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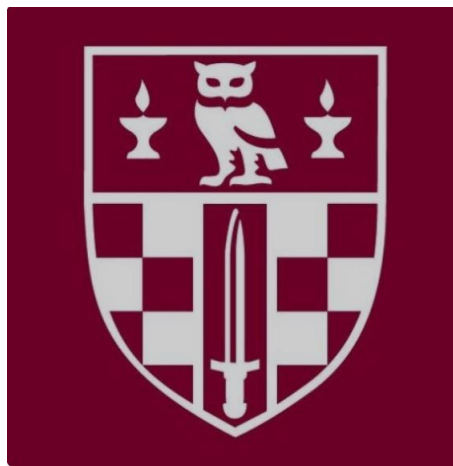
Linking Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness: Conceptual and Practical Insights for Workers, Leaders, Organisations and Coaches

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As I sit down to write this acknowledgement page, I reflect on how, at times, I doubted I would ever reach this moment. Despite the ups and downs, including a complete 180-degree change in my research approach halfway through (yikes!) it has been an absolute privilege to undertake this doctoral journey. Not least due to my wonderful support network.

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and I hope I was as good of a study role model to you as you were to me. I also hope that I've shown you the wonderfulness that comes with education. Never stop learning and growing!

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Abstract

Contemporary workplaces continue to evolve towards greater work demands, limited resources and an 'always on' status quo borne out of the introduction of easily accessible remote working technology. These developments pose questions relating to how workers can sustain their levels of productivity, satisfaction, fulfilment and wellbeing, and this thesis endeavours to interrogate this issue by researching two empirical concepts in parallel. The first, *job crafting*, relates to workers' agentic and proactive exertion of influence over aspects of their role in an effort to create favourable outcomes. The second, *work meaningfulness*, refers to the experience of deriving purpose, significance and positivity from one's role.

This thesis is made up of two distinct studies. The first study, a Systematic Literature Review, confirmed associations between job crafting and work meaningfulness. In particular, work meaningfulness was identified as a common mediator between job crafting and workplace outcomes such as engagement, job satisfaction, productivity and low turnover intention. Despite this, clear gaps in the current research emerged, namely an over reliance on quantitative, self-reported, cross-sectional studies as well as a distinct absence of intervention-based research.

The second study, an empirical qualitative intervention study, explored how cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness can be proactively supported, encouraged and enhanced in the workplace via coaching conversations. Participants took part in two coaching conversations addressing a workplace issue of their choice. Using a process of reflexive thematic analysis, five themes and 10 sub themes were developed and discussed adding to the current body of empirical evidence relating to both cognitive job crafting and

work meaningfulness. The themes covered a range of areas, including how the intervention facilitated the development of cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness over time, the specific strategies employed to foster a sense of agency, the reframing of role characteristics, the promotion and impact of intentional direction and meaning, and the enhancement of self-care practices and coping strategies as an outcome of the intervention.

Overall, this thesis identified and addressed gaps in the current scholarly knowledge. In doing so it provided an empirical foray into how researchers, practitioners and leaders alike can employ cognitive job crafting principles for the betterment of the worker experience, and also referenced the ripple effect of cognitive job crafting on the broader team and organisation. In parallel to this, the two studies specifically focused on how cognitive job crafting can be used to support workers in experiencing work meaningfulness and its associated benefits. In doing so it provided promising insights, such as a heightened sense of purpose, empowerment, contribution, professional satisfaction and self-care.

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Professional Practice Statement

As a Psychologist with Chartered Status and a full member of the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology I am exempt from the MRES (Professional Practice Portfolio) of the Professional Doctorate. This thesis therefore satisfies the requirements for Part 2 of the doctorate and reflects research conducted during my two/three years part-time study (Research Thesis). I provide a summary of my professional practice below as context to this thesis.

Professional Background

I obtained my MSc in Occupational Psychology in 1994 and, some years later, I completed a Masters in Applied Psychotherapy and Counselling. Over the last two decades I have combined these two disciplines, and have worked in both the UK and Australia as an organisational (occupational) psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, facilitator, and International Coach Federation (ICF) accredited coach.

My UK-based experience included working for various government agencies and corporate businesses as an occupational psychologist and Organisational Development Manager. This was followed by a re-location to Australia where I worked in leadership roles within the consulting, business psychology and Employee Assistance Programme industries. More latterly I established my own boutique psychology practice specialising in senior executive development and coaching, individual and team wellbeing, and organisational consulting with a focus on employee wellbeing strategies and deliverables. My clients include government, industry and corporate businesses.

Link Between Professional Practice and Professional Doctorate

My professional driving passion has always been workplace wellbeing, even prior to the current scholarly, commercial, and legal focus on mental health at work. This was evidenced early on in my career when I was involved in forging new pathways relating to mental health issues amongst workers. For instance, I initiated and led a long-term, quantitative study investigating stress and its correlates amongst post office workers in the UK. The study accessed broad sets of employee data, and its analysis provided a range of recommendations and suggested implementation, ranging from individual interventions to organisational strategies.

My career path has consistently straddled organisational and clinical practices, and this area of interest strongly influenced my current thesis which, at its core, relates to the wellbeing of workers. From the outset of this professional doctorate, I hoped to build upon existing empirical knowledge, in order to truly contribute to the employee wellbeing experience. In doing so, I investigated the links between job crafting and work meaningfulness, both of which closely align to workers' mental health. I then undertook the design and application of a practical intervention aimed at supporting workers to develop their cognitive job crafting skills and enhance their sense of work meaningfulness. I did so in the hope that the results of my study will be utilized to build awareness and skills amongst workers, leaders, organisations and coaches, and ultimately lead to a stronger sense of agency and capacity to influence and create positive employment experiences.

Conference Papers and Presentations Arising from this Thesis

In February 2024 I presented the initial findings of my empirical research at the Centre for Transformative Work Design Conference, led by Dr Sharon Parker in Perth, Australia.

I presented twice. The first presentation titled *"Cognitive Job Crafting in Action: Bringing Outcomes to Life via Coaching Conversations",* provided an overview of the initial findings of my empirical study. The opportunity to discuss the themes and sub-themes with like-minded professionals was invaluable. My audience discussed the study with great enthusiasm, interest and curiosity which in turn stimulated my evolving immersion in the data, an approach thoroughly encouraged by reflective thematic analysis principles.

The second presentation was in the form of a symposium delivered with other researchers. Titled *"Leadership and Wellbeing: A Paradox, Possibility or Prerequisite?"* It examined the intersection between my study and a new piece of quantitative research which focused on leader wellbeing through the lens of work design. The collegiate, synergistic nature of the symposium provided further opportunity for me to reflect on my data from alternative angles and paradigms.

Linking Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness: Conceptual and Practical Insights for Workers, Leaders, Organisations and Coaches

Chapter 1: Background to the Research

1.1 Introduction

Post-pandemic recovery and the cost-of-living crisis are impacting businesses and individuals alike (Gaskell, 2023; McConnell, 2022). Workplaces across the board are simultaneously experiencing an ongoing intensification of reduced budgets, increased demands, resource rationalisation and the need for 'doing more with less' at work (Janssen & Estevez, 2013; Kinman, 2014). Furthermore, although many employers express their concern for employees' financial constraints, organisational support is scarce and often focused on acute short-term needs, rather than long-term requirements (Atay & Walker, 2023).

Coupled with this, the constant accessibility to work via e-communication and social media has led to an ever-connected workforce. For many, the traditional nine-to-five working day has become less prevalent, replaced by a blurring of boundaries between work and personal time, with work often conducted across a breadth of contexts and multiple time zones (Steger, 2019). Infact, recent data indicates that adults' most common weekday activity is work (Grant & Parker, 2009; Steger, 2019), and that a third of one's adult life is spent working (SafeWork NSW, 2017).

Given the evolving nature of our living, working, and connecting, it is understandable that positive work experiences are increasingly important due to their capacity to provide a sense of fulfilment which transcends promotion opportunities, working conditions (Bailey & Madden, 2016), and monetary reward (Peng, 2018), with the exception of low-income

workers who place greater significance on the amount of financial remuneration that their job offers (Romney et al., 2024). One way of achieving such fulfilment is through the experience of meaning at work. This concept (henceforth referred to as *work meaningfulness*) refers to the experience of doing a job that feels purposeful, significant and positive (Rosso et al., 2010). It is favourably associated with a breadth of positive work factors, such as engagement, commitment, productivity retention and loyalty amongst others (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). These claims are supported by Michael Steger (2019), one of the foremost contemporary researchers in the field of work meaningfulness. He asserts that the experience of work meaningfulness is a highly intrinsic and motivating pursuit which involves an individual's investment in actions that they find personally rewarding, purposeful and stimulating. For example, a person who is intrinsically motivated to save human lives may choose to become a doctor. He contrasts this with extrinsic motivation which is associated with behaviours aimed at attracting external rewards (for example, salary) or avoiding negative consequences (such as poor performance reviews).

Coupled with the importance of work meaningfulness is the significance of job-related agency, whereby the job incumbent influences aspects of their role in order to create their own, personally tailored job-person fit. This process, referred to as *job crafting,* was initially conceptualised by professors Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton in 2001. They stated that job crafting is characterised by a proactive, continuous, bottom-up set of behaviours whereby employees construct, redefine and modify their work tasks and relationships such that they align with their personal strengths, interests and objectives, with the intention of achieving favourable outcomes (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Though not a panacea, research to date strongly indicates that job crafting can support several endeavours. For instance, recent meta-analyses identified that an increase in job

crafting behaviours (such as seeking resources and challenges) lead to greater worker wellbeing, engagement, satisfaction and positive affect (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017; Silapurem et al., 2024) and that job crafting has a positive impact on wellbeing outcomes (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015).

Given the salience of job crafting and work meaningfulness in today's ever-changing workplace, this thesis aims to contribute to current scholarly knowledge relating to the breadth and depth of the association between the two. This endeavour is undertaken by first assessing and synthesising relevant peer-reviewed literature via a systematic literature review (SLR), and then conducting an empirical study aimed at enhancing knowledge relating to the practical application of both concepts via an intervention study.

By way of introduction to this thesis, this chapter provides a conceptual definition and empirical overview of job crafting and work meaningfulness to date. It focuses on their relevance to contemporary workplaces, identifies and critically synthesises how these complementary concepts intersect, and concludes with a synopsis of the empirical questions addressed in this thesis. The last section of this chapter provides an overview of the ensuing chapters of this thesis.

1.2 Job Crafting

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) initial conceptualisation of job crafting presented the fundamental premise that job crafting is connected to three worker needs (otherwise referred to as motivations). As can be seen in *Figure 1* below, these are comprised of the desire to: (a) assert agency over one's work; (b) create a positive image or reputation, particularly in the eyes of others; and (c) feel interpersonally connected and valued. The successful fulfilment of these needs via job crafting practices impacts workers' sense of work meaningfulness and identity and is strongly moderated by opportunities provided by

the organisation, otherwise known as *boundary conditions* (Wrzesniewski et al., 2001).

Related to job crafting, is a concept referred to as *job design* (Demerouti & Bakker, 2024). Whilst the former is characterised by a bottom-up individual activity, the latter is a top-down process initiated by the organisation to productively structure roles by clustering tasks, activities and responsibilities in order to meet business needs and strategic direction (Oldham & Fried, 2016). However, its static nature tends to view the worker as a passive recipient of the job structure, rather than as an agentic, influential being (Wrzesniewski et al, 2013). Despite this, the importance of job design should not be overlooked and is therefore referenced in the discussion section of this thesis.

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation is heavily rooted in self-identity and suggests that job crafting can positively impact an employee's sense of work meaningfulness and purpose, via proactively aligning elements of their job with their subjective sense of purpose and values. They use the example of a hospital cleaner who proactively interacts with patients and families in order to provide a quality service which likely elevates the meaning that they attribute to their job as a result offering valuable support to patients during a difficult and vulnerable time. This example also reflects Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation that individuals construct their jobs by shaping their inherent tasks and forming working relationships which impact their social environment at work. It differentiates between three different types of job crafting which they define as task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting. *Task crafting* refers to modifying the nature of the role by adapting time, involvement, and responsibilities relating to job tasks. For example, an individual may choose to complete difficult tasks in the morning when their energy levels are high. *Relational crafting* involves the adaptation of interpersonal relationships. For instance, a worker may choose to increase the quality of

their peer relationships by dedicating more time to collaborative projects. Finally, *cognitive crafting* involves the reconceptualization of one's role or parts of it. For instance, one may reframe the importance and value placed on their role, reprioritise their responsibilities, or rethink the contribution that one makes to their team.

Figure 1: Wrzesniewski and Dutton's Original Job Crafting Model
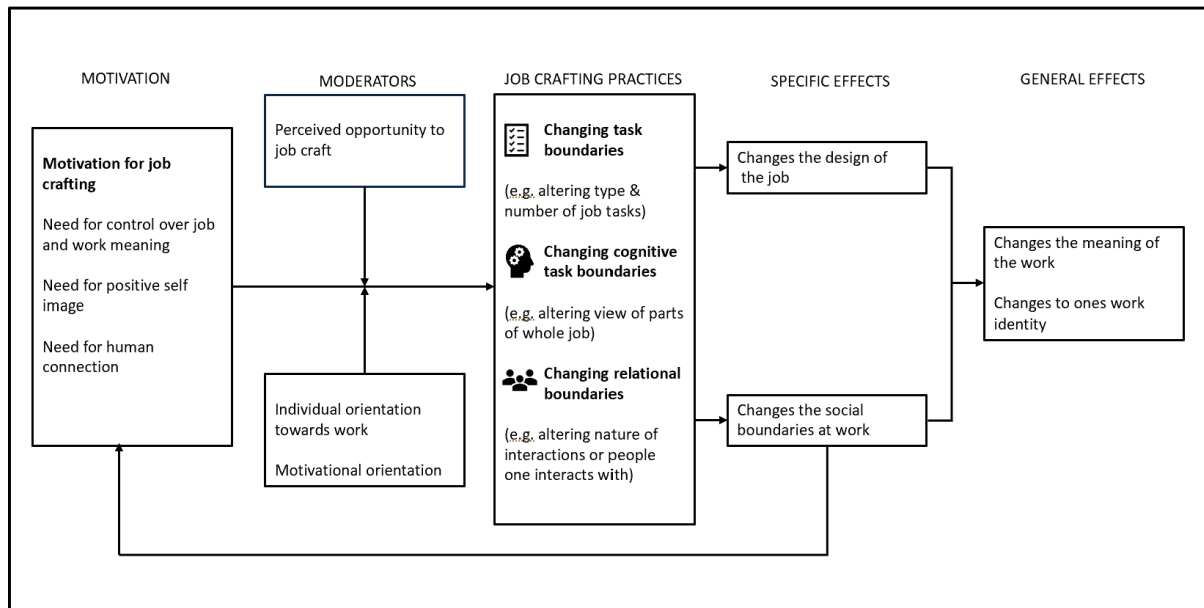
(Source: Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001. Illustration adapted by Setti, 2024)

Since its introduction to the scholarly field, job crafting has become the focus of a significant body of research, particularly explored by Evangelia Demerouti and Arnold Bakker, two preeminent scholars in this field who introduced the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model in 2002. This model, presented in *Figure 2* below, conceptualises that the interaction between job resources (for example, autonomy, professional development, positive relationships and manager feedback) and personal resources (such as, resilience and optimism) have a positive impact on engagement and performance when job demands are high (for example, when workers take on challenging projects). Conversely, hindering job facets (such as, role ambiguity and emotionally difficult customer interactions), lead to job strain and a reduction in job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Figure 2: The Job Demands-Resources Model
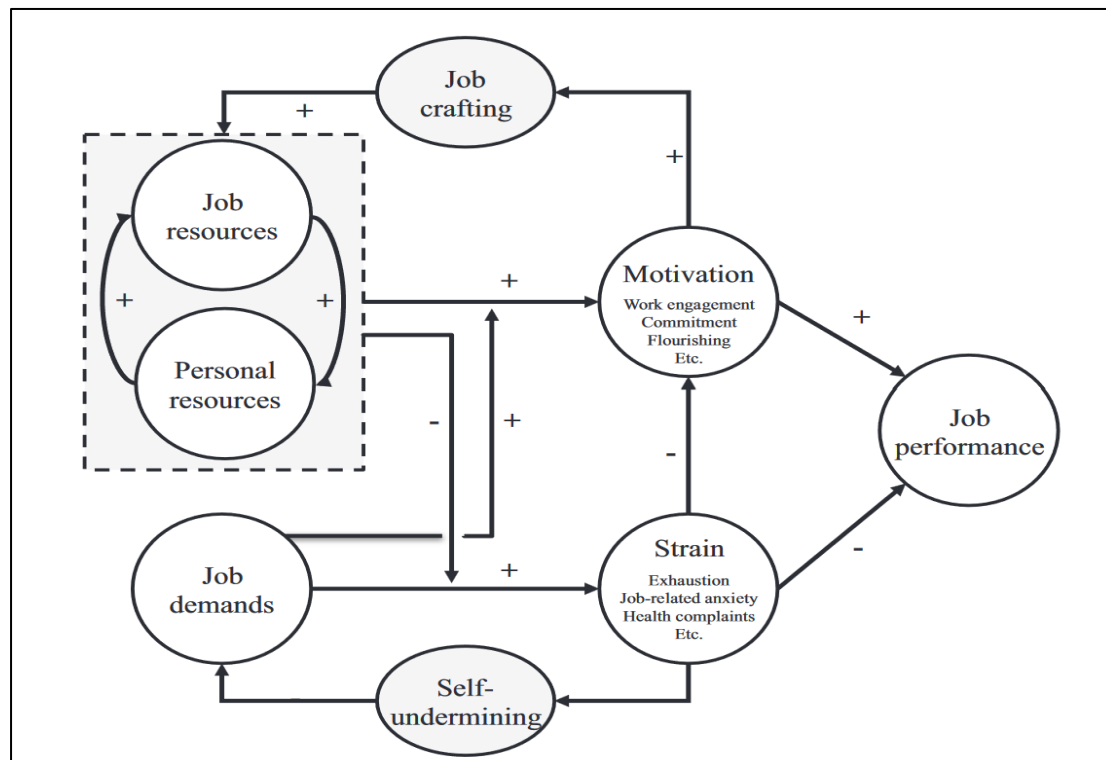
(Source: Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)

The JD-R model, sometimes referred to as 'resource-based crafting' (Zhang & Parker, 2019), has evolved over time. For instance, empirical studies have tended to define JD-R rooted job crafting techniques in terms of 'approach crafting', in other words, actions which create positive work outcomes, or 'avoidance crafting', which are behaviours intended to avoid negative outcomes (Tims et al., 2022). Of further note, the JD-R model has been more widely applied than Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation (Devotto & Wechsler, 2019). It is suggested that this is due to JD-R's agile and heuristic scope whereby *resources* and *demands* are loosely defined, which makes them relatively easy to adapt and apply to varying research angles and practical applications (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Despite their empirically proven conceptual differences, there are parallels between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation and the JD-R model (Mäkikangas & Schaufeli, 2021) which map onto each other (Lee et al., 2021). Namely, Wrzesniewski et

al.'s (2001) relational and task crafting map onto the JD-R model's social job resources and

job demands respectively (Hulshof et al., 2020), because the interpersonal aspect of a job

can be experienced as a resource, and the tasks requiring completion on the job can be

interpreted as job demands. However, the concept of cognitive crafting is not incorporated

into the JD-R model, nor are there empirical studies indicating a link between the two

(Mäkikangas et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2017). This may be because cognitive job crafting is

related to one's inner world of thoughts and personal meaning-making processes, rather

than to the outwardly expressed behaviours and workplace resources which underpin the

JD-R approach (Demerouti, 2014).

