
  - the turnover rate is about 35%, in some cases, up to 100%
  - extremely repetitive work
  - very often, minimum wage salary
  - autonomy is close to zero
    - operators must strictly follow «scripts» and predermined time limits to assist the customers
    - a very «tayloristic» work environment
- WHY?
  - call centers / customer service are mostly seen as a pure cost of the company, with very low added value
    - » so, standardizing as much as possible the activity allows to maximizie productivity (customer served per time unit) and minimize personnel cost
    - » the emerging use of chatbots to replace humans in customer service is another example of the same logic
- Zappos takes a very different approach

Customer service in Zappos

- applicants for call centers are provided basic training for about 10 days before being hired; after training, if some criteria are met, an offer is made:
  - they can accept to work for Zappos
  - CRUCIAL CRITERIA: cultural «fit» (just like Valve)
  - or, they can deny the offer, and in that case they are compensated with 2000$ for the time they devoted to training
    - the incentive is used to reward people for NOT staying with Zappos!!! WHY???
    - the goal is to make sure that hired people are intrinsically motivated and feel particularly comfortable with this kind of job
    - *"It's not an expense; it's an investment in the culture." — Tony Hsieh*

- Then, hired people in call centers are given extremely high autonomy
  - no time constraints, no close monitoring, no pre-defined scripts etc.
  - their only goal is to provide the best possible service to their customers

Customer service in Zappos

- “The operators in Zappos’ call center are not outsourced to some agency in low wage countries, but are located in the company's headquarters.
- There are many of them and they have instructions opposite to those of the operators of any other call center.
- They do not consider it important to process as many calls as possible in the shortest possible time: a phone call with a customer can last even hours, freely chatting about anything.
- They don't have scripts to follow and formulas to repeat that are always the same: they speak like normal people.
- If they hear children in the background, they strike up a conversation talking about their children; If the customer has a recognizable accent, they ask what the weather is like there.
- They don't sell anything over the phone: they don't offer deals, offers, discounts, promotions.
- If they want, when they want, they can give gifts to customers like biscuits, flowers or other small gadgets“

adapted from Francesco Costa (Post), 2014

Outcomes

- Zappos' outcomes:
  - turnover close to zero
  - extremely high customer service (judged, by customers, as top level as that of highly luxury brands such as Ritz and Jaguar, and better than some high quality brands such as Apple, Cadillac, BMW)
  - customer service is now one of the most important strategic assets of Zapps
    - «powered by service» is in the logo
  - It is more costly than most other companies. However, the strategic advantages clearly outweigh the costs.
    - In fact, it is not a cost, but an investment

- A similar approach by JetBlue, an airline company
  - customer service personnel work from home, with a lot of autonomy
  - less stress, more comfort, less transportation costs, more quality
    - with excellent results

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE ZAPPOS CASE?

- Sometimes (or maybe .. often?), autonomy may provide significant benefits even within jobs and activities that, traditionally, are extremely tayloristic, standardized, and perceived as low added-value

- in other words, intrinsic motivation and autonomy it is not just about highly creative, innovation-driven organizations and jobs

- More importantly, Zappos seems to show that the company can generate / access to a lot of «hidden value» from autonomous employees

- Of course, the right conditions need to be present

- What concept can we use in order to better understand how and why these benefits are possibile?

JOB CRAFTING

What does the word "craft" / "crafting" mean?

Cambridge Dictionary:

the activity or hobby of making decorative objects with your hands

LanGeek Dictionary – What is "crafting" in video games?

Crafting in video games refers to the process of creating new items or equipment by combining different resources in the game. Players can collect raw materials, such as wood, metal, or herbs, and use them to craft weapons, armor, potions, or other useful items. Crafting systems allow players to upgrade their skills, customize their gear, or improve their chances of success