Given the established link between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting

conceptualisation and meaning-making, attention is now turned to the definition of life and

work meaningfulness, followed by an examination of the intersection between job crafting

and work meaningfulness.

1.3 The Definition and Significance of Life Meaning

The concept of meaningfulness dates back some decades. It first emerged as an area

of scholarly interest with the publication of the book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946)

penned by neurologist and existential psychiatrist Viktor Frankl. He asserted that meaning

underlies one's intrinsic motivation to live, and that striving towards proactive, intentional

goals and pursuits provides life purpose (Bushkin et al., 2021). Since Frankl's reference to

life meaning there has been an increased interest in the concept, for instance, Steger and

peers identified several concepts relating to intrinsic life meaning. In part, they referred to

these as: (a) *coherence* which relates to how people make sense of life; (b) *purpose* which

references one's sense of direction and striving; (c) *significance* which relates to one's

feeling that their life is worthy and valuable; and (d) *mattering* which references the need to

feel interpersonally important (Martela & Steger, 2016). Despite this, there is no singular

agreement on the definition of *life meaning* (Steger, 2016), though current research does

concur that the experience of life is not merely a sequential accumulation of time and

events (King & Hicks, 2021). Instead, it is an interpretive process to which people attach

their core values, principles and judgements, and it is empirically associated with a breadth

of positive physical and mental health outcomes (Romney et al., 2024).

Given that meaningfulness refers to the intrinsic value that we attach to all aspects

of life, it follows that the concept also holds significance in one's professional life (Lee et al.,

2017), and may influence choices relating to career, job type, organisational culture, work

environment and industry. As such, an exploration of work meaningfulness is warranted.

1.4 Work Meaningfulness

Despite its importance, comparatively little attention has been given to the

experience of work meaningfulness (Steger, 2019), and how various factors impact its

prevalence (Lysova et al., 2019). Perhaps this is because Western attitudes have historically

focused on employment as a financial necessity, rather than an avenue for personal growth

and self-realisation (Mei, 2019). Consequently, there is limited empirical knowledge and

conceptual consistency relating to the workplace elements and characteristics that influence

work meaningfulness (King et al., 2021; Martela & Pessi, 2018; Tommasi et al., 2023).

Notwithstanding this, the last two decades have seen an increased scholarly interest

in work meaningfulness (Beadle, 2019), and an initial exploration of the link between

meaningfulness and work was provided by researchers Steger and Dik (2009). Their

research found a broad interaction between one's experience of life meaning and work

meaningfulness. As presented in Steger's (2019) model in *Figure 3* below, there is a clear

set of shared themes including, *self-knowledge, authenticity, effective action, self-transcendence and connection, wisdom, ethics* and *purpose*.

Figure 3: Steger's Model of Shared Themes between Life and Work Meaningfulness.

MEANING IN LIFE CONCEPTS

Creating - self-expression, making something new

Building relationships - close interpersonal bonds

Enduring suffering - bravery in face of adversity (Frankl)

Coherence - making sense of self and life

Purpose - working on worthwhile aspirations

Significance - building a valued, worthwhile life

Mattering - making a difference to others (Martela & Steger; George & Park)

SHARED THEMES

Self Knowledge

Authenticity

Effective action

Self-transcendence & connection

Wisdom

Ethics

Overarching purpose & mission

MEANINGFUL WORK CONCEPTS

Positive meaning - work has a point and an outcome

Meaning making - work builds life meaning

Greater good - doing good for a cause beyond oneself (Steger, Dik, Duffy)

Craftmanship - doing work well

Serving - helping others

Kinship - working together (Pratt, Pradies, Lapisto)

Self-connection - authenticity & identity

Individualism - self-efficacy & control

Contribution - self transcendence & impact

Unification - shared values & connection (Rosso, Dekas, Wrzesniewski)

(Source: Steger, 2019. Illustration modified by Setti, 2024)

Steger's (2016) work also explored the theory, correlates and benefits of work meaningfulness. He concluded that the experience of work meaningfulness transcends the benefits one achieves when fulfilling a job's transactional or procedural requirements (for example, completing a list of required assignments). Instead, it leads to a more holistic, multi-faceted range of benefits which encompass practical, emotional and psychological factors. As he succinctly stated *"People who have meaningful work are more engaged, experience greater positive emotions, feel they use their psychological strengths more often, and are less often stressed and hostile. In some cases, meaningful work is demonstrated to longitudinally predict other important metrics of work well-being, such as engagement"* (Steger 2019, p.211).

Further to this, Steger and colleagues developed a survey tool underpinned by their research. Referred to as the *Work and Meaning Inventory* (Steger et al., 2012), it identified three dimensions relating to the experience of work meaningfulness, these are: (a) the

subjective feeling of worth and utility of one's work; (b) the contribution of work to one's overall life purpose; and (c) the perception that one's work contributes to a greater good, beyond one's individual needs.

Bailey et al. (2016), in alignment with Steger's research, adopt a comprehensive approach to the concept of work meaningfulness, emphasizing a holistic perspective. They introduce the concept of a *Meaningfulness Ecosystem*, consisting of four interrelated elements. The first component, *Organisational Meaningfulness*, pertains to the clarity with which an organisation communicates the significance of its contributions. This element highlights that an individual's experience of meaningfulness is not solely self-determined but is also influenced by the proactive efforts of leaders to promote work meaningfulness through appropriate support and interventions. The second component, *Interactional Meaningfulness*, describes a state in which individuals perceive their work through the lens of its impact on others and the environment. This aligns with the social identification perspective, which suggests that work meaningfulness emerges from one's sense of identity and belonging within the organisation (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The third component, *Task Meaningfulness*, refers to the meaning individuals attribute to the specific tasks associated with their roles. The final component, *Job Meaningfulness*, relates to the perceived impact of an individual's role on significant organisational or societal outcomes.   The latter three elements align with Martela et al's. (2018) contention that worker's potential for self-realisation is impacted by their evaluation of the importance of their work, and their perception of their impact on a broader purpose beyond themselves.

Other scholars have further supported the empirical evidence on work meaningfulness. They affirmed that it as a key intrinsic psychological experience (Fletcher & Schofield, 2021; Michaelson, 2019) which is continuously evaluated (Romney et al., 2024)

and provides significance and purpose to employees (Geldenhuys et al., 2021) which influences their commitment, performance, and self-realization at work (Kim, 2024). Additionally, a recent systematic review consolidated 20 years of development in the arena of work meaningfulness and determined several common threads and tenets (Tan et al., 2023). Building on some of the aforementioned findings, it concurred that work meaningfulness is related to an individual's interpretation of the value of their work, and that this is influenced by their self-identity, connectedness, authenticity and broader life context. Furthermore, individuals tend to derive meaning from aspects of their work that provide pro-social communal benefit. Tan et al's (2023) review also reinforced that work meaningfulness is strongly related to one's intrinsic sense of personal fulfilment, they differentiated between high-level goals that inform one's sense of purpose, and lower-level goals that inform actions. Further insights confirm that work meaningfulness is an evolving experience often evaluated retrospectively and episodically through a process of sense-making, particularly during significant moments when one's goals and motivations align with work (Bailey et al., 2016).

Despite the growing interest in work meaningfulness, academic literature has yet to identify a cohesive understanding of how organisations can nurture, encourage and support the experience of work meaningfulness (Lysova et al., 2019). Some believe that work meaningfulness occurs via an ongoing process of cognitive alignment between job tasks and personal ideals (Bailey et al., 2016), therefore workers should be encouraged to pursue endeavours which support their values. Others look more broadly, and state that work is an obligatory process that fulfils a functional, political and moral purpose (Michaelson & Tosti-Kharas, 2024), such that workers should be supported to focus on societal betterment. Additionally, some researchers posit that work meaningfulness can lead to negative

outcomes, such as burnout, as a result of factors like overwork and a preparedness to accept poorly resourced work environments (Tan et al., 2023), whilst others state that in order to feel a sense of work meaningfulness, one must experience motivation, commitment and wellbeing (Martela et al., 2018). While these varying perspectives are not mutually exclusive, the absence of a universal conceptualisation of work meaningfulness creates inconsistencies in measurement, and inhibits the establishment of clear causal relationships. This consequently, limits the generalisability and applicability of research findings and highlights the need for a more coherent work meaningfulness framework to support valid research outcomes and their practical application

1.5 Intersections and Commonalities between Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness

In their 2001 seminal paper on job crafting, Wrzesniewski and Dutton made a clear association between job crafting and the experience of work meaningfulness. This is presented in their statement that "*actions affect both the meaning of the work and one's work identity. By 'meaning of the work' we mean individuals' understanding of the purpose of their work or what they believe is achieved in the work" (*Wrzesniewski et al., 2001, p.181). Numerous studies have since backed the association between work meaningfulness and job crafting. Such research has concluded that workers agentically job craft in order to influence their work boundaries and create a greater sense of meaning (Rosso et al., 2010), they also proactively optimise their person-job fit in a way that creates a sense of work meaningfulness (Tims et al., 2016). Furthermore, both job crafting and work meaningfulness are influenced by a combination of personal and situational factors (Peng, 2018), and involve continuous, proactive endeavours whereby workers evaluate the

alignment between their job and their intrinsic values (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) and redefine or modify their tasks to achieve perceived favourable outcomes (Peng, 2018).

Research also posits that both job crafting and work meaningfulness are related to positive workplace outcomes. For instance, job crafting is linked to increased job satisfaction, engagement and performance (Roczniewska et al., 2022). Similarly, work meaningfulness can lead to a sense of universal wellbeing (Steger & Dik, 2009). For instance, workers who report that their emotional needs are met through their employment also report low anxiety and healthy self-esteem (Deci et al., 2001). Further research which asserts that wellbeing is positively impacted by the experience of work meaningfulness, also references favourable outcomes such as positive identity, self-worth, self-realisation, and personal agency (Fletcher et al., 2021; Peng, 2018), as well as engagement, positive emotions, and reduced stress (Steger, 2019). These findings are particularly salient in the face of increased employer concerns relating to worker wellbeing (World Economic Forum, 2021), and the contribution of mental illness to the global disease burden (Zadow et al., 2019). A case in point is that in Australia, where this research took place, the last two decades have seen a consistent rise in work-related claims attributed to mental health conditions (SafeWork Australia, 2022).

Further links between job crafting and work meaningfulness are found in relation to other variables. One such variable is a *sense of calling*. This concept is defined as the desire to be involved in intrinsically meaningful work (Beadle, 2019), as it supports a series of fundamental worker needs such as the experience of agency, self-efficacy and interpersonal connectivity (Demerouti et al., 2024). Research has identified that workers with a strong sense of professional calling, such as spiritual leaders (Chang et al., 2021), also experience a strong association between job crafting and meaningfulness.

A final point relating to the commonalities between job crafting and work meaningfulness is the conjecture relating to the negative implications of each concept. For instance, although a sense of belonging and work meaningfulness are closely associated, there are indications that this can lead to poor professional boundaries and work-related over-identification resulting in the neglect of one's self-care (Schnell et al., 2019). Furthermore, workers with a strong sense of work meaningfulness may experience emotional distance in their personal relationships, particularly if their significant other doesn't share their work values (Oelberger, 2019). Similarly, given the positive impacts of job crafting, it might be assumed that job crafting is purely prosocial and positive in nature (Grant & Mayer, 2009). However, little is known about the motives behind job crafting and the drivers that underlie its related behaviours (Lin & Meng, 2024), which restricts the current scholarly understanding of the impact of negative motives. For instance, an individual may choose to engage in job crafting for impression management reasons. Whilst this is not necessarily an undesirable motive, it may result in negative outcomes for the organisation, such as poor interpersonal citizenship particularly in collectivist cultures (Takeuchi et al., 2015). It may also result in a reduction in pro-social behaviours and cooperation when employees opine that their co-worker's job crafting impacts them negatively (Grey et al., 2024), thus missing the opportunity to make positive contributions and create effective change (Grant et al., 2009). From a wellbeing perspective job crafting has also been associated with workaholism and work obsession, leading to maladaptive outcomes such as burnout (Silapurem et al., 2024). Similarly, *approach crafting* (as per the JD-R model) can lead to increased workload resulting in burnout, and likewise, *avoidance crafting* is associated with reduced work complexity, increased burnout and disengagement from work (Grey et al., 2024; Harju et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding their various conceptual intersections, little is known about the direct, empirical relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). This leads to several potential lines of inquiry relating to the directionality of the relationship between the two, and the variables, if any, that mediate or moderate the relationship.

In conclusion, while empirical research predominantly suggests positive outcomes associated with job crafting and work meaningfulness, such as enhanced job satisfaction, wellbeing, and performance (Roczniewska et al., 2022), other studies (Silapurem et al., 2024) identify potential negative consequences, including burnout and workaholism. These findings point to a complex and multifaceted relationship between these constructs. However, current research is limited by factors such as insufficient exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which both job crafting and work meaningfulness operate, as well as a lack of universality relating to the definition of work meaningfulness. As a result, currently there is no clear understanding of the intersectionality between job crafting and work meaningfulness. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the impact of job crafting on work meaningfulness (and vice versa), as well as the subsequent implications for both individual and organisational outcomes, future research could examine the causal dynamics between job crafting and work meaningfulness, and identify variables that may moderate or mediate their relationship.

1.6 Rationale for the Current Research

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of the historical, conceptual and empirical development of job crafting and work meaningfulness. It has presented both as discrete scholarly topics and as intersecting concepts, specifically in relation to the contemporary workplace. It highlighted that work meaningfulness is particularly associated

with Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) meaning-rooted conceptualisation of job crafting, which takes the view that workers proactively overlay their self-identity onto their job crafting endeavours. In doing so they align their personal values with their behavioural and cognitive approaches to work. It further stated that current research points to the importance of job crafting and the experience of work meaningfulness on workers' sense of subjective purpose and wellbeing, as well as its impact on their motivation to strive towards positive outcomes for themselves and their employer.

This chapter also highlighted gaps in current scholarly knowledge. In particular, the limited knowledge relating to mechanisms underlying the relationships between job crafting and work meaningfulness. Tan et al's. (2023) recent review went some way to address this. It found that effective leadership behaviours and supportive organisational culture can strengthen the connection between job design and work meaningfulness. However, several key areas of inquiry still remain. For example, it is unclear whether increased job crafting can lead to greater work meaningfulness, and conversely, whether greater work meaningfulness can foster more job crafting. Additionally, the specific relationships between the different forms of job crafting (relational, task and cognitive) and work meaningfulness remain underexplored. Furthermore, questions arise regarding the actions that employers, employees, peers, and workplace behavioural specialists can take to foster job crafting practices and enhance the experience of work meaningfulness. Finally, it is uncertain which types of organisational interventions would most effectively support these efforts.

These gaps in the existing literature formed the foundation for the present thesis. Its primary objective was to identify empirical links between job crafting and work meaningfulness, with the aim of providing conceptual and practical insights for workers,

leaders, organisations, and coaches. This was achieved through the SLR, followed by an empirical study. The SLR examined current peer-reviewed research to provide an overview of the existing scholarly connections between job crafting and work meaningfulness, as well as the impact of organisational interventions on this relationship. In order to do so it posed the principal question: What is the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness? With a series of related sub-questions:

1. How and to what extent are job crafting and work meaningfulness associated?

2. What are the antecedents, mediators and moderators that impact upon this association?

3. To what extent has research differentiated between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness?

4. What, if any, organisational interventions and initiatives effectively enhance job crafting and work meaningfulness?

Amongst other findings, the SLR identified a lack of intervention studies in this field, and limited attention to cognitive job crafting. This informed the second study in the thesis, an intervention study which examined the impact of a cognitive job crafting coaching intervention on job crafting and work meaningfulness. The research questions posed were:

1. How can a targeted coaching process support the development of cognitive job crafting?

2. What thought processes do participants experience in the development of cognitive job crafting skills?

3. To what extent can a cognitive job crafting focused coaching intervention enhance the experience of work-related meaningfulness?

1.7 Overview of the Ensuing Chapters

The following four chapters provide a progressive discussion of the issues identified in this chapter, and the research conducted as part of this thesis. The final chapter provides a subjective reflection on the doctoral process.

Chapter 2, the methodology, presents an in-depth explanation of the approach taken for each of the two studies which make up this thesis. It discusses the ontological and epistemological paradigms which guided my decisions at various junctures throughout the process and includes relevant ethical considerations. The underpinning rationale used for each study is then addressed, with a concluding overview of their inherent limitations and how their negative impacts were mitigated.

Chapter 3, the SLR, provides a transparent and replicable synthesis of the relevant academic literature to date, and identifies knowledge gaps in the current literature. It asks whether current research effectively differentiates between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) different forms of job crafting and their impact on work meaningfulness. It also examines whether relevant intervention studies have specifically examined job crafting and work meaningfulness simultaneously. In doing so it explores a series of academically novel questions pertaining to the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness, and responds to questions relating to the directionality of their association, including a look at the antecedents, moderators and mediators.

The SLR findings confirm that job crafting and work meaningfulness are clearly linked. In particular, work meaningfulness commonly mediates between job crafting and outcomes such as role performance, worker engagement, commitment, job satisfaction, productivity and low turnover intention. For instance, in one study job crafting impacted tour leaders' work engagement via work meaningfulness. Similarly, another research paper

found that work meaningfulness was a mediator between job crafting, engagement and task performance amongst staff in service-orientated roles.

The SLR also identified clear gaps in scholarly knowledge relating to an over-reliance on quantitative, self-reported, cross-sectional studies and a distinct absence of interventions. Based on these findings, implications for theory, research and practice are highlighted, and future research opportunities are discussed.

Chapter 4 addresses the gaps identified in Chapter 3 (the SLR) by way of a qualitative empirical study aimed at advancing current scholarly knowledge. It does so via the practical application of a job crafting intervention delivered over two time segments, designed to support the development of cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. The empirical questions relate to how a targeted coaching intervention can support the development of cognitive job crafting, the thought processes experienced in the development of such skills, and the extent to which a cognitive job crafting intervention can enhance the experience of work-related meaningfulness. Themes were conceptualised using reflexive thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke's (2022b) six-phase process. This encompassed: (1) data collection; (2) engagement and familiarisation with the data; (3) generation of initial codes and labels which represent the data; (4) creation of code categories; (5) aggregation of patterns of codes to construct meaningful themes; and (6) write up using a combination of analysis and data extracts to represent findings (Peel, 2020). The analysis provided a spectrum of novel findings used to expand current theoretical knowledge, and highlighted practical considerations for organisations, people leaders, individual workers and coaches. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the strengths, limitations and future research opportunities.

Chapter 5 integrates the overall themes and findings of the two studies presented in this thesis. It discusses ways in which both studies have advanced current scholarly knowledge and how the second study, in particular, provides insight into how an organisational intervention can be used to enhance cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. In doing so, it provides theoretical contributions, as well as implications for practice and further research. Chapter 5 also presents an overview of the limitations of both studies and how they were mitigated.

Finally, chapter 6 provides insight into the thoughts and reflections which guided the breadth and direction of both of the studies from conceptualisation through to completion.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology for this thesis, providing the reasoning and considerations made at each step of the SLR and empirical studies. Ontological and epistemological paradigms are initially considered due to their guiding influence on the researcher's cognition, perspectives, and research style (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Following this, ethical considerations are addressed, leading to the underpinning rationale for the design and administration of each study, and concluding with an examination of their inherent limitations. Whilst this chapter provides the empirical reasoning behind each methodological decision, Chapters 3 and 4 detail the methods, findings and recommendations of the SLR and the empirical study respectively.

2.2 Ontological and Epistemological Approach

My initial training as an occupational psychologist took a realist approach to the human experience, and greatly influenced my early career during which time I viewed human behaviour as highly observable, measurable and assessable. In subsequent years two developments impacted a change in my philosophical stance. One was my ongoing, direct client work that demonstrated the power of subjective experience on human behaviour. I observed time and again the profound influence of education, family, culture, past experience, personal preference and societal factors on clients' lives and work choices. The second development occurred when I undertook further study and trained as a counsellor and psychotherapist 15 years into my career. During this time, I was exposed to varying scholarly and practical schools of thought relating to human cognitions, affect and behaviour, all of which shared a common underlying concept of subjective, personal choice.

As a result, I developed newfound appreciation of the impact of context, motivation, personal preference, past experience and future aspirations on the way people process information and present themselves to the external world. This proved to be a pivotal moment in my philosophical evolution as my realist, somewhat quantitatively focused stance, adapted and changed to one that strongly considers the subjectivity of human experience. This change significantly influenced the underlying ontological stance taken in this thesis, which closely aligns with *critical realism,* a position that recognises that truth and reality are shaped and accessed by subjective human experiences (Zhang, 2023) which "*determine, constrain and oppress*" (Houston, 2001, p.846) behaviour which is influenced by perceptions and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

Closely aligned to this ontological stance was my epistemological approach, described as *contextualism*, a belief that emphasises the role of context and frame of reference in human perceptions. It advocates that human thought, and behaviour cannot be separated from one's personal situation and environmental factors (Tebes, 2005), and closely aligns with the concepts explored in this thesis which, as stated above, both reference the significance of personal choice and subjectivity.

My philosophical stance influenced my scholarly approach, which gravitated towards qualitative based research which, compared to quantitative methodologies, acquires in-depth first-hand, meaning-focused, contextual data relating to the human experience (Taherdoost, 2022).   As such, my underlying focus for both studies was to empirically investigate two subjective, person-centred processes, namely job crafting and work meaningfulness. However, a dissonance was encountered when aligning traditional SLR methodology, which originally hails from medical research and is historically positivist in nature (Tranfield et al., 2003), with my own philosophical approach. Exploration of its

evolution identified that in more recent times the traditional SRL approach has been subject to criticism for being too dependent upon positivism to the exclusion of other ontological stances (Santos et al., 2022). Subsequently, in recent years SLR methodology has been adopted by management research, which tends to take a critical realism approach, and a theory-building methodology (Rojon et al., 2021) which aligns more closely with my own philosophical inclination.

The focus of the empirical study was to develop insight into how participants think about and develop cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. It focused on the narratives and meanings that participants used to make sense of their behaviour in their work context, with each participant bringing their own set of views and judgments. This approach, which emphasised the importance of subjective reality influencing decisions and behaviours, aligned with a critical realism ontology, and contextualist epistemological slant.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

As a psychologist with Chartered Status, I am well versed in the ethical practices required by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and adhered to its guidelines to inform my approach. In doing so I upheld the four guiding principles provided by the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (Oates et al., 2021). These encapsulated: (1) respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of the participants; (2) maintaining scientific quality, integrity and contribution to my field of research; (3) social responsibility, partnership, and self-reflection contributing to the common good; and (4) maximising the benefit of my work whilst also minimising the risk of harm. This included conflicts of interest that could arise, for instance, in the event that a participant or their business was a previous or current client of mine.

From a procedural perspective, an ethics application was submitted to the Birkbeck Ethics Officer (DREO) prior to the start of the empirical study. It referenced the relevant facets of the study. This included participant sample and size, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection method, confidentiality, anonymity assurances and material dissemination. Information sheets, which can be found in *Appendix 1*, were designed to provide potential participants with a breadth of relevant information, particularly in relation to the protection of their anonymity and confidentiality. Adverse effects on participants and the researcher were considered highly unlikely, therefore the study was deemed 'routine', and the study was approved without amendments (approval number 950532-950514-112874720). Approval can be viewed in *Appendix 2.*

2.4 Study 1: Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

2.4.1 Rationale

In contrast to scoping reviews, the SLR approach aims to aggregate relevant empirical studies in order to investigate a series of clearly framed and identified research questions (Gough et al., 2013). As per the Birkbeck College Occupational Psychology doctoral programme practice, I opted to carry out an SLR due to its precise protocols which lead the researcher through a stepwise, transparent and auditable method of appraising a body of primary research (Rojon et al., 2021). It has the capacity to identify convergent and divergent themes, establish gaps in knowledge (Tranfield et al., 2003), enhance both academic and practical knowledge and, where applicable, inform policy (Rousseau et al., 2008; Thorpe et al., 2006). Furthermore, though the researcher plays an important part in data synthesis, SLR conventions help highlight existing bias in the primary literature. It also helps address researcher bias which may, for instance, occur if the researcher only includes data that concurs with their views. This latter aspect is a common criticism of traditional

literature reviews which have limited replicability due to a lack of methodological details, and their tendency to include studies which align with the researcher's goals (Briner & Rousseau, 2011). Thus, the SLR approach was taken in order to create a set of defensible insights into new, previously unexplored areas of study (Gopalakrishnan & Ganeshkumar, 2013). Details relating to the method applied is provided in detail in Chapter 3 (section 3.2).

From a personal perspective, my inherent interest in workplace wellbeing, and the impact that job crafting and work meaningfulness have on this, influenced my motivation to carry out a robust, transparent, and replicable study. This was done with the intent to expand the current academic body of research by synthesising contemporary research and informing future studies.

2.4.2 Data Identification and Extraction

My initial research identified that job crafting and work meaningfulness are rarely studied in combination, particularly in intervention studies, and so I developed an inclusive protocol in my endeavour to capture all primary peer-reviewed studies relating to these two constructs. This was done by setting broad inclusion criteria (as listed in *Table 1,* on p.55 below), and creating parsimonious search strings intended to include any peer-reviewed study as long as it concurrently addressed both job crafting and work meaningfulness. This struck a balance between the need for a focused search process, whilst also ensuring inclusivity by ensuring that relevant studies were not unnecessarily excluded.

I excluded grey literature as it is not typically peer-reviewed or steeped in empirical evidence (Rojon et al., 2021). However, in recognition of the practical and contemporaneous contributions provided by grey literature (Adams et al., 2017) I undertook an initial search of such material in order to rule out any important oversights, such as industry-based practical practices linking job crafting and work meaningfulness. This search

did indeed identify online presentations, articles, training materials, and videos relating to employee experience, skill development, career, and leadership. However, it did not yield fresh insights to supplement or challenge the available scholarly research relating to job crafting and work meaningfulness. The reason for this may be that job crafting appears to be experiencing a strong academic focus since the term was first coined in 2001. This was confirmed via a search of the Birkbeck College library portal which found that peer-reviewed studies containing '*job crafting*' in its title has significantly increased from one publication in 2000, to 48 studies in 2023 across a breadth of databases.

A series of electronic literature searches were carried out following a discussion with the relevant Birkbeck College subject librarian and my supervisor regarding my areas of research and interest. I chose to use three well regarded data repositories namely, Proquest One Business, PsychINFO, and Web of Science. Despite the expediency of this approach, one disadvantage is that it can overlook important studies, often due to poor indexing (Magos & Gambadauro, 2005). To overcome this limitation, the electronic search was supplemented by a process of hand searching which included the inspection of references found in previously identified relevant studies and reviews (Suarez-Almazor et al., 2000) which examined both job crafting and work meaningfulness.

2.4.3 Data Synthesis and Analysis

Systematic review syntheses seek out patterns, consistencies, and discrepancies in the data, leading to the analysis relating to the predetermined SLR questions (Booth et al., 2016). It is an important step in critically analysing the implications of current scholarly knowledge on future research (Rojon et al., 2021) and thus plays a central part in the SLR process. In order to establish my confidence in the findings of each of the SLR studies that were identified in the final sift (16 in total, see *Figure 4* below), I carried out a thematic

assessment to identify their empirical quality. This was undertaken by comparing and

mapping the facets of each study using the SPIO framework, a process via which **S**tudy

Design; **P**articipant population; **I**nterventions used; and **O**utcomes achieved are analysed

and presented (Robertson et al., 2015). Notably, none of the studies included in the

synthesis presented any interventions, and so the procedural aspects of the research were

assessed in place of interventions. For example, some of the studies (4 in total) conducted

longitudinal studies which investigated change over time in the absence of an intervention,

and it was this aspect of the study that was assessed instead of interventions. All the

identified studies were retained, irrespective of quality. This was based on guidance

provided by the course directors in order to maintain an overview of the scholastic

characteristics and status of the current academic literature. In recognition of the influence

of poorer quality studies, better quality studies were emphasised by attributing a greater

weighting to them during the quality assurance process (Levitt et al., 2017). *Appendix 3*

provides an overview of the quality ratings.

The extracted data was pooled, clustered and mapped using an integration approach

commonly used in SLR methodology (Rojon et al., 2021), and typically responds to a series

of predetermined questions designed to examine causal relationships (Rousseau et al.,

2008). It was chosen for its capacity to pull together data relating to academic studies, such

that the accumulation of multiple sets of data increased overall validity by compensating for

individual study weaknesses (Gough, 2013). In particular, its focus was on viewing the

research studies within different environments and situations (Rousseau et al., 2008), which

aligned with my guiding philosophical stance. It also enabled me to arrive at a set of

relevant, practical recommendations which though important, are sometimes lacking in

SLRs (Rojon et al., 2021). These recommendations are provided in the discussion section of Chapter 3 (section 3.5).

2.4.4 Limitations

One shortcoming of the SLR approach is the challenge of integrating different study designs and inconsistent details, which creates difficulty when mapping and comparing findings (Thorpe et al., 2006). To reduce the negative impact of poor parallel comparisons, each study was re-read multiple times in order to identify the disparities. This data was then tabulated, such that omitted information (demographics, methodology details, and so on) was noted in both the quality assurance process (see *Appendix 3),* and the results section.

Furthermore, SLRs only draw on published research which increases their susceptibility to *publication bias*, a term used to describe the tendency to publish studies which present statistically significant positive findings (DeVito & Goldacre, 2019; Nair, 2019) thus skewing shared knowledge and review outcomes. This is a difficult challenge to overcome, and was addressed to the best of my ability by maintaining all of the studies in the final sift (16 studies), irrespective of their empirical credentials, thus maintaining a broad view of the available studies.

2.5 Study 2: Empirical Research Study

2.5.1 Rationale

In alignment with my ontological and epistemological approach, my empirical study sought to investigate participants' subjective experiences in real time via an applied, hands-on, interactive method. Thoughts and actions relating to job crafting and work

meaningfulness were used as a lens through which to observe, capture and interpret cognitions and behaviours with the intent of uncovering novel empirical insights.

The study utilised a qualitative methodology which is particularly impactful when investigating the significance that people attach to their experiences (Pistrang & Barker, 2010) and provided an alternative to the exclusively quantitative studies highlighted by the SLR. In deciding which qualitative data generation approach to take, I initially considered an interview method as this approach could have identified participants' subjective experience of job crafting and work meaningfulness. However, this approach was dismissed on the basis that an intervention study would be more effective in helping to understand the conditions under which job crafting skills and work meaningfulness can be developed. In other words, although interviews are adept at enquiring about *content* (such as ideas, opinions and personal experiences), my research was focused on understanding the *process* of job crafting and work meaningfulness, rather than the *substance* or *content* of the issues at hand. As such, I was not seeking to elicit answers to a set of predetermined questions. Furthermore, both structured and semi-structured interviews are highly susceptible to researcher bias and judgement as they are comprised of predetermined questions in service of the research goals. Although one could argue that researcher bias was inherent in my interpretive paradigm, my goal was to provide a scaffold for job crafting, and then observe the *cognitive processes* undertaken by the participants with minimal researcher influence and judgement. Finally, unstructured interviews were also deemed inappropriate in this instance as they are subject to nebulous outcomes which are difficult to underpin with theory (Leech, 2002).

Subsequently, I implemented a coaching method comprising of two sessions designed to stimulate and observe job crafting (Silapurem et al., 2021). Further detail

relating to this intervention is provided in Chapter 4 (section 4.2). Of note, the coaching

conversations took a co-partnering approach in which I, as the coach, provided cues and

reflection opportunities (Grant, 2003), and also encouraged the coachee (participant) to

address issues of importance to them. The conversations aimed to develop and utilise job

crafting over time and supported both parties to shape the intervention outcomes jointly

and actively. It thus aligned with the philosophical approach undertaken in this study, which

placed significance on the subjective human experience, and the influence of contextual

factors on behaviour.

Despite its advantages, the co-partnering approach introduces complexity and

potential bias due to the dual relationship (Bourdeau, 2000). I was both coach and

researcher, and the participants were both research subjects and coachees. This complexity

was mitigated to the best of my ability by delineating between my two roles (and theirs) and

is discussed in the limitations section (2.5.4) below. Also, in recognition of the sessions' dual

role of providing coaching whilst also exploring a set of research objectives, a decision was

made to describe the sessions as *coaching conversations* in order to highlight that the

intervention did not provide a purist coaching approach. This decision is addressed in more

detail below, though henceforth the intervention used in the empirical study is referred to

as *coaching conversations*, rather than *sessions*.

2.5.2 Data Identification and Extraction

Sample size has long been debated in qualitative research circles. At times sample

size sufficiency goes under-reported or not reported at all (Vasileiou et al., 2018), and often

consists of vastly varying sizes, ranging from 2-400 (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Researchers

have attempted to address these issues (Guest et al., 2006), with some concluding that

qualitative sample size should be flexible and focused on the richness of data rather than a

predetermined sample size (Staller, 2021). Others have made a series of recommendations based on their systematic analysis of qualitative health research (Vasileiou et al., 2018). They suggested that in order to make a well-considered sample size decision, qualitative researchers should: (1) transparently present their decisions relating to sample size sufficiency; (2) consider parameters set in similar studies; and (3) consider the unique and intrinsic nature of the study. The first recommendation relating to transparency of decision was addressed by stating the rationale behind my sample size clearly to my supervisor and in this thesis paper. The second point, relating to the precedence set by similar peer-reviewed studies was challenging due to the dearth of similar qualitative intervention studies. I therefore focused on the third, and most critically evaluative aspect of my decision. In considering the unique and intrinsic nature of the study I was guided by experts in thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2022b), who assert that deciding on a sample size is not simply a matter of participant numbers or *data saturation*, a term used to describe the point at which sufficient data has been collected to reach relevant conclusions, and further data is unlikely to provide value-added insights**.** Instead, they state that it should be based on the researcher's reflection and judgement relating to the nature and characteristics of the data. As such, although I made a lightly held decision to recruit 15 participants, this decision was subject to review as the research progressed. It was conditional upon the results of my deep immersion in, and familiarisation with the data, coupled with ongoing conversations with my supervisor, other eminent qualitative researchers and doctoral peers. In the course of these discussions, decisions relating to sample size were subject to both scholarly and pragmatic considerations, including the resources and time available to me as a student.

Convenience sampling was initially considered due to its capacity for broad

participant eligibility (Farrugia, 2019). However, the indiscriminate nature of this approach

was deemed inappropriate due to the risk of poor quality data, which could have occurred

had some or all of the participants failed to present a relevant coachable challenge (i.e. a

challenge that could not be reasonably addressed in a coaching session). Subsequently,

purposive sampling, defined as a form of non-probability sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015),

was identified as a more relevant approach. It involves deliberate recruitment from a

specific population (Hazari, 2023) which holds knowledge or relevance to the study in

question (Palinkas et al., 2015). This latter point was deemed particularly important as all

participants were required to present knowledge relating to a workplace challenge to be

explored in session. To support participants with this endeavour, at the outset of the

intervention realistic objectives were discussed with each participant. This was devised to

help create a participant driven, manageable and focused coaching environment (Locke &

Latham, 2019). One final benefit of purposive sampling was its capacity to compare data

across participants and identify divergent and convergent patterns relating to the study

questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). It was thus considered ideal for the purposes of this study.

2.5.3 Data Synthesis and Analysis

As stated above, data generation occurred via a series of coaching conversations and

included my active, subjective involvement in data identification and extraction (Braun &

Clarke, 2022b; Campbell et al., 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). However, given that data analysis

is not an exact science (Lune & Berg, 2017), it is rare to identify one ideal qualitative

technique (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Consequently, a range of analytical techniques were

considered prior to the data collection phase in order to ensure *methodological integrity*

(Levitt et al., 2017). This is a standard that measures empirical veracity by confirming that

study designs: (1) support the research goals; (2) effectively respond to the identified research questions; and (3) align with the researcher's epistemological approach. In particular, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) and *Thematic Analysis* (TA) were explored.