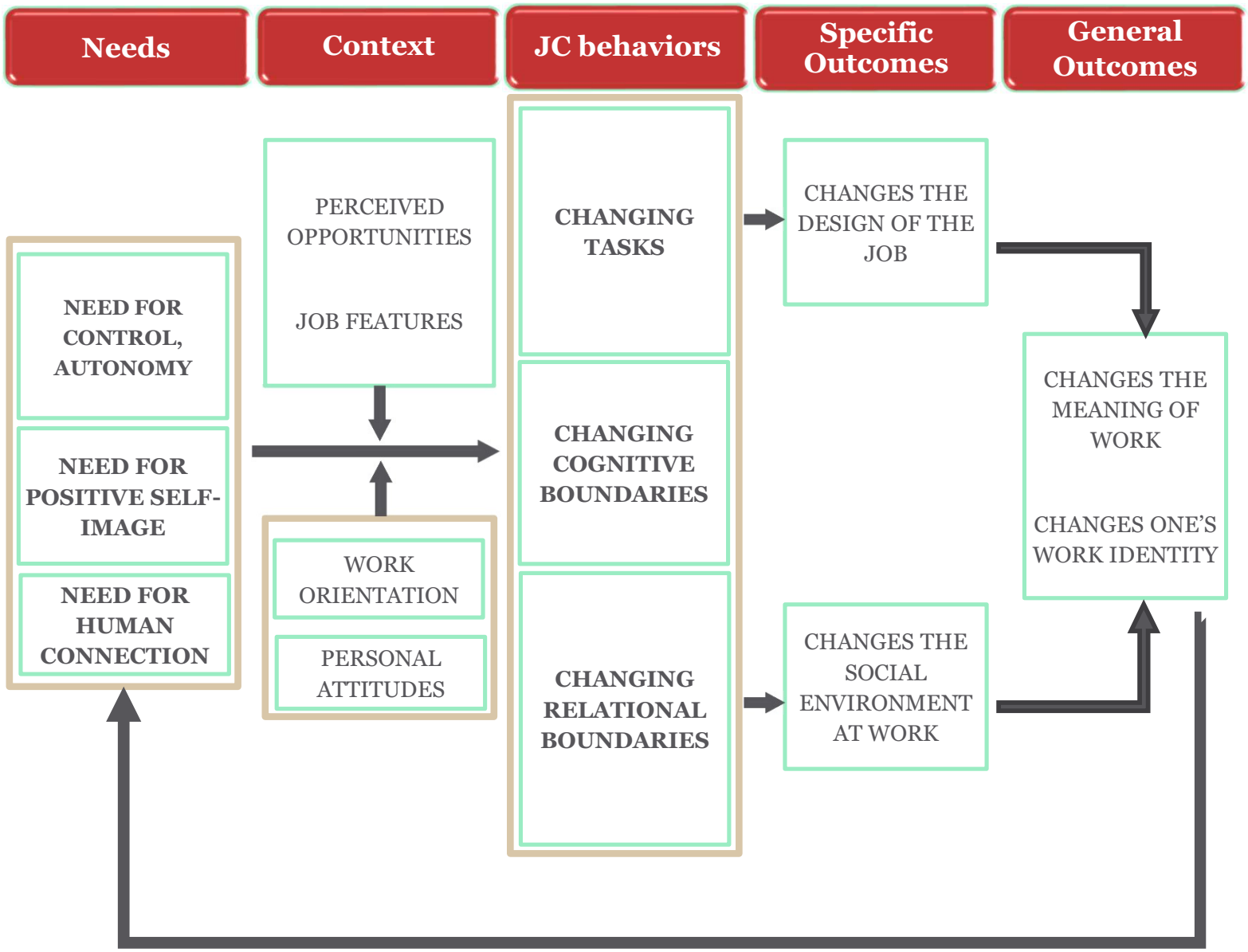
The definition from the world of video games is the one that comes closest to the concept of "job crafting", let's see why...

DEFINITION OF JOB CRAFTING

"the actions employees take to shape, mold, and redefine their jobs"

Job Crafting concerns all those behaviors through which people, proactively (i.e. on their own initiative, without this being foreseen by their formal role or expected/required by the company hierarchy) transform some significant aspects of their work to better adapt them to their needs, interests and skills.

ORIGINAL JOB CRAFTING MODEL (adapted from Dutton et al., 2001)



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IN SUMMARY: THE FIRST JOB CRAFTING MODEL by WRZESNIEWSKI & DUTTON (2001)

According to the authors, the main job crafting behaviors include:

Change of activities (task "boundaries")

Workers change the type or number of tasks they perform, choosing those that they find most stimulating or that best suit their abilities