IPA was closely considered due to its subjective, meaning-making exploration of the participants' lived experiences, which this study did indeed set out to do. However, its case-study-like focus and deep, idiographic exploration of individual existential complexities (Braun et al., 2022b) within a homogeneous cohort (Spiers & Riley, 2018) was deemed unlikely to add relevancy to the research questions. In fact, the requirement to carry out an in-depth analysis of every single participant before identifying any results (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) could have created a deviation away from the objectives of this study, which were to elicit the here-and-now cognitive processes which underpin job crafting and work meaningfulness. In light of IPA's mismatch, thematic analysis was closely considered. Whilst this method of analysis has existed for some time, it came to prominence with a 2006 methods paper which outlines its stepwise process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and describes it as a range of applied methods consisting of three approaches; (a) reflexive; (b) coding reliability; and (c) codebook. The latter two take a positivist, objectively focused approach (Byrne, 2022) which did not align with my contextualist epistemology and were therefore unsuitable for this study. Conversely, reflexive thematic analysis, an approach that encourages the researcher's subjectivity as a way of discerning meaning from one's deep interaction with the data and is recognised for its flexible and iterative nature (Braun & Clarke, 2022b), provided an appropriate approach for addressing the specific questions posed in this research. It also aligned with my philosophical approach due to its subjective, context dependent, meaning-making process of "*deep and prolonged data immersion,*

thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative" (Braun & Clarke, 2019 p. 591), which satisfied all three of Levitt et al.'s (2017) methodological integrity requirements.

Reflexive thematic analysis requires the researcher to engage with theory prior to data analysis in order to derive a strong analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), and avoid outputs that have no clear conceptual underpinning (Braun et al., 2022b). In accordance with this, I studied job crafting and work meaningfulness in the early stages of this research such that I achieved a thorough understanding of both concepts. This lent itself well to a hybrid methodology which combined a theory derived deductive approach, with a data driven inductive approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In other words, I applied existing cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness theory to the analytical process, whilst also developing new observations and patterns which were derived from the data. This was particularly well demonstrated during the data identification and analysis phases where I applied a deductive approach by using Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation to differentiate between the various types of job crafting, coupled with an inductive stance whereby real-time observations were made of how participants job crafted. This approach satisfied reflexive thematic analysis methodology and also acknowledged that though theories offer a set of principles and tools relating to a particular phenomenon, they can be somewhat abstract and better understood via illustrative empirical observations (Stiles, 2010). Furthermore, these observations can uncover insight into real-life behaviours and can in turn lead to the confirmation and growth of theory (Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019).

Reflexive thematic analysis clearly states that themes do not pre-exist in the data and that the researcher's role is to find them. In fact, the researcher is encouraged to play an active and central role in the development of codes and themes (Braun et al., 2022b).

This was reflected in my graded and oscillating analytical approach, whereby descriptive codes were initially developed and then clustered into a set of central themes in an iterative and ongoing manner. They were contextualised in view of the empirical questions, thus layering my subjective interpretations onto the data synthesis, rather than objectively noticing and noting participants' responses (as per a more positivist approach).

One of the challenges experienced at this stage was the number of initial themes developed which amounted to 13. The suggested number of themes when using thematic analysis is 2-6 for a single chapter in a doctoral thesis (Braun, & Clarke, 2013) Any more themes and the data may be considered too *thin,* an expression used to describe a set of thematic outcomes which lack the contextual depth and complexity required to drive a set of meaningful and representative outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Noyes et al., 2021). It may also be associated with data *cherry-picking* (Morse, 2010), a term which references the researcher's tendency to focus on a narrow subset of the data, at the expense of understanding the wider data set. In order to address this, I undertook a multi-layered process of discussion with my supervisor, a re-examination of the thematic links through the lens of the research questions, and a deeper analysis of the transcripts, quotes and personal narratives expressed by the participants. This supported me to develop a set of richer thematic links which resulted in five themes and 10 sub-themes, the details of which are presented in Chapter 4 (section 4.3).

2.5.4 Limitations

Academic opinions differ as to the agility of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach, and confusion exists as to how to implement it appropriately. Some argue that the lack of distinct guidelines can lead to a sense of confusion, ambiguity, poor process coherence and inconsistent analysis (Byrne, 2022; Holloway & Todres, 2003), whilst others

conclude that its dynamic and agile nature can lead to a deep understanding of the presented data (Ozuem et al., 2022). In order to ensure that as a novice user of reflexive thematic analysis I adhered to a robust process, several measures were taken to redress any limitations, both of the method itself and my application of it. For instance, in staying true to my contextualist epistemological stance, an interpretive and iterative approach was maintained throughout my analysis thus avoiding the conflation of subjective coding with positivist-based coding which would have been more akin to *coding reliability* and *codebook* approaches (Braun et al., 2021b). Further to this, in order to maintain reflexivity, three consultations were arranged with my supervisor. As per thematic analysis principles, these exchanges focused on sharing insights and exploring reflections, rather than on reliability checking (Braun et al., 2022b).

As referenced above, co-partnering approaches, such as the one undertaken in this intervention study, can lend themselves to researcher bias by dint of their close involvement in the process, and a potential power differential (Bourdeau, 2000) whereby the researcher/coach may be considered to have the 'upper hand' in their relationship with the participant/coachee. In such instances, the latter may inadvertently wish to support the research endeavours at the cost of their own needs, and the former may encourage this stance. This dual role was mitigated in several ways. Firstly, in order to eliminate potential interpersonal bias resulting from pre-existing relationships, participants previously known to me (either personally or professionally) were not included in the research. Secondly, I maintained a set of consistent coaching and procedural principles throughout the coaching conversations in order to ensure equitable treatment of all participants. For instance, uniform recruitment criteria, frequency and length of coaching conversations were applied, as was a clear and unambiguous termination of the research (Bourdeau, 2000). This was

done by clearly stating, at the outset of the research, that the researcher-participant relationship would end following the second coaching conversation, and should any further interaction occur between us it would not constitute part of the research.

Co-partnering in an intervention study can also impact the participant by way of the *Observer* or *Hawthorn Effect*, a phenomenon whereby the participant alters their natural behaviour in response to being observed and assessed (Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015). Likewise, *self-censorship* is a potential reaction which refers to one's propensity to intentionally avoid the sharing of information, especially in order to evade criticism or judgement from others (Bar-Tal, 2017). This was remediated by creating a participant-led approach whereby individuals were encouraged to treat the conversation as they would any coaching endeavour. For instance, upon commencement of the coaching conversations, they were advised to express their work-related issue in any way they wished, without concern for the research process.

Chapter 3: Systematic Literature Review: The Association between Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness, and the Impact of Organisational Interventions on the Relationship

Abstract

Job crafting and work meaningfulness each hold intrinsic value for employees, and impact favourable work-related outcomes, however despite a clear association between the two, the nature of their empirical link is unclear in the research to date. To address this gap, a systematic literature review (SLR) examined the empirical link between the two concepts. In doing so it examined four sub-questions relating to: (1) How, and to what extent, job crafting and work meaningfulness are associated; (2) The antecedents, mediators and moderators which impact upon this association; (3) The extent to which current research differentiates between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness; and (4) What, if any, organisational interventions and initiatives effectively enhance job crafting and work meaningfulness.

The SLR, conducted in accordance with the Cochrane Collaboration guidelines (Higgins et al., 2023), began by identifying gaps in academic knowledge, which led to a clear, purposeful and previously unexplored line of inquiry. A set of SPIO based inclusion and exclusion criteria were then identified. They included international, peer-reviewed studies conducted after 2001 which examined employee behaviour, subjective experiences and affect through the specific prism of individual job crafting and work meaningfulness.

Three sifting stages were conducted using scientific repositories. These were Proquest One Business, PsychINFO and Web of Science. The title sift identified 267 studies. It was followed by an abstract sift (which pinpointed 32 studies) and culminated in a full

paper sift that identified 16 research papers all of which met the relevant inclusion criteria. A quality assessment process was then conducted to assess and compare the robustness of each of the 16 papers, followed by a data synthesis process that was carried out through thematic analysis of convergent and divergent findings. Inconsistent results were explored, and opportunities for future research were highlighted.

Findings confirm that job crafting and work meaningfulness are empirically linked. In particular, work meaningfulness is a common mediator between job crafting and favourable workplace outcomes such as engagement, job satisfaction, productivity and low turnover intention. Despite this, clear gaps in the current research emerged, namely an over-reliance on quantitative, self-reported, cross-sectional studies and a distinct absence of interventions. Based on these findings, implications for theory, research and practice are highlighted, along with future research opportunities.

3.1 Introduction

Few would dispute the importance of work meaningfulness and its intrinsic role in the human experience. As observed by psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, it underlies one's motivation to live, such that striving towards meaning-making goals and engaging in meaningful pursuits provides purpose in life (Frankl, 1985). Unsurprisingly, there has been a scholarly focus on life meaning for centuries (Bailey et al., 2019), and in recent decades attention has turned to the phenomenon of work meaningfulness, though scholars in this arena agree that further empirical research is required to gain greater conceptual and practical knowledge (King et al., 2021; Steger, 2019).

Work meaningfulness refers to the purpose experienced by employees, and is defined by Rosso et al., (2010, p.95) as "*work that is experienced as particularly significant and holding positive meaning for an individual*". It was initially built upon the work of humanistic psychologists and motivation theorists, such as Maslow, Hertzberg and Rogers (Chalofsky, 2003) and has latterly become a hotly debated issue within Human Resource Development circles, particularly in relation to purpose and employee potential (Bailey et al., 2019). As referenced in the introductory chapter of this thesis, it is recognised as an important factor in supporting employee wellbeing and is associated with an increased sense of agency, motivation, and connection to the workplace (Black Dog Institute, n.d.; Steger et al., 2009). Not least is its association with personal engagement, a concept pioneered by professor of organisational behaviour, William Kahn in 1990 which he defined as the expression of one's authentic self which involves "*the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self*" (Kahn, 1990 p. 700). Engagement positively impacts workplace presence and role performance and has been found to mediate between work meaningfulness and performance (Han et al., 2021).

Although the experience of work meaningfulness is an individual endeavour influenced by personal factors (Bailey et al., 2019), there are a variety of workplace factors that impact the meaning derived from work. One such factor is job design, a process commonly influenced top-down by leaders who structure jobs according to business needs and strategic direction (Oldham et al., 2016). In concert with this, a bottom-up approach whereby the individual worker autonomously modifies their role such that it aligns with their personal strengths, interests and objectives, also impacts work meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). As previously referenced, this approach is referred to as job crafting, and its empirical association with work meaningfulness is the focus of this SLR.

3.1.1 Job Crafting: Definition and Overview

Job crafting is a process of proactive change made by a job incumbent in order to positively influence their subjective experience and perception of workplace duties and roles. Such processes include changes to role boundaries, conditions, tasks and relationships at work (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) initial conceptualisation stated that job crafting impacts one's sense of work meaningfulness, purpose and identity. They differentiated between three different types of job crafting which they defined as: *task crafting* (for example, changing the way one completes job requirements), *relational crafting* (for instance, adapting interpersonal communication to suit the situation) and *cognitive crafting.* The latter differs from the other two as it is not behaviourally based, instead it involves the cognitive reframing of one's role (or parts of it) and can occur in a variety of ways. For instance, one may reconsider the value they attribute to their job such that they experience a greater sense of purpose in their daily work routine. Berg et al., (2013) later elaborated that there are three subsets of cognitive job crafting, all of which connect the incumbent with a sense of personal meaning and

motivation. They refer to these as: (1) *expanding perceptions* whereby workers broaden out their view of the impact and purpose of their role; (2) *focusing perceptions* whereby workers narrow down their perceptions of the impact and purpose of their role by focusing on job elements that they hold valuable; and (3) *linking perceptions* whereby connections are drawn between meaningful components of the role.

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) seminal job crafting conceptualisation provided the foundation for subsequent development and elaboration. For instance, Lyons (2008, p.25) referred to job crafting as "spontaneous changes" made by workers to enhance their experience of work, independent of the organisation's needs. Others took a more symbiotic view of job crafting, they asserted that workers create effective person-environment fit by adapting either themselves or their surroundings, which leads to an increased sense of individual agency and positively impacts organisational outcomes (Grant et al., 2009). Further research also focused on individual agency, proposing that personality factors, such as proactivity, are likely to influence an individual's proclivity for job crafting (Tims et al., 2010), whilst others added that job crafting helps employees take a positive view of their role by optimising their strengths (Kooij et al., 2017).

As previously referenced, others reconceptualised Wrzesniewski et al.'s. (2001) model altogether. For instance, Demerouti and Bakker's research moved away from a work identity and meaning focused definition of job crafting (Tims et al., 2012). Instead, they defined job crafting as changes in behaviour in response to job characteristics, thus creating the Jobs Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. This model states that in the face of job demands, engagement is high when job resources (work factors that help achieve one's goals, such as autonomy) and personal resources (individual factors such as resilience and self-efficacy) are enhanced. Conversely, performance capacity is reduced when hindering

job facets and barriers to goal achievement (such as role ambiguity) are high (Bakker et al., 2007). Both job crafting models have developed over time though the JD-R model, which tends to lend itself well to a variety of research styles and topics, has been more widely reached to date (Devotto et al.,2019).

Despite their differences, some researchers have identified intersections between both job crafting models. One hierarchical model, developed by Zhang et al., (2019), places the JD-R's job crafting orientation (approach versus avoidance crafting) at the highest hierarchical level as they view it to be a fundamental aspect of job crafting. This is followed by Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) task and relational job crafting forms, and finally job crafting content (resource or demands) which captures how workers job craft. Further intersections also exist between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) task and relational job crafting and the JD-R model's job demands and resources respectively (Hulshof et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021). However, cognitive crafting was not found to have such parallels (Mäkikangas et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2017). It is thought that this is because cognitive job crafting is an internal process that does not actively change facets of the job, rather it reframes the way one views their job (Lazazzaraa et al., 2018). In other words, it involves changes in thoughts rather than actions and is therefore less tangible and visible than task and relational crafting, hence more difficult to map onto the behaviourally focused JD-R model (Demerouti et al, 2014).

A final point of importance in the conceptualisation of job crafting is the differentiation between job crafting (fostered by the worker) and job design (typically initiated by the organisation). The latter aims to productively structure roles by clustering tasks, activities and responsibilities (Oldham et al., 2016), and is therefore an important aspect of role clarification, though the increasing diversity and levels of complexity in

modern workplaces make it progressively difficult to centrally design jobs (Wijngaards et al., 2021). Furthermore, some researchers (Roczniewska et al., 2022) argue that job design can take a one-size-fits-all approach such that nuanced role complexities can be missed. However, given the respective advantages of job crafting and job design, a combination of the two can optimise outcomes (Tims et al., 2016). For instance, workers were found to derive greater meaning from their work by idiosyncratically combining top-down job design and bottom-up job crafting approaches. This is explored in latter sections of this thesis.

3.1.2 Work Meaningfulness: Definition and Overview

Steger et al. (2012) state that meaningful work occurs when three conditions are met. They referred to these as: (1) *positive meaning*, referencing the extent to which employees perceive their role as significant; (2) *meaning-making*, which reflects the level to which employees consider their role to be part of a larger endeavour; and (3) *greater-good motivations*, which refers to perceived contribution to the wider society. Further research drew on Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) and hypothesised that intrinsic motivation occurs when people's psychological need for three conditions is fulfilled (Autin, et al., 2022). They referred to these as: (1) *competence,* meaning the development of mastery and a sense of accomplishment; (2) *relatedness,* which references the feeling of belonging and interpersonal connection with others, and (3) *autonomy* which reflects a sense of ownership over one's decisions and a locus of causality (Gagne & Vansteenkiste, 2013).

Other longitudinal studies examined these three concepts as antecedents of work meaningfulness and introduced the concept of beneficence, defined as a sense of prosocial impact on the lives of others, as an additional pathway to meaningful work (Martela et al., 2021). The findings of this research suggest that the interaction between beneficence and

autonomy is a stronger predictor of work meaningfulness than when beneficence is associated with competence and relatedness. This not only highlights the diverse perspectives in academic literature regarding work meaningfulness (as discussed in Chapter 1), but also emphasises the significance of both self-fulfilment (in this case, through autonomy) and contributing to the well-being of others (as per beneficence). This may be interpreted either as a paradox or, alternatively, as a reinforcement of the multi-dimensional factors that contribute to the experience of meaningful work (Martela et al., 2018).

In their exploration of how people increase their sense of meaningfulness at work, Vuori et al., (2012) found that workers actively focus on positive cues, derived from their environment. They do so by cognitively highlighting the positive aspects of their role, proactively investing in skill development, and adjusting their job content. These actions result in enhanced motivation, wellness, commitment and positive organisational citizenship behaviours. This was reinforced by further findings showing that work meaningfulness is highly regarded by employees due to its perceived relationship with performance and wellbeing, such as its potential capacity to buffer against burnout (Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018). Broadening this out, further research focused specifically on resilience and work meaningfulness, concluding that such is the importance of job meaningfulness to job incumbents, that it is often prioritised above job security, promotion and salary (Morales-Solis et al., 2022).

3.1.3 Integrating Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness

Although job crafting and work meaningfulness are two distinct concepts that have evolved over time (Tims et al., 2022), they share a common thread of holding intrinsic value for employees (Thomas et al., 1990). As previously stated, they were explicitly linked by

Wrzesniewski et al. (2001) who recognised that individuals align the various facets of their job with a sense of purpose via voluntary thoughts and behaviours which shape the identity and meaning derived from their job.

Further research added that the practical application of job crafting can potentially support employees to adapt to the parameters of their job and subsequently enhance their experience of meaningful outcomes (Berg et al., 2013). An alternative angle to this is that workers' subjective interpretation shapes the perception of their job and consequently impacts their experience of work meaningfulness. This interpretative approach bears similarities to the subjective reframing which is undertaken during cognitive job crafting (Vuori et al., 2012).

3.1.4 Objectives of this SLR: Identifying the Questions

The studies used to inform this SLR provided empirical evidence that job crafting and work meaningfulness are related however, the exact nature and directionality of the association between the two require clarification (Lee et al. 2021). Thus, this SLR located and synthesized peer-reviewed research focused on the empirical associations between job crafting and work meaningfulness.

One overarching question was posed, with four sub-questions. The overarching question was: *What is the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness?* The sub-questions posed were:

1. How and to what extent are job crafting and work meaningfulness associated?

2. What are the antecedents, mediators and moderators that impact upon this association?

3. To what extent has research differentiated between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness?

4. What, if any, organisational interventions and initiatives effectively enhance job crafting and work meaningfulness?

3.2 Method

The methodology used in this SLR is documented below in a stepwise manner to ensure replicability. In preparation, I familiarised myself with the highly regarded Cochrane Collaboration guidelines (Higgins et al., 2023; Gough et al., 2023) and with the approach provided by Rojon et al., (2021). I also adhered to the PRISMA Checklist (Page et al., 2021) to ensure sufficient coverage of each step of the process.

3.2.1 Search Strategy

An initial scoping review explored existing peer-reviewed literature on both job crafting and work meaningfulness. Searches were conducted across various research types, including meta-analyses, literature reviews, and SLRs, revealing that the intersection of job crafting and work meaningfulness was relatively underexplored. To ensure a comprehensive inclusion of relevant studies for the SLR key search terms were identified as detailed in the search strings below. These search terms were intentionally parsimonious, focusing specifically on the central concepts of interest for this SLR. For instance, the term "meaningfulness" (as opposed to "meaning") was chosen due to its experiential dimension (Pratt et al., 2003; Steger, 2019). This was further reinforced in the exclusion criteria (see *Table 1*), which excluded concepts that are distinct from "meaningfulness" (e.g. happiness, pleasure) and "job crafting" (e.g. job design). This method mirrors the approach taken in other literature reviews (Devotto et al., 2019; Rozsa et al., 2023; Tims et al., 2021), where the authors similarly limited their search to specific concepts to guide their literature searches.

TI(work* OR organi* OR employ*) AND TI((job crafting) or (work crafting)) AND

TI(meaningfulness)

ab(work* OR organi* OR employ*) AND ab((job crafting) or (work crafting)) AND

ab(meaningfulness)

3.2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Table 1 below displays the broad inclusion and exclusion criteria designed to allow

for a breadth of potentially relevant studies to be identified. As shown in the table, the data

was presented using the acronymic SPIO framework (Robertson et al., 2015) which is an

abbreviation of: **S**tudy Design; **P**articipant population; **I**nterventions used; and **O**utcomes

achieved. Only studies published from 2001 onwards were included as the first study to

formulate the concept of job crafting was published by Wrzesniewski et al., (2001).

Furthermore, all intervention studies were included (such as training, mentoring, coaching

and the like.), as long as they were concurrently related to both job crafting and work

meaningfulness. Exclusions were grey literature, as well as any studies that did not include

both job crafting and work meaningfulness as central concepts. Furthermore, given this

review's specific focus on individual job crafting, interventions aimed at group or team job

crafting were excluded.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria using the SPIO Guidelines

	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Design	• **Context:** work • **Time period**: 2001 onwards • **Publication**: English language or translated academic literature • **Type of studies**: peer-reviewed - Qualitative / quantitative • **Outcomes**: Employee behaviour / subjective experience / affect • Studies that match the definition of "meaningfulness" and "job crafting" based on evidence-based psychological literature • Individual job crafting • Primary data	• Non peer-reviewed studies • Grey literature • Interventions not aimed at job crafting. • Measures concepts which are distinct from "work meaningfulness" (e.g. happiness, pleasure) and "job crafting • SLRs and reviews • Group or team job crafting
Participant Population	• Any sector or country • Study population: working adults (18+) • voluntary and paid workers	• <18 years of age • Non-working adults
Intervention	• Purpose is to improve work experience via increased meaningfulness or job crafting. • Empirical, correlational studies that explore the interface/relationship between meaningfulness and job crafting.	• Focused on improvements to work experience that are not related to job crafting and / or meaningfulness
Outcome	• Identify the relationship between meaningfulness and job crafting in the workplace.	• Identify the relationship between workplace constructs that are not related to job crafting or work meaningfulness

3.2.3 Data Sources

The search was conducted across three broad scientific repositories. These were:

Proquest One Business, which combines multiple business information databases;

PsychINFO which focuses specifically on psychological literature; and Web of Science which

indexes a wide range of academic sources. Furthermore, a hand sift approach was used

(Booth et al., 2016) to identify further relevant studies that were not identified by applying

the search strings. This was done by searching through the references of previously

identified relevant studies and reviews and setting up automated online alerts with journal

publication websites (such as ResearchGate) to track newly published research. An example of this is *Cognitive Crafting and work engagement: A study among remote and frontline health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Wijngaards et al., 2021) which was included due to the link made between job crafting and work meaningfulness in its abstract.

3.2.4 Data Extraction

As illustrated in *Figure 4,* the data search collated research titles and abstracts, and then extracted the research in three stages, referred to as sifts. The first sift examined study titles and included those which referenced or appeared to address, both job crafting and work meaningfulness. It yielded 267 relevant articles. An example of a title included in this phase was *Work Volition and Job Satisfaction: Examining the Role of Work Meaning and Person-Environment Fit* (Duffy et al., 2015) due to its reference to the impact of work meaning. Conversely, an excluded title was *Who is called to work? The Importance of Calling when Considering Universal Basic Income* (Rowles et al., 2021) which did not appear to address either job crafting or work meaningfulness.

The second sift examined study abstracts and eliminated 235 articles because they did not contain measures of association between job crafting and work meaningfulness, often focusing on alternative measures such as happiness and resilience. An excluded study was entitled *Meaningfulness-Making at Work* (Vuori et al., 2012) which was discarded on the basis that it referenced a very generic link between work meaningfulness and job crafting and therefore did not fit the inclusion criteria requiring that studies explicitly explore the relationship between the two concepts. The third and final sift was a full-text review of the remaining 32 articles which extracted a final pool of 16 relevant articles, all of which measured the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness. An example of an excluded study was *Does Work Engagement Mediate the Influence of Job*

Resourcefulness on Job Crafting? An Examination of Frontline Hotel Employees (Chien-Yu, 2019) because of its strong focus on the association between job crafting and personality, rather than work meaningfulness. *Appendix 4* provides examples of studies which were included and excluded in the Title and Abstract sifts.

Throughout the process, inter-rater reliability checks were conducted, and any potentially divergent views between my primary supervisor and me were reconciled through discussion, and if consensus was not achieved my secondary supervisor was invited for a third review. After the first and second sift, a sample of 10% of the papers was provided to my primary supervisor for independent assessment. Our independent decisions achieved a Cohen's Kappa rating of .75 denoting sufficient inter-rater agreement (McHugh, 2012).

Figure 4: Flow Diagram Displaying the Three Sifting Phases

Papers identified in initial data base sift (N=367)

ProQuest One Business (N=253) — PsychINFO (N=28) — Web of Science (N=86)

Duplicates excluded (N=100)

Title Sift (N=267)

Abstracts excluded based on inclusion/exclusion criteria (N=235)

Abstract Sift (N=32)

Full texts excluded based on inclusion/exclusion criteria (N=16)

Full Paper Sift. All articles included for quality analysis and included in synthesis (N=16)

The 16 studies included in this SLR were published in a variety of journals broadly falling into three categories. Six papers were published in psychology journals such as the European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology, and the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology. Seven papers were gleaned from human resource, career and management journals, such as Career Development International, and Leadership and Organization Development Journal. Three articles were published in industry-specific journals, such as The International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management and

the Project Management Journal. *Appendix 5* provides a full list of journal and paper titles included in this SLR.

3.2.5 Quality Appraisal

Prior to undertaking the quality appraisal of the studies, preparation was undertaken by studying and exploring STROBE (Dhana et L., 2016) statements and checklists, which provided recommendations for effective observational studies. A quality assessment of the quantitative studies was then undertaken using a checking tool implemented by Schlachter et al. (2018) which applied several checks, each of which was assigned a numerical score. When collated, the scores indicated the quality of each research paper and enabled a direct comparison between them. Scoring ranged from 0-15, whereby 0-4 indicated a low rating, 5-10 an intermediate rating, and 11-15 a high rating. The elements extracted from each article, and their corresponding maximum score are listed in *Table 2* below. Qualitative quality assurance was not undertaken because all of the studies applied a quantitative methodology.

Table 2: Elements examined in the SLR papers and their corresponding maximum score

Elements examined	Maximum score per element
How appropriate was the chosen methodology?	2
Appropriateness of chosen methods	1
Quality of design study	2
Reliability	2
Validity	2
Objectivity of the chosen methods	1
Response rate	2
Appropriateness of chosen data analysis methods	2
Control of confounding variables	1
Potential maximum score per research study	**15**

In assessing each paper, the research objectives guided the attribution of scores. For instance, to ascertain the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness,

directionality was important, thus papers that presented longitudinal studies were more heavily weighted in my appraisal. On this note, most of the longitudinal studies comprised less than 200 participants, presumably due to the inherent attrition involved in such studies, whilst most of the cross-sectional studies contained sample sizes of between 200-500 participants. In total, sample sizes ranged from 114 and 1,151.

As presented in *Appendix 3* all the articles fell within the intermediate range, with a mean score of 7. This finding implies that none of the articles were considered highly robust from a methodological or statistical perspective and diminished the quality of the derived outcomes and conclusion. The quality appraisal data was used to create a series of evidence statements which are presented in *Table 5* in the *Findings* section below. They present a breadth of quality ratings relating to the research questions.

3.3 Findings

A process of systematically mapping each of the studies was carried out, and the findings are presented below and tabulated for ease of reference and comparison.

3.3.1 Study Characteristics

Table 3 below summarises and maps information relating to the SLR study characteristics. All of the papers reviewed were published between 2016-2023 and covered a breadth of locations. Half of the studies were conducted in China (n = 4) or South Africa (n = 4). Other countries included the Netherlands (n = 2), as well as Romania, Poland, Korea, USA, France, and India which each featured once.

All of the studies employed a quantitative design focused on the relationship between work meaningfulness and job crafting, amongst other variables, most commonly work engagement. More details relating to the variables measured are presented in *Tables 3* and *4* below. Furthermore, most of the papers (n=12) were cross-sectional in nature (Dan

et al. 2020; Fouché et al. 2017; Guo at al. 2022; Haffer et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2021; Meng et

al. 2021; Morales-Solis et al. 2022; Mousa & Chaouali, 2023; Peral et al. 2016; Sen et al.

2018; Vermooten et al. 2019; Xu et al. 2023), though four papers used a time-lagged aspect

to their design (Chang et al., 2021; Geldenhuys et al., 2021; Hulshof et al., 2020; Vermooten

et al., 2019) which included self-reports (such as diaries) over three to four time periods.

Cross-sectional designs tend to be accessible and cost-effective. Furthermore, they support

the identification of patterns and relationships between variables at a single point in time.

However, they fail to establish trends and nuances over time, and are not designed to

establish causality due to the absence of temporal sequencing (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This

suggests that while the majority of the research reviewed in this SLR identified a

relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness, most of the studies reviewed

did not establish the directionality of the relationship between the two concepts.

In terms of their conceptual approach, seven papers aligned their research with

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) identity-rooted job crafting conceptualisation (Chang et al.

2021; Fouché et al., 2017; Geldenhuys et al. 2021; Meng et al., 2021; Morales-Solis et al.

2022; Mousa et al. 2023; Xu et al., 2023), seven with the JD-R (Dan et al., 2020; Guo & Hou,

2022; Haffer et al., 2021; Peral & Geldenhuys, 2016; Sen & Rajkamal, 2018; Tims et al. 2016;

Vermooten et al. 2019), and two took a combined approach (Hulshof et al. 2020; Lee et al.,

2021).

Although this SLR didn't specifically set out to review engagement as a construct, it

was measured as a dependent variable in nine of the 16 studies reviewed. To illustrate, six

of the seven studies which used the JD-R model measured work engagement, whilst only

two of the seven papers that utilised the Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation

measured engagement. This difference may reflect that whilst work engagement is not an

underpinning element of Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation, it is inherently

associated with the JD-R model as a mediating factor between job resources and

organisational outcomes (Schaufeli et al., 2014).

3.3.2 Population

Table 3 also provides a summary of the population characteristics included in the SLR

studies. Although all studies included women and men participants, men were in the

minority in most studies, with two exceptions which reported on firefighters (Dan et al.,

2020) and IT professionals (Sen et al., 2018). In these two studies men respectively

represented 99.2% and 69.7% of the sample population. The reason for such gender

disparity is commonly noted in research however, no clearly identified reasons for this

phenomenon exist, even when variables such as personality traits and traditional gender

roles are controlled for (Becker, 2022)

Details relating to age and seniority were referenced inconsistently. The 14 articles

which specified age provided mean ages ranging between 20 to 46 years and suggested an

overall mean of 36 years. Tenure was recorded in all but three of the papers and ranged

from less than one year up to 15 years. Notably, more mature workers, in the 50-plus

demographic, were not represented at all.

Overall, people leaders represented a minority of the whole sample, suggesting a

limited empirical focus on the experience of job crafting and work meaningfulness amongst

leaders. Seniority (i.e. percentage of participants in leadership) was only referenced in five

of the papers, and three papers (Chang et al., 2021; Haffer et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021),

addressed the association between leadership, job crafting and work meaningfulness.

Haffer et al. (2021) who compared people leaders and non-leaders concluded that work

meaningfulness partially mediates the relationship between job crafting and engagement

amongst workers (non-leaders), and more strongly amongst managers. Furthermore, Chang et al. (2021) found that spiritual leadership moderated the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness, with Lee et al. (2021) suggesting that leaders who help foster a strong sense of purpose and value, especially when related to team membership, motivate people to engage in self-development, organisational outcomes, relationships and competency building.

Five papers combined participants from a range of sectors (such as manufacturing, retail, teaching and consulting), though most focused on specific industries including office-based environments, such as financial services (Lee et al. 2021; Vermooten et al., 2019), recruitment (Hulshof et al., 2020), and IT (Haffer et al., 2021; Sen et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2023). Non-office settings were also included, such as the fire department (Dan et al., 2020), education (Fouché et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2021; Peral et al., 2016; Tims et al., 2016), law enforcement (Morales-Solis et al. 2022), and manufacturing (Chang et al., 2021; Haffer et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021).

Table 3: Summary of Study Design (S) and Participant (P)

	Study Design (S)				Participant Population (P) NS=not specified					
	Country of Origin	Brief Aims Abbreviations: • Job crafting (JC) • Work meaningfulness (WM) • Work Engagement (WE)	JC concept	Methodology	Sample Size	Gender (% male)	Age range or mean age (rounded up)	Tenure	Seniority (% in ppl leadership)	Occupational Sector
1	China	To examine the relationship between sense of calling and WM with JC as a mediator, and spiritual leadership as a moderator.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Longitudinal.* 4 questionnaires over 3 time periods	333	55	33	6 yrs (mean)	NS	**Various** manufacturing
2	Romania	To investigate how firefighters JC behaviours contribute to WE, personal WM and performance.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* 4 questionnaires completed.	1151	99.2	39	10-15 yrs (mode)	28.7	Fire Department
3	South Africa	To investigate 3 antecedents & outcomes of WM amongst schoolteachers. The 3 antecedents were: nature of task; co-worker relationships & calling as a work orientation.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Cross sectional.* Survey	513	38.99	42	11-20 yrs (mode)	14.4	Education
4	South Africa	To use JC theory to posit that WM mediates between task, cognitive and relational crafting and peer-ratings of job performance over time. Additionally, to validate the weekly version of the JCQ.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Longitudinal.* Weekly diary completed over 3 weeks	134	41.2	NS	NS	46.7	Various

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

5	China	To examine the effects of JC on the WE of tour leaders mediated by person-job fit and WM.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* Online questionnaire	331	26.3	21-35 yrs	56% < 3 yrs	NS	Tourism
6	Poland	To examine the effects of JC on WM and WE amongst project team members and managers.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* Telephone interviews OR questionnaires	114	NS	NS	46.5% <10 yrs	37%	**Various** Manufacturing Professional Scientific Technical services
7	Netherlands	To examine whether JC is related to service-oriented task performance through WM and WE.	Both	*Longitudinal.* Diary over four consecutive workdays	156	32.3	46	16.5 (mean)	NS	Recruitment
8	Korea	To examine conditions that stimulate JC, and explore the three JC elements (task, cognitive and relational) integrating JC dimensions and the JD-R classification of JC.	Both	*Cross sectional.* Survey	195	59.1%	33	4.35 yrs (mean)	20%	**Various** private firms; Schools; Gov agencies. Manufacturing Finance; Retail
9	China	To propose & test a model in which social workers' WE is shaped & promoted by JC via Person-Organisation fit, WM, psychological safety & psychological availability.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Cross sectional.* paired response surveys	194	21	25	22 mnths (mean)	NS	Social Work
10	USA	To study the impact of relational, task & cognitive JC on the relationship b/t resilience & WM	Wrz. et al. theory	*Cross sectional.* Survey	374	NS	36 - 45 yrs	15 yrs (mean)	NS	Law Enforcement

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

11	France	To investigate how individual and collaborative JC may be positively related to WM and affective commitment.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Cross sectional.* Survey	327	56	73% under 40 yrs Education: 69.4% tertiary	NA	NS	gig workers (self-employed)
12	South Africa	To investigate the relationship between JC and subjective wellbeing, as well as the potential mediating effect of WM between JC and well-being.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* Survey	251	30.3	40 Education – unknown	15 (mean)	NS	**Education** high school teachers
13	India	To examine the role of JC in predicting wellbeing at work through WM, safety and psychological availability.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* Questionnaires	225	69.7	20-30 yrs	1-5 yrs (mean)	NS	IT
14	Netherlands	To gain increased knowledge relating to the influence of JC on person–job fit and WM.	JD-R	*Longitudinal.* 3-wave survey	114	31.1	40	8.72 yrs (mean)	NS	**various** teachers; consultants; nurses; trainers
15	South Africa	To examine the role of JC, proactive personality and WM in predicting WE and turnover intention among employees.	JD-R	*Cross sectional.* Survey	391	39	27	< 1 yr (mode)	NS	**Financial Services** Auditing; tax; Consulting; Advisory
16	China	To elaborate on the effects of technology characteristics on JC and the downstream impacts of JC on WM.	Wrz. et al. theory	*Cross sectional.* Online-survey	357	39.6	25-46 yrs	NS	NS	IT

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

3.3.3 Interventions

Intervention studies are particularly valuable as they offer practical insights and could, in this context, enhance the empirical understanding of the mechanisms through which job crafting and work meaningfulness are interconnected. However, none of the 16 studies reviewed included intervention studies leading to a lack of evidence on the practical application of job crafting and work meaningfulness. On a separate note, given the lack of interventions, the methodological aspects of the research were evaluated instead (as presented in *Table 3* above).

Table 4 below provides a comparative overview of the job crafting, work meaningfulness and engagement measures included in the SLR studies. Other measures included in the studies are omitted for parsimonious and relevance reasons. As previously stated, most studies (n=12) utilised a cross-sectional approach and included measures such as self-reported surveys, questionnaires and validated scales. Whilst self-reported measures are effective at gathering subjective data, they can result in common method bias whereby observations, even if statistically significant, can be artificially impacted by the idiosyncratic characteristics of the respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This concern was addressed by six of the studies that followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) statistical remedies. Notwithstanding this, the ubiquitous use of self-report measures raises questions relating to the validity of the findings. It suggests that while the studies might be statistically significant, the results could be skewed due to the limitations of self-report measures, and identifies the need for more objective data collection methods (Dang et al., 2020).

The most commonly used measures were The Job Crafting Questionnaire (JCQ) (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013), The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) (Steger et al., 2012) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). These scales are

widely used and validated (Amillano et al., 2024) which suggests a focus on consistency and comparability across studies. However, the reliance on these tools could limit the scope of what is measured as there may be other aspects of job crafting or work meaningfulness that are overlooked because they don't fit neatly into the existing frameworks. An alternative to using validated measures is the application of qualitative approaches such as interviews, observations, and other methods which gather in-depth, inductive-based data.