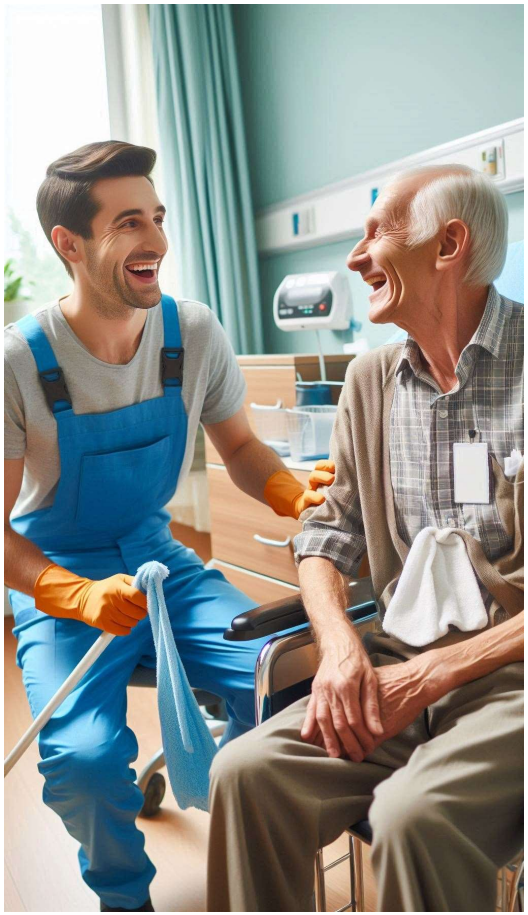
Change of relationships (relational "boundaries")

Workers change the way they interact with colleagues, customers or superiors, trying to establish more meaningful or collaborative connections

Change in the meaning of work (cognitive "boundaries")

Workers gives a new meaning to their activities by changing thier perception of what they do and why, to make them more consistent with their personal values or goals.

Example according to the Wrzesniewski & Dutton model



Cleaners working in hospitals

Being in constant contact with doctors and nurses (professions that they perceived as superior to theirs because they save people's lives while they simply clean the rooms), workers risked losing motivation to do their job, considering it "of little importance".

Thanks to job crafting, they have:

- **Changed the activity**: they did not simply clean but added other tasks to feel more valued (supporting patients both in material and psychological ways)

- **Changed relationships**: they talked to patients trying to lighten up their day, improve their mood and their psychological well-being

- **Changed the meaning of work**: they were no longer just cleaners but, like doctors, they felt they contributed to the health of patients.

THE JD-R (JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES) MODEL (Tims & Bakker, 2010)

Four typical job crafting behaviors, according to this model

1. INCREASING STRUCTURAL RESOURCES

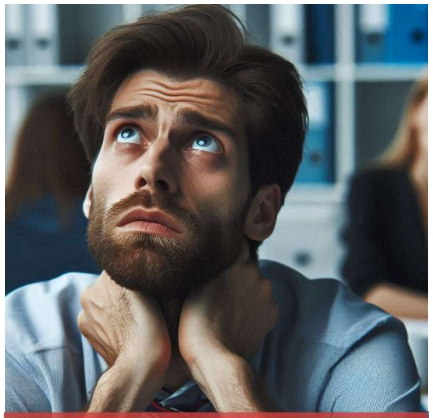
acquiring knowledge, skills, more responsibility, etc

2. INCREASING SOCIAL RESOURCES

acquiring help, recommendations, guidance, feedback from boss, colleagues, etc

3. INCREASING CHALLENGING DEMANDS

challenging, interesting activities that require problem solving, creativity, etc.



4. DECREASING HINDERING DEMANDS

activities that involve ambiguity and role conflicts, safety concerns, excessive workloads, etc.

«APPROACH» JOB CRAFTING

«AVOIDANCE» JOB CRAFTING

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Job Crafting and Job Design

- In what situations is job crafting observed?
  - always (except in extreme situations) albeit in different sizes and ways
  - In any job, task, activity, people always tend, at least in part, as far as they can, to "appropriate" the work, that is, to act in a discretionary way that may go “beyond” the formal job description.
    - Remember Deci’s SELF DETERMINATION THEORY
  - In some cases these changes are small, insignificant details, in other cases they concern aspects of the work that are quite consequential
- Job crafting can take place:
  - without the management’s awareness (or even against management’s will)
  - the management is aware of this and simply "tolerates" these behaviors
  - (more rarely, for now) with the management’ encouragement and facilitation

Job Crafting can be seen as a sort of "Co-Job Design" (i.e. a job design in which both the workers and management contribute to the definition of work activities), which attempts to rebalance the need for coordination and control "from above“ with the usefulness of autonomous mobilization of competence "from below".