Table 4: Summary of Interventions (I) and Outcomes (O)

	Intervention (I)		Outcomes Measured and Findings Relevant to the SR Protocol (O)
No.	**Yes/no[1]**	**Measure/s used[2]**	**Association between JC & WM: Antecedent, Moderators & Mediators.** **Abbreviations: Job crafting (JC); Work meaningfulness (WM); Work Engagement (WE)**
1	No	JCQ[3] WAMI[4]	JC partially mediates between employee sense of calling and WM. Spiritual leadership moderates between JC & WM.
2	No	WAMI UWES-9[5] JCS[6]	WM & WE partially mediate between JC and performance.
3	No	WAMI Work Engagement Scale	A calling orientation, good job design, co-worker relations are antecedents of WM and predict WE. JC impacts a calling orientation.
4	No	JCQ PMS[7]	WM mediates between task JC and peer-rated in-role performance. WM mediates between weekly cognitive JC on peer-rated extra-role performance on a week-level.
5	No	Adaptations of Work Engagement scales Tour leaders JCS	JC is positively associated with WM. WM mediates between JC & WE. Person-Job fit mediates between JC & WE.

[1] As no intervention studies were identified procedural aspects of the studies were assessed

[2] Where a specific measure was not used construct and number of items are listed

[3] The Job Crafting Questionnaire

[4] The Work and Meaning Inventory

[5] Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Short version

[6] Job Crafting Scale

[7] Psychological Meaningfulness Scale

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

6	No	Adaptations of: JCS, WAMI & PES[8]	JC has a significant effect on WM & WE. WM has a significant effect on WE. WM partially mediates between JC and WE for project members & fully for project managers.
7	No	JCS (10-item) MWS[9] (4 items) UWES (adapted) JPS[10]	WM acts as mediator between JC and two variables: (1) WE and (2) service-oriented task performance.
8	No	PMS JCQ	WM is an antecedent of JC. Task and relational crafting were both highest when WM, task interdependence, and social identification were high.
9	No	JCQ Job engagement (12-item) Psychological meaningfulness (5-item)	JC directly shaped and promoted WE. WM partially mediates between JC and WE.
10	No	Job crafting (3-items). Meaningfulness scale (3-item)	Resilience is related to WM and all three forms of JC. JC mediates between resilience and WM in high-stress roles.

[8] Psychological Engagement Scale
[9] Meaningful Work Scale
[10] Job Performance Scale

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

11	No	Individual Crafting (4-item) Collaborative crafting (3-item) Meaningful work (10-item)	WM mediates b/t individual and collaborative JC and affective commitment. Collaborative JC moderates b/t individual JC and WM. Individual JC has a positive & significant effect on WM.
12	No	UWES-9 PMS JCS	WM mediates between JC and WE.
13	No	JC (21-item) Meaningfulness (6-item) UWES-9	WM partially mediates between JC and WE.
14	No	JC (21-item) WAMI (10 item)	By crafting job demands and job resources, and decreasing hindering job demands individuals optimize person-job fit and consequently experience WM. Person-job fit partially mediates between JC & WM.
15	No	JC UWES-9	JC has a significant positive influence on WM and engagement. MW has a significant positive influence on engagement. Inference is that WM mediates JC & engagement. Proactive personality has a significant positive influence on JC.
16	No	JC Meaningfulness: adapted from Spreitzer (1995) & May et al. (2004).	Individual and collaborative JC contribute to person-job fit, which subsequently increases WM. Inference is that Person-job fit mediates between JC and WM.

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

3.3.4 Outcomes

Table 4 above documents information relating to the relevant outcomes determined by each of the SLR studies, including relevant antecedents, moderators and mediators.

3.3.4a Associations between job crafting and work meaningfulness.

The research (for example, Lee et al., 2021) widely agreed that job crafting is a proactive, anticipatory and impactful mechanism, which is closely associated with the experience of work meaningfulness (Morales-Solis et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023). Furthermore, work meaningfulness was seen as a clear contributing factor to the efficacy and success of job crafting, which in turn impacts positive individual and organisational outcomes, such as work engagement. These findings were not just applicable to employees, but also to self-employed gig workers who reported a strong association between job crafting and meaningfulness. This was especially significant when gig workers had the opportunity for collaborative work (Mousa et al., 2023) and indicates that contractors employ job crafting skills given the right conditions.

The findings applied to a variety of professional settings, spanning teachers, firefighters, financial services, tour leaders, social workers and IT specialists, in a variety of ways. For instance, job crafting was seen as a robust way of increasing job-person fit as it supports individuals to increase their resources (for example, manager support) and challenging job demands (for example, involvement in high-demand tasks), whilst concurrently decreasing their hindering job demands, such as emotional load (Tims et al., 2016).

Finally, this review elicited little reference to the disadvantageous aspects of job crafting and its association with work meaningfulness. One exception was a study which

concluded that task crafting is not associated with increased work meaningfulness in high-risk roles, such as firefighting (Morales-Solis et al., 2022). The hypothesised reason for this was that roles which include rigid operational procedures leave little room for task crafting. In fact, task crafting in such jobs may be considered risky behaviour, and as such employees tend to refrain from it.

3.3.4b Antecedents, Mediators and Moderators

In total, twelve of the sixteen studies analysed in this SLR found a statistical link between job crafting and meaningfulness (Dan et al. 2020; Fouché et al. 2017; Geldenhuys et al. 2021; Guo at al. 2022; Haffer et al. 2021; Hulshof et al. 2020; Meng et al. 2021; Mousa et al. 2023; Peral et al. 2016; Sen et al. 2018; Tims et al. 2016; Xu et al. 2023). Generally, job crafting and work meaningfulness did not act as antecedents for one another, with the exception of one study (Lee et al., 2021) which found work meaningfulness to be an antecedent of job crafting when investigating the role of social and job resources to stimulate job crafting. The scarcity of antecedents indicates that work meaningfulness was not found to precede, trigger or cue job crafting behaviours and vice versa, meaning that both can occur mutually exclusively to the other.

On two occasions job crafting was found to be a partial mediator between various outcomes and work meaningfulness. One study partially confirmed the hypothesis that job crafting can support individuals to adapt the nature of their work to better fit their goals and values such that they experience a sense of work meaningfulness (Chang et al., 2021). The other confirmed that relational and cognitive crafting partially mediate between resilience and work meaningfulness (Morales-Solis, et al., 2022). They based this on the hypothesis that resilient employees address adversity by creating meaning through workplace

relationships (relational crafting) and by reframing their perception of challenges through cognitive crafting. Whilst these studies provide evidence that job crafting can mediate the relationship between workplace variables and work meaningfulness, the partial mediation effects suggest that job crafting does not fully explain these relationships, and illustrate a gap in the academic understanding of the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness. Further research could explore how job crafting, in parallel with other workplace factors, impacts the experience of work meaningfulness.

Contrary to the limited evidence regarding the mediation effect of job crafting, work meaningfulness was commonly identified as a full or partial mediator (n=9) between job crafting and a range of favourable outcomes such as *performance* (Dan et al., 2020; Geldenhuys et al., 2021; Hulshof et al., 2020 etc). This was based on a number of hypotheses. For instance, one stated and confirmed that firefighters who engage in job crafting experience a greater experience of meaningfulness which heightens their sense of engagement (Dan et al., 2020), whilst another confirmed the hypothesis that employees who continuously (weekly) craft their work, experience a heightened experience of work meaningfulness and also endeavour to perform well in the eyes of their peers (Geldenhuys et al., 2021). Furthermore, work meaningfulness was found to positively impact affective commitment amongst gig workers (Mousa et al., 2023), and the hypothesis that work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between job crafting and work engagement amongst tour leaders was confirmed (Guo et al., 2022). It can therefore be concluded that the presence of work meaningfulness as a mediating factor is central to explaining the relationship between job crafting (as an independent variable) and a range of work-related (dependent) variables.

Moderator effects were rarely measured, with one study identifying that spiritual leadership moderates the indirect relationship between a sense of calling and work meaningfulness through job crafting (Chang et al., 2021). The limited presence of moderators suggests that further research could increase scholarly knowledge relating to variables that influence the strength and direction of the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness.

Although this SLR did not set out to research work engagement, notably nine articles (of the 16) referenced the association between work-related engagement with either job crafting or work meaningfulness (and in some cases both). For instance, studies which examined the psychological conditions mediating between job crafting and employee engagement concluded that meaningful work increased employee engagement and led to reduced turnover intention (Sen et al., 2018; Vermooten et al., 2019). This suggests that organisations fostering increased work meaningfulness are more likely to experience enhanced engagement, longer staff tenure, and other beneficial workplace outcomes.

3.3.4c Differentiation between the three forms of job crafting in relation to work meaningfulness.

Although it was recognised that Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three job crafting dimensions possess distinct differences (Geldenhuys et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2021; Morales-Solis et al., 2022; Tims et al. 2016), the research rarely delineated between them in any substantial way. There were some exceptions, for instance, cognitive job crafting was shown to have greater convergent validity with work meaningfulness than it did with task and relational job crafting dimensions (Tims et al., 2016). In fact, so closely associated were the concepts of work meaningfulness and cognitive job crafting that a differentiation

between the two was deemed important for research purposes and was provided by

Geldenhuys et al. (2021). They succinctly stated that *"meaningfulness is related to the*

perception employees have about their work, while cognitive crafting is the process in which

employees actively make changes to those perceptions" (p.85). Put differently,

meaningfulness pertains to the subjective beliefs and values that workers associate with

their roles, whereas cognitive job crafting refers to the manner in which workers mentally

reframe or interpret different aspects of their job. Geldenhuys et al. (2021) added that

weekly cognitive crafting helps employees reflect on the meaning of their work, which

expands their personal and communal domains. Work meaningfulness was also found to

mediate the relationship between task and cognitive crafting however, no association was

found between work meaningfulness and relational job crafting (Geldenhuys et al., 2021).

Furthermore, cognitive job crafting impacted resilience when workers reframed their

contributions such that they perceived themselves as more valuable and purposeful in the

role (Morales-Solis et al., 2022). Somewhat aligned with this, Lee et al. (2021) found that

cognitive crafting is a reflective approach which is less dependent on contextual factors

(such as work environment) than task and relational crafting. They suggested that this is

because it is an individual reframing activity which is not reliant on actual physical (task) or

interpersonal (relational) changes.

3.4 Evidence Statements

Consequent to the analysis and synthesis of the studies included in this SLR, a quality

rating was attributed to each of the SLR sub-questions and presented in the form of

evidence statements (García-Peñalvo, 2022). The quality ratings were based on the breadth,

depth and significance of empirical evidence found in the process of this SLR, and a summary is presented in *Table 5* below.

Strong evidence was found relating to two research questions. Firstly, an empirical association between job crafting and work meaningfulness was identified, with 12 of the 16 studies reporting a statistically significant relationship between the two, specifically, with job crafting as the independent variable. This suggests that employees' job crafting efforts influence their experience of work meaningfulness. Secondly, nine studies found work meaningfulness to be a full or partial mediator between job crafting and other variables such as job performance, commitment, and engagement. This suggests that work meaningfulness is a conduit through which job crafting impacts employee behaviours, and further investigation could clarify how work meaningfulness facilitates the relationship between job crafting and these critical organisational metrics.

Limited evidence was found regarding job crafting as an antecedent, mediator or moderator for work meaningfulness, with just two studies referencing job crafting as a partial mediator between work meaningfulness and other variables. This highlights the need for more focused research to understand if, and how, job crafting influences work meaningfulness. Limited evidence was also found relating to the differentiation between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of their relationship with work meaningfulness (n=4). As such, further research could examine whether each form of job crafting has distinct implications for employees' sense of meaningfulness at work.

Finally, no evidence was found of the empirical assessment of job crafting and meaningfulness interventions. This gap in the literature opens avenues for future research to explore how specific interventions effectively cultivate job crafting behaviours that

enhance work meaningfulness, and the impact that this would have on individuals and

organisational practices.

Table 5: SLR Evidence Statements and their Respective Ratings

SLR Question	Evidence Statement JC = job crafting WM = work meaningfulness	Quality Rating	Reasoning	Studies in which evidence was found
How and to what extent are JC and WM associated?	There is an empirical relationship between JC and WM.	Strong evidence	• 12 studies referenced a significant association between JC and WM. Specifically, with JC as the **independent** variable.	Dan et al. 2020 Fouché et al. 2017 Geldenhuys et al. 2021 Guo at al. 2022 Haffer et al. 2021 Hulshof et al. 2020 Meng et al. 2021 Mousa et al. 2023 Peral et al. 2016 Sen et al. 2018 Tims et al. 2016 Xu et al. 2023
What are the antecedents, mediators and moderators which impact upon the association between JC & WM?	WM has an antecedent, mediator or moderator relationship between JC and other variables.	Strong evidence	• Nine studies referenced WM as being a full (5) or partial (4) mediator between JC and other variables (e.g. job performance, commitment, and engagement). • One study found WM to be an antecedent of JC. • No studies found WM to be a moderator between JC and other variables.	**Full Mediator** Geldenhuys et al. 2021 Guo at al. 2022 Haffer et al. 2021 Hulshof et al. 2020 Mousa et al. 2023 **Partial Mediator** Dan et al. 2020 Haffer et al. 2021 Meng et al. 2021 Peral et al. 2016 **Antecedent** Lee et al. 2021

	JC has an antecedent, mediator or moderator relationship between WM and other variables.	Limited evidence	• Two studies referenced JC as a partial mediator between WM and a sense of calling & resilience. • No studies found JC to be an antecedent of WM, or a moderator between WM and other variables.	Chang et al. 2021 Morales-Solis et al. 2022
To what extent has research differentiated between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness?	The research differentiates between different forms of Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness.	Limited evidence	• 4 studies explored the empirical relationship between Wrzesniewski et al.'s different job crafting types.	Geldenhuys et al. 2021 Lee et al. 2021 Morales-Solis et al. 2022 Tims et al. 2016
What, if any, organisational interventions and initiatives effectively enhance JC and WM?	Organisational interventions relating to JC and WM have been empirically assessed to date.	No evidence	• There were no intervention studies.	NA

3.5 Discussion

Broadly speaking the focus of this SLR was to examine the magnitude and direction of the empirical association between job crafting and work meaningfulness, the differentiation between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) various forms of job crafting, and the impact of organisational interventions on job crafting and work meaningfulness.

The results point to a strong empirical association between job crafting and work meaningfulness when using Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation. In particular, work meaningfulness was a common mediator between job crafting and a range of outcomes such as performance, commitment and work engagement. This suggests that work meaningfulness plays a central role in connecting job crafting endeavours with favourable workplace attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, although there was limited evidence of comparisons between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three job crafting types, the review did indicate that of the three types, cognitive job crafting is most closely associated with work meaningfulness, and it is also the most underrepresented job crafting type in the scholastic literature (Mäkikangas et al., 2021; Morales-Solis et al., 2022). This necessitates a deeper empirical examination of cognitive job crafting in order to better understand the nature of its association with work meaningfulness.

Finally, the conspicuous absence of intervention studies indicates that the integration of job crafting and work meaningfulness initiatives remains an emerging area of academic research. Consequently, conclusions regarding the structure and content of effective interventions cannot yet be made. This gap in the literature makes a compelling case for intervention-based research to broaden and deepen the theoretical and practical understanding of whether job crafting and work meaningfulness interventions can create

change, and if so which mechanisms, conditions and approaches may best serve such outcomes.

3.5.1 Future Directions

This section utilizes the integrated findings of this SLR to explore ways to broaden current empirical knowledge. It begins by summarising the limitations found in the studies, and then discusses implications for theory, research and practice.

3.5.1a Limitations of this SLR.

The limitations of this SLR were twofold. Firstly, it only accessed three databases to the exclusion of others which could have elicited further relevant studies. Furthermore, a common shortcoming of electronic literature searches, such as those carried out in this review, is the tendency to overlook important studies, often due to poor indexing (Magos et al., 2005). To supplement the electronic search, a pearl-growing approach (Booth et al., 2016) was taken to identify further studies. Also known as hand sifting (Suarez-Almazor et al., 2000) this approach included an iterative process of drawing out highly relevant studies via further desk research and did indeed lead to the identification of previously unidentified relevant research papers.

Secondly, whilst the overview presented by these studies indicates support for the empirical link between job crafting and work meaningfulness, the paucity of rigorous studies limited the empirical inferences that could be made. The stepwise nature of the SLR mitigated this somewhat as it allowed me to systematically assess the quality of current, relevant peer-reviewed literature, and make well-informed analysis and synthesis decisions. For instance, I was able to give closer consideration to those studies that obtained higher scores in the quality assurance process.

3.5.1b Limitations of Studies in this Review.

This review aimed to explore the links between job crafting and work meaningfulness. However, the conspicuous absence of clearly identified, and defined, associations between the two concepts in academic literature, restricted the capacity to reach robust conclusions. For instance, just one study found a moderator in the relationships between job crafting and work meaningfulness (Change et al., 2021). The underlying reason for the lack of moderators was challenging to decipher from the texts. It was unclear if moderator relationships were measured and not found, or whether the relationships were simply not tested.

Further to this, the studies generally lacked robust methodological design, particularly in relation to the impact of targeted job crafting interventions on individual, leadership and business outcomes. Whilst this is not unexpected given Luthans et al.'s (2006) findings that interventions are seldom used to examine organisational behaviour, the consequence is a scarcity of empirical knowledge relating to the conditions which foster job crafting activities (Demerouti, 2014). Furthermore, the potential contribution of leadership behaviour to the development of job crafting behaviour was sparse and aligns with previous research which concludes that people leaders are generally overlooked in job crafting research (Mäkikangas et al., 2021).

Longitudinal studies are underrepresented in organisational research (Kelloway & Francis, 2012), as was seen in this review whereby a large majority of the papers were cross-sectional in nature. Additionally, the absence of qualitative research papers provides a further gap in the current available academic literature.

A final, though important, point relating to the limitations presented in the SLR studies is that although cognitive job crafting presented a greater convergent validity with work meaningfulness than relational and task job crafting dimensions did (Tims et al., 2016), none of the research explicitly referred to the cognitive processes undertaken to develop job crafting skills, and how these can impact work meaningfulness. This aligns with other research findings which state that cognitive crafting has received less academic attention than other job crafting dimensions (Tims et al., 2022) and would benefit from further exploration in terms of its association with meaningfulness-making (Vuori et al., 2012).

3.5.1c Implications for Theory and Research.