Job Crafting: relevance and key questions

- Is it Job Crafting good or bad for performance?
- How do exactly employees craft their jobs?
- What are the benefits (if any) for the individuals?
- What are other consequences of Job Crafting?
- What are the antecedents that facilitate / hinder Job Crafting?
- What are the implications for managers and leaders?

A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN OUTCOMES OF JOB CRAFTING

from available empirical literature

NOTICE: these are AVERAGE results. Every single case may be different.

PERFORMANCE

SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE EFFECT on INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

- especially associated with JC related to increasing resources and challenging demands

MODERATE POSITIVE EFFECTS on ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

- more data needed

WELL-BEING

MORE job satisfaction
MORE work engagement
MORE work meaningfulness
LESS burnout and cynicism
LESS job strain
LESS boredom

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

LESS turnover intention
BETTER job-person fit
MORE organizational commitment
MORE self-competence
MORE perceived employability
LESS role conflict and role overload

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JOB CRAFTING and PERSONAL ANTECEDENTS

from available empirical literature

NOTICE: these are AVERAGE results. Every single case may be different.

ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED with JOB CRAFTING

PERSONALITY

CONSCIENCIOUSNESS (but more data needed)
EXTRAVERSION (especially for increasing social resources behaviors)
AGREEABLENESS (especially for increasing social resources behaviors)
OPENNESS (especially for increasing challenging demands behaviors)

COMPETENCE AND EXPERTISE

COMPETENCE and EXPERTISE, SELF-COMPETENCE, SELF-EFFFICACY
(they increase persistence, ambition, better strategies to achieve change through JC)
SENIORSHIP / AGE

- older individuals seem to engage in JC either more (because they know better their work context and are better able to recognize good JC opportunities) or less (because they become more attached to the status quo and routine)

ATTITUDES and OTHER ELEMENTS

PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION (in public organizations)
WORK ENGAGEMENT, INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
(more data needed)

PROMOTION FOCUS (individuals oriented to accomplishments and change)

- JC behaviors to increase resources and challenging demands

PREVENTION FOCUS (individuals oriented to safety, status quo, loss avoidance)

- JC behaviors to decrease hindering demands

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JOB CRAFTING and ORGANIZATIONAL ANTECEDENTS

from available empirical literature

NOTICE: these are AVERAGE results. Every single case may be different.

ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED with JOB CRAFTING

TASK CHARACTERISTICS

AUTONOMY and JOB ENLARGMENT
TASK COMPLEXITY
TASK SIGNIFICANCE
TASK INTERDEPENDENCE (the effect depends on the "desired" interdependence of the individual)
WORK OVERLOAD

ORGANIZATIONAL AND HR POLICIES

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (more data needed)
PARTICIPATORY POLICIES

LEADERSHIP

PROMOTIVE LEADERSHIP (vs RESTRICTIVE LEADERSHIP) more data needed
LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE (LMX)
EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP (and other types of leadership, such as "EMPLOYEE ORIENTED", "SERVANT", "INCLUSIVE", "TRANSFORMATIONAL"

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WHY DOES JOB CRAFTING INCREASES PERFORMANCE?

- WHY JOB CRAFTING DOES NOT GENERATE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON COORDINATION and, by consequence, NEGATIVE PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES?
- When they are able to "craft" their work, people tend to increase their "person-job fit". Work becomes more intrinsically motivating. By consequence:

1. Individual performance improves because the job becomes more consistent with the individual's skills, interests, passions, knowledge
2. Organizational performance improves because the individuals have no interest in taking action that will damage a work environment that they consider satisfactory and intrinsically motivating
   - A sort of virtuous cycle can be enacted: the more I craft my job, the more I like it, the more I want to preserve this positive situation, the more I craft my job in a way that will be accepted and legitimized by others (colleagues, leaders)
   - Therefore, it becomes an individuals' interest to try to craft (change) their work in ways and areas where personal goals are, to some extent, aligned with good results for the organization
   - If this was not the case, we would certainly observe NEGATIVE performance consequences from job crafting.

JOB CRAFTING and NEGATIVE PERFORMANCE

- Does Job Crafting always have positive consequences on performance?