The SLR identified a clear gap in qualitative research aimed at understanding the theory underpinning the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness. This concurs with Geldenhuys et al.'s (2021) findings which reported a dearth of studies that qualitatively explore the psychological processes via which people job craft, and points to a distinct need for data that provides a more granular understanding of participants' experience of job crafting and work meaningfulness. Such research could provide insight relating to the motivational drivers underlying job crafting and extrapolate the subjective experience and application of job crafting activities. The current limited empirical focus on cognitive job crafting (in comparison to task and relational crafting), and its formerly established association with work meaningfulness, creates a focused gap in the scholarly analysis and provides a potential starting point for this type of research. Furthermore, people leaders made up such a small part of the samples included in the reviewed studies, and this suggests that a stronger empirical focus on the experience of people leaders, not just workers, is warranted.

A clear implication also emerged for the need for longitudinal intervention studies. Such studies could focus on understanding the conditions required to stimulate job crafting, explore the elements of a sound and effective job crafting initiative, and examine how job crafting interventions impact work meaningfulness. Such research could also provide insight into how individual needs (for example, engagement, wellbeing, resilience) and organisational needs (for example commitment, availability and reduced turnover) can work in synergy with one another. An intervention study could also provide the opportunity for longitudinal assessment of change over time and support the development of increased insight into the causal interaction, or the directionality, between job crafting and work meaningfulness.

3.5.1d Implications for Practice.

<u>Organisational</u>

Job crafting has historically been viewed as a bottom-up approach, proactively carried out by individual workers. However, when the application of job crafting occurs within the context of organisational culture (Hornung, 2019), and when organisations actively stimulate and encourage top-down job crafting approaches, they are more likely to achieve positive organisational outcomes, such as adaptation to change (Demerouti et al., 2021), employee-organisation fit and job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2018). This suggests that organisations that take a multi-approach to job crafting, by introducing relevant interventions and initiatives, may well increase the positive effects of job crafting. Unfortunately, as discussed above, to date little empirical knowledge is available relating to job crafting interventions, such that clear organisational job crafting guidelines cannot yet be formulated (Roczniewska et al., 2023). Despite this, given the clear empirically founded

benefits of job crafting, organisations can choose to cultivate a job crafting culture by instilling multi-faceted approaches to job crafting and ensuring that they are embedded in the company's purpose and values so as to maximize their efficacy (Lee et al., 2021; Peral et al., 2016; Tims et al., 2016).

Behavioural interventions at work often take the form of plenary training sessions which can be effective, though all too often they view employees as passive recipients of pre-established initiatives, which are not necessarily relevant to the individual (Nielsen, 2013). Given that job crafting requires employee proactivity, interventions requiring both managers and job incumbents to actively co-create content, may enable closer alignment between participants and organisational needs (Demerouti, 2014). Tailored interventions, supported by the organisation, are a potentially effective approach, and individual coaching is one such intervention (Biswas-Diener, 2020). This stems from the fact that coaching inherently requires interaction between the individual, coach and manager to co-author a set of specific aims and objectives and can be utilised to enhance job crafting. This is because coaching is considered a 'meta-intervention' (Biswas-Diener, 2020), meaning that when delivered alongside other interventions (for example job crafting training) it can magnify their benefits by reinforcing skills and knowledge development.

In summary, organisations can influence the success of interventions by combining and embedding top-down and bottom-up job crafting interventions. Organisations that do so are more likely to foster positive global outcomes and impact enhanced work meaningfulness and engagement.

People Leadership

Although behavioural change initiatives are often instigated and sponsored by senior echelons within organisations, it is the line managers who are ultimately charged with their implementation, and who can influence their success (Young et al., 2015). Job crafting programmes are unlikely to be any different in this regard, and as poignantly expressed by Xu et al., 2023 (p.13) "*Managers should position themselves as opportunity providers or instructors who seed the ground for job crafting*". In addition to well-designed interventions, people leaders who role model job crafting by supporting, encouraging and reinforcing relevant behaviours are more likely to achieve positive organisational cultural outcomes (Guo et al., 2022; Meng et al., 2021; Vermooten et al., 2019), and an enhanced sense of work meaningfulness which leads to reduced burnout, and increased work-engagement, performance and retention (Fouché et al., 2017).

Finally, an approach that often runs parallel to development interventions in organisations is participant feedback. In their review of job crafting's antecedents and consequences, Tims et al. (2010) proposed that tailored feedback can stimulate job crafting. Furthermore, when leaders use feedback as part of their management approach, workers are more likely to develop a sense of enhanced meaning and motivation (Lee et al., 2021).

To summarise, the power of leadership influence over employee development is manifold. As such, from a job crafting and work meaningfulness perspective, line managers could consider promoting effective interventions, model job crafting behaviours, and provide regular and constructive feedback. Furthermore, encouraging their staff to proactively create a role that fits their specific abilities, interests and needs, rather than expecting workers to align to predefined tasks is recommended (Tims et al., 2016).

<u>Individuals</u>

As stated, workplace skill development is generally provided in the form of training (Tims et al., 2016). Accordingly, much of the literature references development programmes to enhance job crafting skills (Geldenhuys et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2021; Peral et al., 2016; Sen et al., 2018; Vermooten et al., 2019) and workplace meaningfulness (Fouché et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2022). Whilst these approaches may well provide a pathway to enhanced capacity, their top-down approach can stifle individualistic, agentic growth and development. With this in mind, individuals may consider their personal capacity to job craft within the parameters of their role and expand their efforts to do so through collaborative conversations with peers and managers.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

This SLR highlights several gaps in the current academic literature and points to a requirement for more longitudinal or time-lagged, qualitatively orientated intervention studies that focus on the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness. More specifically, the limited academic focus on cognitive job crafting to date, and its link to work meaningfulness, provides a clear and practical focal point for future research. Such studies could extrapolate: the cognitive processes via which workers re-frame the way they perceive their job; how workers experience job crafting in real-time; whether, and how, workers associate job crafting practices with increased work meaningfulness; and what type of job crafting interventions can benefit the worker and the employer.

Chapter 4: Empirical Study.

Cognitive Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness in Action: Bringing Outcomes to Life via Coaching Conversations

Abstract

Cognitive job crafting is associated with work meaningfulness, though research falls short of exploring the experiential aspects of this association, and empirically documented studies that concurrently investigate cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness are somewhat sparse. To fill this gap, the current qualitative empirical study asked three research questions relating to: how a targeted coaching intervention can support the development of cognitive job crafting; the thought processes experienced in the development of such skills; and the extent to which a cognitive job crafting intervention can enhance the experience of work meaningfulness.

The study included 14 participants who all took part in two coaching conversations aimed at addressing a challenging workplace issue over the course of four weeks. The ensuing reflexive thematic analysis identified several themes that illuminate the process of job crafting and its impact on work meaningfulness. These included: the consolidation of cognitive job crafting over time; using cognitive strategies to create a sense of personal agency; reframing the view of one's role; promoting a sense of purpose, empowerment, and positive contribution; and supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity.

This study makes theoretical contributions and discusses practical implications for individuals, leaders and organisations thus paving the way for further research into the experiential aspects of job crafting and work meaningfulness more broadly.

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Association between Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) early conceptualisation of job crafting emphasised an identity-rooted perspective. Their model clearly associated job crafting with an increased experience of work meaningfulness as a result of increased agency and influence, enhanced self-image and reputation, and a sense of value-laden interpersonal connection (Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). Despite this early association, little empirical focus has been placed on the link between job crafting and work meaningfulness (Geldenhuys et al., 2021). For instance, scholarly questions specifically relating to whether and how job crafting impacts the experience of work meaningfulness, or vice versa, do not appear to have been clearly explored. This point is illustrated in the SLR (Chapter 3) which indicated that currently there are no intervention studies dedicated to examining the relationship between cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. This dearth of intervention studies has significant implications for both theory and practice. Without such studies, establishing causal relationships between job crafting and work meaningfulness is challenging, leaving the connection largely theoretical. This gap also limits the practical application of job crafting strategies, preventing organisations from effectively using them to enhance meaningfulness. Furthermore, it obstructs a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which job crafting influences work meaningfulness and results in an absence of empirically based tools and strategies for developing job crafting behaviours. As a result, this gap in intervention research restricts both the theoretical and practical insights needed for organisations to utilise job crafting as a means of improving work meaningfulness.

Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation referenced three different types of job crafting (task, relational and cognitive) which are prevalent in the peer-reviewed literature, though there is still a dearth of research relating to how the three forms of job crafting influence workplace outcomes (Nesimnasi, 2022). In particular, little attention has been given to cognitive job crafting (Buonocore et al., 2020), which has been specifically identified as more closely associated with work meaningfulness than task and relational job crafting (Tims et al., 2016). This is because cognitive job crafting supports employees to experience a sense of influence over how they align their work with their core values and personally meaningful outcomes (Geldenhuys et al., 2021).

4.1.2 Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness Interventions

As discussed in previous chapters, an increased interest in job crafting since the turn of the century has identified that its agentic nature is linked to positive outcomes at work. These outcomes span worker wellbeing, job satisfaction, engagement, performance, person-job fit and acclimatisation to change (Roczniewska et al., 2022). Despite the increased attention on job crafting, to date there are limited intervention studies in this area (Demerouti, 2014). One study, which was among the first to carry out an intervention in this arena, implemented a four-phase process incorporating interviews, a workshop, weekly assignments and a reflective session. It concluded that the job crafting intervention supported employee wellbeing and, albeit to a lesser extent, job performance (Ven den Heuvel et al., 2015). Despite these promising results, currently most job crafting intervention studies consist of deductive, quantitative, and post-intervention measures, with limited qualitative focus on when, why and for whom the interventions are effective (Roczniewska et al., 2023). One partial exception was a two-part training intervention study

(Sakuraya et al., 2016) which resulted in a favourable impact on cognitive job crafting, though it was less impactful on task and relational job crafting. This suggested that cognitive job crafting may be more accessible and easier for participants to develop. Perhaps this is because it lies within the individual's personal discretion, whereas influencing tasks and relationships is more challenging as they rely on others' input and buy-in.

A further look at job crafting interventions in Devotto et al.'s (2019) systematic review concluded that although studies have established that interventions can effectively promote job crafting, more research is required to understand the conditions and types of interventions most likely to stimulate such outcomes. The same review added that the JD-R framework is the most commonly used intervention in job crafting research. This has led to a stronger base of scholarly literature relating to job resources and demands (as per the JD-R model), and consequently a limited focus on the Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation which places a strong focus on meaning and identity. In order to achieve a more balanced breadth of job crafting research, and in particular its links with work meaningfulness, further attention could be placed on the latter model, specifically cognitive job crafting which, as referenced above, has garnered the least scholarly attention.

Comparable to job crafting interventions, meaning-centred workplace activities show promising results, particularly in supporting wellbeing, career growth and work related decisions (Honsová, 2024). However, their scarcity leads to a limited empirical understanding of how, and whether, employers can influence work meaningfulness through workplace initiatives. It has been suggested that this gap in evidence stems from the inherent elusiveness of the concept itself, making it challenging to grasp and effectively implement interventions (Fletcher et al., 2021). One potential solution is the development

of accessible and engaging meaning-focused interventions, achieved through collaboration with other, more readily comprehensible concepts (Fletcher et al., 2021). This study seeks to address this by linking work meaningfulness with job crafting through a coaching focused intervention.

4.1.3 Coaching Conversations

Workplace coaching is a contextual, targeted and purposeful intervention aimed at creating positive change in one's professional development and capacity and is linked to the sponsoring organisation's strategic direction (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018).

Peer-reviewed research provides evidence that coaching can amplify the transfer and uptake of other interventions and employee development programmes (Silapurem et al., 2021). However, empirical research investigating whether coaching can enable job crafting has yet to be undertaken, though recent academic dialogue suggests that this may be the case. For instance, although yet to be investigated, it has been argued that coaching and job crafting share commonalities. They both aim to enhance performance, wellbeing and work satisfaction, and as such coaching is likely to help create a more structured approach to job crafting (Silapurem et al., 2021). Likewise, although some research explores the meaning-making aspects of coaching (Cunningham, 2017), as far as is known, there are no current intervention studies specifically examining the use of coaching in the development of work meaningfulness.

4.1.4 The Empirical Study

The empirical study aimed to investigate how cognitive job crafting occurs through a targeted coaching intervention designed to study the process of job crafting and framing of work meaningfulness. The study addressed three research questions. Firstly, it enquired

How can a targeted coaching process support the development of cognitive job crafting? and

addressed this by utilising coaching principles to understand the process of using a tailored,

individual initiative to support the development of cognitive job crafting over the course of

two coaching conversations. The second objective was to facilitate an understanding of

how cognitive job crafting occurs by observing participants' thoughts and experiences when

addressing a pertinent work-related challenge. This was addressed by asking *What thought*

processes do participants experience in the development of cognitive job crafting skills?

Finally, it investigated whether a cognitive job crafting coaching conversation can enhance

the subjective experience of work-related meaningfulness by asking *To what extent can a*

cognitive job crafting focused coaching intervention enhance the experience of work-related

meaningfulness?

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Ethics

An ethics application form was completed and approved by the Birkbeck

Departmental Ethics Officer (DREO) prior to the start of the study (approval code number

950532-950514-112874720).

4.2.2 Recruitment

Recruitment was carried out via professional networks, such as LinkedIn, and word-

of-mouth. As presented in *Appendix 1* an initial information sheet was provided which

explained the aims of the research and eligibility criteria. People who wished to participate

were asked to complete a Microsoft Form which posed a short series of questions relating

to the inclusion criteria. These criteria were defined as Australian-based employees aged 18

and over, working in a full or part-time capacity. Participants were also required to possess

a minimum of five years of work experience to support their insights into job crafting. Furthermore, they were required to express a willingness to articulate, and share, a specific work-related challenge with the researcher.

Exclusion criteria applied to self-employed individuals, business owners and independent contractors because of the potential of their autonomous work contracts and conditions to impact their job crafting experience. Furthermore, to reduce researcher bias, any participants previously known to me, as the researcher, were excluded.

Following an initial screening, all respondents were contacted, via email, to inform them of their inclusion or exclusion from the study, with a clear explanation of the reason underpinning the decision. Those included were provided with further details relating to the study and asked to sign a consent form, which can be viewed in *Appendix 6*. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were notified that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Furthermore, if they wished to remove their data from the study, they were able to within two weeks of the second coaching conversation. The rationale behind this was that beyond two weeks, the data was likely to be anonymised thus difficult to isolate and remove from the collated data set. This information was provided verbally both before and after the participants' involvement in the study. Furthermore, a debrief document was provided following both coaching conversations. This can be viewed in *Appendix 7*.

Participants were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. During the study one participant did not attend the second coaching conversation, their data was therefore removed resulting in a final sample size of 14.

4.2.3 Participant Demographics

Table 6 below provides a demographic overview of the 14 participants, all of whom lived in Australia, and worked as full-time employees in a variety of settings. This included government, education, human resources, professional services, finance and marketing. Notably, a majority (nine) of the participants worked in either education or government roles. All of the participants possessed a minimum of five years in the workforce and were tenured in their current role up to 4 years.

10 participants identified as women and four as men. They presented a breadth of ages. Two were aged 25-34, six were 35-44, four were 45-54, and two participants fell within the 55-64 age range. All participants possessed tertiary qualifications, with 11 identifying themselves as people leaders.

Table 6: Demographic Overview of the Empirical Study Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Highest level of completed education	Tenure in current organisation (yrs)	Tenure in current role (yrs)	Industry	Role	People Leader
Aaliyah	Female	35 - 44	Master's degree	3-4 years	< 1 year	Education	Policy and projects	Yes
Alice	Female	35 - 44	Bachelor's degree	5-10 years	3-4 years	Government	Principal WHS Officer	Yes
Antonia	Female	35 - 44	Bachelor's degree	1-2 years	1-2 years	Brand strategy and design	Senior Consultant - Employer Brand	No
Ari	Male	45 - 54	Bachelor's degree	5-10 years	3-4 years	Education	Talent Specialist	Yes
Aylee	Female	35 - 44	Master's degree	1-2 years	< 1 year	Professional Services and Government	Consultant Psychologist	No
Cara	Female	45 - 54	Post grad diploma	1-2 years	1-2 years	Financial	General Manager Employee Experience	Yes
Daniel	Male	35 - 44	Certificate 4	> 10 years	1-2 years	Government	Manager	Yes
Jared	Male	55 - 64	Bachelor's degree	> 10 years	3-4 years	Education	Human Resources Business Partner Lead	Yes
Naomi	Female	25 - 34	Master's degree	3-4 years	3-4 years	HR	People & Development Business Partner	Yes
Nico	Male	55 - 64	Master's degree	1-2 years	1-2 years	HR	Deputy Director, Human Resources	Yes
Nora	Female	45 - 54	Bachelor Degree plus Grad Diploma	3-4 years	1-2 years	Government	Director	Yes
Rona	Female	45 - 54	Honours Degree	1-2 years	1-2 years	Professional Services	Creative Director	Yes
Shari	Female	25 - 34	Bachelors & Graduate certificate	1-2 years	< 1 year	Government	Senior Design Advisor	No
Sosana	Female	35 - 44	Master's degree	1-2 years	< 1 year	Government	Policy/Project Manager	Yes

4.2.4 Approach Taken in the Coaching Conversations

Prior to the delivery of the intervention, a pilot was conducted with three individuals who were demographically similar to the research participants. The pilot tested the flow and content of the coaching conversations, and highlighted that whilst job crafting was conceptually accessible, work meaningfulness was perceived as a somewhat nebulous concept that was open to broad interpretation. This mirrored other research findings that conceptualising meaningfulness, in particular one's own experience of it, is a challenging endeavour (Lips-Wiersma, 2022), perhaps because people rarely reflect on it (Fletcher et al., 2021) which leads to a lack of familiarity and a difficulty exploring and examining it as a concept. In response to this, interview cues were reconsidered and refined based on the WAMI (Steger et al., 2012), which provided an empirically based, tangible and more easily understood series of cues.

Participants were invited to attend two coaching conversations during which they were asked to consider a current, moderately difficult work challenge of their choice. Individuals are more inclined to reflect on meaningfulness in adverse situations (Fletcher et al., 2021). Therefore, prompting participants to recall a challenge, rather than a routine situation, was intended to enhance their consideration of work meaningfulness. Both conversations were an hour long and took place approximately four weeks apart. The conversations were recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams with the participants' signed consent. The form used for this is provided in *Appendix 6*. This dual-phased implementation addressed the current empirical gap in time-staged interventions, and also addressed the claim that the experience of meaningfulness is commonly recognised retrospectively (Bailey et al., 2016**).** It did so by embedding a time-lag into the intervention

which supported ongoing reflections to occur over the course of four weeks. This process is presented in *Figure 5* below which illustrates the flow of the coaching intervention, including examples of coaching cues used.