Of course not. There is always variation between individual cases

- However, it happens much more often than we might imagine, as data show
- However, it may not happen because:
- *Sometimes people behave opportunistically (free riding)*
- *Sometimes people make mistakes in predicting the effects of their actions on collective outcomes (of their group, their organization)*

- *HOW THIS LATEST POINT CAN BE CONNECTED WITH PERSONNEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT?*

JOB CRAFTING and NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Generally, Job Crafting leads to the same potential risks and negative consequences that we have already seen for autonomy
  - This is obvious: job crafting is, indeed, an example of autonomous, proactive behavior in the workplace, especially «traditional» workplaces
- More specific risks for Job Crafting:

1. Increased Role Conflict or Overload
   - \When employees craft their jobs by taking on additional tasks or responsibilities ("approach crafting"), they may unintentionally overestimate their ability to deal with them
   - This can lead to **stress, burnout, work-life unbalance**
2. Conflict with Colleagues
   - When someone crafts their job in order to avoid some unpleasant activity that is necessary for the team or the colleagues success (especially with "avoidance" job crafting)
   - This can lead to **resentment**, **decreased collaboration**, or **perceived unfairness**
3. Misalignment with Strategic Goals
   - Employees might craft their jobs to align with personal interests while ignoring or misunderstanding the organizational priorities
   - This can lead to decreased collective performance

JOB CRAFTING AS A HR POLICY: the «INTERVENTION STUDIES»

- Some very early data on «Job Crafting Interventions»
  - empirical studies in which the company agrees to follow a specifi job crafting protocol through which employees are instructed and encouraged to increase their job crafting behaviors, in order to evaluate the outcomes
- RESULTS: mostly positive, with some heterogeneity
  - largely, job crafting interventions increase the job crafting behaviors (as expected)
    - more often than not, job crafting behaviors that are increased by intervention studies concern the job demands (less so the job resources)
      - probably because of how protocols are designed: for example, several protocols put emphasis on job crafting behaviors aimed at «decreasing hindering demands»
  - on average, job crafting interventions increase performance
    - however, it is useful to separate:
      - TASK performance
        - » the individual performance in relation to the specific, assigned task
      - ADAPTIVE performance
        - » the individual performance in terms of ability to adapt to new circumstances
      - CONTEXTUAL performance
        - » the individual performance in terms of contribution to the group / organization
        - » Interestingly, on average, intervention studies show a more significant increase in CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE (as compared to TASK and ADAPTIVE)

JOB CRAFTING INTERVENTIONS STUDIES: CURRENT LIMITATIONS

- other results from intervention studies
  - positive effects on
    - » work engagement; stress reduction; work-life balance; emotional states
- CRITICISMS
  - some protocols propose «individual goal setting», while others propose «combined goal setting»
    - «combined» goal setting means that the employees' goals, in defining their job crafting experience, is defined through some form of «negotiation», or «approval» by the leader / manager
    - this seems to be *potentially contradictory with the «core» idea of job crafting, which is self-determination, rather than a top-down imposed form of responsibilization*
- LIMITATIONS
  - not enough studies, yet, to paint a reliable picture (about 30)
  - protocols are too heterogneous
    - » maybe not all protocols are equally effective: we still don't know exactly what is the best way to «train» job crafting and to integrate it as an explicit policy
  - the measured outcomes are quite different
  - context probably matters a lot (as usual)
    - » job crafting may be more effective in certain contexts and less in others

JOB CRAFTING: CONCLUSIONS

– Job Crafting is an extremely promising area of research and, even more so, practice, for various reasons:

1. It focuses on spontaneous behaviors which happen most of the time for most of the people in most organizational settings
2. It is relevant even in traditional work settings for traditional work activities
3. It may help managers realize that leveraging people's natural need for autonomy may generate positive consequences for the organization, even when they do not expect them (see the Zappos case)
4. It implies and allows a more balanced approach to the tradeoff between coordination and autonomy, where people can be fully "valued"
5. It is associated with a number of contextual factors: facilitating job crafting implies some rethinking of certain elements of the organizational context, without implying a totally revolutionary / radical approach to autonomy. So, Job Crafting DOES imply change, but not "RADICAL CHANGE". It is FEASIBLE.
6. Currently available data on job crafting's outcomes are very encouraging, even when job crafting is not an explicit organizational policy
7. If organizations become capable and willing to implement proper job crafting policies, positive results may even increase (this is very plausible, supported by anecdotal evidence but we do not have enough data yet)