Both conversations addressed the same work challenge and explored the participants' perceptions of any changes or progress (relating to their chosen challenge) to have occurred between the two conversations. Coaching literature suggests that progress is enhanced when the coachee experiences a sense of accountability and commitment to their development (Passmore et al., 2012). This principle was therefore embedded at key stages of the intervention, notably at the conclusion of the first conversation and at the onset of the second. At these two junctures, participants were respectively cued to state their intended actions to address their work challenge, and then reflect on areas such as how their approach had developed between the two conversations, whether their perception of the challenge had altered, and if their experience of work meaningfulness had evolved. This process was facilitated through a series of cues presented in the second conversation, such as: "*Reflecting on the challenge discussed previously, explain how things have changed or developed for you*." *Figure 5* below provides further examples of these cues, which were designed to elicit participants' self-observations regarding their evolving experiences of cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness.

The challenges presented by the participants were wide and varied. As presented in *Table 7* below, they typically encapsulated role ambiguity, unsustainable workload, difficulty managing people (both upwards and downwards), managing through change and career transition concerns.

Figure 5: The Coaching Process

Coaching conversation 1

Preparation: Participants given brief overview & interactive demonstration of job crafting, work meaningfulness, ACTA & TA.

Setting the scene: Participants asked to present one workplace challenge to discuss over two coaching conversations.

Throughout the session: Prompts used to support participants to explore work challenge using TA, ACTA & narrative approaches

Concluding the conversation: participants asked to develop & commit to actions to undertake prior to the second coaching conversation.

Example cues:
- What's going through your mind right now?
- Please verbalise what you are thinking as the thoughts pop into your mind.
- Can you expand on that?
- Please tell me more.

TA, ACTA and Narrative prompts are provided in Table 8.

Example cues:
- What would it mean to you if you approached the challenge differently?
- How would you like to practice approaching the challenge differently?
- What are the specific changes you will make?
- What would that tell you about yourself?
- How would you describe your level of motivation to do things differently between now and the next time we meet?
- Talk me through how you will remind yourself or remember what you've agreed to do when you face the challenge.

Coaching conversation 2

Self-observations:
Participants encouraged to explore observed changes in relation to the challenge, and changes in behaviour since first coaching conversation.

Next steps:
Discussion relating to what the participant will continue to do in future.

Sustained Change:
Discussion relating to embedding new thoughts and behaviours in order to sustain long-term change.

Closure:
Participants thanked for partaking. Reminded that the researcher-participant relationship would now cease, and that a request to withdraw from the study required within two weeks.

Example cues :
- Thinking about the challenge we discussed last time, talk me through how things have changed or developed.
- If you view the challenge differently, how so?
- What goes through your mind when you are faced with the challenge now?
- How significant is the change/s to you?
- Meaningfulness is experienced when work holds personal significance to the individual, talk me through how you feel about your sense of meaningfulness at work?

Example cues:
- Maintaining change over time can be challenging. Which approaches might you take to maintain successes you have experienced?

Example cues:
- As a result of this coaching process is there anything that would like to continue doing?
- Is there anything that you would like to stop doing?
- What are some enablers or detractors that may influence your capacity to take the next steps?

Table 7: The Work-related Challenges Presented by the Participants

Pseudonym	Work-related challenges	
	Theme	**Summary**
Aaliyah	Managing up	Difficulty influencing senior colleagues and decision-makers on a challenging project.
Alice	Self-management	Overwhelming workload leading to concerns relating to professional reputation.
Antonia	Self-management	Lack of confidence in skills, competence and capacity to execute aspects of the job.
Ari	Resourcing	Significant lack of resources relating to the delivery of a new strategic initiative.
Aylee	Managing up	Poor management support and communication leading to duplication of work and reduced productivity.
Cara	Managing up	Abdication of responsibility by the executive team impacting the team's sense of fairness and achievement.
Daniel	Organisational culture	Concerns relating to a culture of inappropriate team dynamics and unprofessional behaviour.
Jared	Managing down	Concerns relating to a team member inappropriately oversharing personal information with clients.
Naomi	Resourcing	Poor resourcing impacting organisational support, prioritisation, and concerns for potential burnout.
Nico	Managing down	Poor institutional knowledge (after a long break), leading to feelings of disempowerment.
Nora	Managing up	Unnecessary barriers to management support, leading to miscommunication and poor quality outputs.
Rona	Self-management	A propensity to over-prepare, leading to long working hours and fatigue.
Shari	Self-management / managing-up	Lack of assertiveness such that opinions and thoughts are not vocalised effectively, particularly in large meetings
Sosana	managing down	Requirement to adapt leadership style in order to manage experienced subject matter experts.

The coaching conversations involved the exploration of participants' subjective experience of the cognitive job crafting process and were grounded in Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation. Participants were encouraged to express their thoughts in real-time, aided by cues that were developed using *cognitive crafting* items from the JCQ (Slemp et al., 2013) relating to purpose, significance, impact and overall wellbeing.

The coaching conversations were based on narrative coaching principles, which employ a storytelling and re-authoring approach to support individuals. Similar to cognitive job crafting, the central principles of narrative coaching emphasise the power of intentional reframing, helping individuals develop the ability to view their challenges from different perspectives, explore new solutions, recognise their capacity to make choices, take action, and drive change (Drake, 2018). Consequently, participants were encouraged to explore their perceptions of the challenge by iteratively presenting their experiences, thoughts and beliefs via verbalisations, analogies or metaphors, and then reframing them into a preferred or updated narrative encapsulating future possibilities (Drake, 2018). Examples of narrative cues are presented in *Table 8* below. It further incorporated two novel approaches that were not found to have been previously used in similar empirical studies. The first, referred to as the Think Aloud (TA) protocol, elicits in-depth insights into cognitions by accessing participants' real-time thoughts in the form of a running commentary relating to a process or problem. This protocol is most often used with sporting professionals, such as golfers (Whitehead & Jackman, 2020), to study their unfiltered thoughts during play in order to understand how expert techniques, methodologies, and decision-making processes are applied. This knowledge is usually harnessed for training and development purposes (Eccles & Arsal, 2017). In conjunction with TA, Applied Cognitive Task Analysis (ACTA) principles

were used. Originally developed in the USA Navy for use in system and instructional design

(Militello et al., 1997), ACTA is a practical approach, often implemented in an interview

format. It is applied by asking subject matter experts to elicit expertise via specific cues that

address the cognitive demands of their job (Militello & Hutton,1998). Contemporary

empirical literature provides insight into the benefits of ACTA, and concludes that it is a

reliable method for ascertaining subject matter expertise for the purpose of developing

effective training programmes for novices (Gore et al., 2015).

The ACTA and TA protocols are not without limitations. For instance, they rely on a

robust level of participant self-awareness to support how and what they convey about their

thoughts, and from a methodological perspective, the verbalisation process may reduce

focus on the task at hand (Baxter et al., 2015). Further to this, as far as can be ascertained

TA and ACTA have not been previously used together or adapted for use in participant-led

coaching conversations. As such, during the piloting stage specific attention was given to

ensuring that this novel application was practicable and achievable. To support this, TA and

ACTA cues were developed, and examples are provided in *Table 8* below. However, it

should be noted that in order to accommodate the flexible and adaptive nature of coaching

these cues were used to guide the conversation, rather than as a categorical set of

questions. To further ensure the success of this novel approach participants' familiarity with

ACTA and TA principles was reinforced throughout the process. Prior to the first coaching

conversation, they were sent written information relating to the ACTA and TA protocols.

Following that, the first coaching conversation introduced participants to the practical use of

TA and ACTA principles including a short trial using a familiar example of making a cup of

tea. Furthermore, throughout the conversations relevant cues, clarifying questions and

reflections were used as needed.

Table 8: Example of TA, ACTA and Narrative Informed Cues used in the Coaching Conversations

	Cues		
	TA Protocol	**ACTA**	**Narrative**
Cognitive Job Crafting	Walk me through what you tell yourself when you think about this challenge.	Is there one particular part of the problem, which is specifically difficult for you?	If you wanted to change the outcome, what could you tell yourself next time you come across this challenge?
Work Meaningfulness	What is it about this particular challenge that is meaningful to you right now, as you're thinking about it?	Thinking about the skills and expertise you bring to your role, how do they align with your core values?	If you came into work on Monday morning and the challenge no longer existed, what significance would that hold for you?

4.3 Findings

Five themes and 10 sub-themes were determined and are summarised in *Table 9*

below. This is followed by a discussion of each theme using verbatim quotes selected to

illustrate and elucidate the themes.

Table 9: Empirical Study - Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Research Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
How can a targeted coaching process support the development of cognitive job crafting?	1. Creating opportunities to develop and consolidate cognitive job crafting over time.	1. Converting cognitions into verbal expression 2. Utilising the coaching process to encourage intentional cognitive job crafting
What thought processes do participants experience in the development of cognitive job crafting skills?	2. Cognitive Strategies creating a shifting sense of personal agency	3. Examining how thoughts impact the perception of work 4. Using cognitive strategies to reframe workplace challenges
	3. Reframing and reprioritising characteristics of the role	5. Challenging preconceptions of individual responsibilities 6. Cognitively adjusting preconceptions of working relationships
To what extent can a cognitive job crafting focused coaching intervention enhance the experience of work-related meaningfulness?	4. Promoting a sense of purpose, empowerment, and positive contribution.	7. Enhanced sense of capacity to make effective contributions at work 8. Enhanced intentional direction and motivation
	5. Supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity	9. Focus on work meaningfulness leading to a heightened sense of wellbeing 10. Commitment to active self-care

4.3.1 Data Analysis Approach

This thesis incorporated a hybrid analysis approach by combining a theory-derived deductive approach with a data-driven inductive approach (Fereday et al., 2006). It was conducted by applying existing theory relating to cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness to the analysis process, whilst also developing new observations and patterns from the data derived from the coaching conversations. Particular attention was given to the evolution of participants' cognitive job crafting and their experience of work meaningfulness throughout the intervention period. As outlined earlier, this was achieved by using specific verbal cues that facilitated the measurement of change over time. This

approach enabled a comparison between the two conversations, allowing for the identification of whether, and how, participants expressed changes in their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours between the first and second conversation.

Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen to interpret the data, the benefit of which is its flexibility to be adapted to a range of epistemological positions (Clarke et al., 2013). I took an interpretivist stance, and this aligns with the narrative coaching approach which holds that reality is a socially constructed phenomenon, whereby people create meaning via the way they talk about things and the stories they tell themselves (Drake, 2018).

The analysis process adhered closely to Braun and Clarke's six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022b). The first, *familiarization with the data*, included several readings of the transcripts, paving the way to a nuanced understanding of the data in its original format. The second phase involved the development of a set of *semantic and conceptual codes* which captured explicit expressions and verbalisations relevant to the focus of this study. There were 157 codes in total, each one covered an observation presented by multiple participants. At this juncture, the codes were shared and discussed in a supervisory session. This allowed for a two-way exploration and examination of the themes through alternative lenses, angles and paradigms, and proved pivotal in the immersive, reflexive process.

Following this, the third phase involved developing *clusters of data* united by a shared concept (Braun et al. 2022b), which were derived using the previously developed codes. This established an initial set of multi-dimensional, centrally unifying and descriptively labelled themes and sub-themes. *Appendix 8* presents a sample of codes and initial data themes which were wide and varied. They included references to the different

job crafting types, work meaningfulness, professional growth, wellbeing, leadership, and organisational culture. At this stage all codes were included, regardless of whether they aligned with the research questions and, as in previous phases, they were shared and jointly discussed with my supervisor.

The fourth phase saw a refinement and confirmation of a series of *central organising concepts and theme boundaries*. It involved a process of reflection, re-examination, immersion in the data, and an oscillation between the themes, sub-themes and codes to ensure that relevant data was captured. This phase established a series of descriptive theme names.

Prior to writing up the findings, *a mapping of the structure and flow of the themes and sub-themes* was carried out in adherence to the requirement that each theme should be clearly distinct from the next, yet also part of an interconnected theme composition that addresses the research questions (Braun et al., 2022b).   This was followed by the final phase of data analysis, the *write-up stage* (Braun et al., 2022b), which was carried out using extracts from the data, and involved a final finessing of themes.

4.3.2 RQ1: How can a targeted coaching process support the development of cognitive job crafting?

This research question focused on whether, and how, coaching conversations are an effective way of supporting the development of cognitive job crafting. The theme attached to this question was ***creating opportunities to develop and consolidate cognitive job crafting over time.*** It was comprised of two subthemes as explored below.

<u>Theme 1: Creating opportunities to develop and consolidate cognitive job crafting over time.</u>

This theme referenced the positive impact of creating the time and space to verbalise one's concerns during the conversations, aided by an independent coach to facilitate this exploration through a series of open cues. This aligns with Silapurem et al.'s (2021) assertion that job crafting can be encouraged via a meta-intervention, defined as a procedure or intervention that increases the uptake of another approach. In this case, the coaching intervention helped stimulate cognitive job crafting.

Two sub-themes were associated with this theme. The first, **converting cognitions into verbal expression,** encapsulated the impact of actively noticing and accessing one's internal narrative, and allowing time to process and organise thoughts, over the course of the two coaching conversations, such that they could be more easily verbalised and acted upon.

A significant part of this appeared to lay in the opportunity for participants to hone in on their internal dialogue and convert those thoughts into verbalisations, which in turn strengthened their capacity to address their concerns. This was somewhat akin to the process of *affect labelling* whereby the act of putting feelings into words reduces one's emotional reactivity to a situation (Lieberman et al., 2007). Shari, below, expressed the transformational impact that verbalising her cognitions had on realising the importance of the challenge.

> I think this is the most I've verbalised about something like this before because obviously it's in your head. But I think verbalising it as a whole, it takes it to a whole new level…I think just talking to you about it made me realise how important it is to me. Maybe I haven't placed it in that that much of an importance, but just talking through it…it's made me realise more than what I had in my mind...

A further participant, Aylee, also focused on the impact of focusing on her cognitions. Towards the end of the second conversation, she reflected on the impact that the coaching process had on bringing her attention to pertinent issues.

I remember leaving and being very, very aware of the...the unconscious internal dialogue I was having, like the stuff that I wasn't really paying attention to. And so I think the value for me has been really...quite profound actually. I truly think it's been invaluable in the sense of I don't think I would have gotten there given the situation and what was happening at the time... without having somebody external stop me and go, let's talk about what's going on.

Furthermore, for some, the act of accessing their internal dialogue was associated with an initial sense of heightened emotion which, over time, gave way to clarity of thought. This was expressed by Antonia in her reflections on how the coaching conversations had supported her in addressing an emotionally charged challenge at work.

I found that first session quite difficult....it was an emotional thing for me at work...I found myself not being able to think of how, ways I could get out of it necessarily...and like you prompted or gave me some suggestions... and then being able to work out what is good and what works for you was good because there's a sense of, you know... this way works a bit better for me or oh, I hadn't even thought about that. Let me try it, and it worked.

The second sub-theme, ***utilising the coaching process to encourage intentional cognitive job crafting,*** was supported by a number of participant self-observations, particularly made in the second session when they considered the temporal impact of the

intervention. Some participants identified the specific benefits achieved by the two time points in the intervention, specifically the provision to proactively stop, reflect on their challenge, trial new problem-solving approaches, and review progress over time. They noted that the pre-arranged second session served as a signpost which fostered accountability by introducing a sense of continuity and commitment. This reinforces previous research relating to coaching duration and frequency, which concludes that multiple sessions yield more significant and sustainable improvements in workplace performance than a single session (Williams & Lowman, 2018). Although this micro-intervention consisted of only two sessions, participants perceived that the impact of two conversations was greater than that of a single one. As Aaliyah reflected in the second session:

> I think the key thing for me was forcing myself…I knew that we had that next conversation coming up and I couldn't turn up to the meeting to say hey, no…I couldn't muster up the energy, I, I didn't make any progress…that was holding me to account…I knew there was a looming deadline that I had to report back

Naomi also considered the impact of a phased approach in helping her be accountable to her goals.

> I think it's that accountability too that has come with it. So being able to identify certain things that I want to do, working through those and then setting up some goals over a period of time and you know trying to keep myself accountable. I think it is helpful.

Other participants added that it was the process of verbalisation, combined with the two-phased process, that helped them explore previously unconsidered angles, and created the opportunity to consider alternative courses of action. This reflection was most prevalent in the second session, for instance, Aaliyah expressed:

…it was all a jumbled mess in there…I remember in our first conversation I was like, actually, no this is what I actually mean, and you know…it just forced me to to nail the right words to describe…It absolutely helped to me because I knew how I was feeling. But putting feelings into words was I, I have to admit at the start of our conversation I did find it challenging…you might remember that there were lots of times…like I just need a moment to think…

Others added that the benefits of the temporal nature of the intervention were enhanced by the collaborative partnership created in the coaching conversations. This aligns with recent research findings that one of the factors that underpin coaching success is the powerful impact of one-on-one time that the coach and coachee share together (Kapoutzis, 2024). Participants referenced the impact of timely cues used to enhance self-observation and a sense of empowerment. Daniel reflected:

Um. I think it's been good because…it's like talking to someone who doesn't have any judgement, like if I was to talk to someone within my own organisation, they'll probably give me a solution, and I need to find the solution myself and I need to buy into that solution because as you know…if someone just imposes a plan on you, you can execute the plan, but you don't really believe in it, right…so you you've been

able to sit and listen and give me ideas and I think to be honest, you know, I think

I've solved my own problem and you've just helped me facilitate that.

Furthermore, Rona reflected on the sense of accountability that she had developed

throughout the process:

If I was just thinking about it, you know, you might waffle and digress, but actually

sort of being accountable to, you know, talking to someone and being probed to sort

of think more deeply about things just keeps, keeps you on task, I guess.

An additional advantage of the coaching process was the involvement of an

independent coach to facilitate participants' progress by fostering a neutral and secure

environment. This condition enabled participants to address their workplace challenges

without fear of judgment or interpersonal risk. This fostered a sense of psychological safety

(Edmondson & Bransby, 2023) which was reflected in several participant comments. For

example, at the conclusion of her second conversation, Aylee made several cognitive

connections between her experience of psychological safety, the absence of judgment, and

the opportunity to think aloud.

If I felt judged, I probably would have shut down 'cause I would have felt like I'm

being judged. I found the the questioning quite, sort of, thoughtful and

compassionate in the approach and it gave me the space to talk out loud. Um, which

I need…

In addition to highlighting the importance of psychological safety, this comment

reinforced the well-documented advantages of working with external coaches, particularly

in terms of the perceived objectivity and confidentiality they offer (Whitmore, 2017).

Aaliyah succinctly added:

> What I liked about this coaching session was that I felt like it was a safe place, and I
> could be completely honest. Had it been a coaching session…provided through the
> organisation I might not have been candid.

Furthermore, the collaborative and co-creating nature of the intervention seemed to alleviate participants' concerns about providing specific responses, as is often the case in researcher-led interventions (such as interviews), where predetermined questions are asked. This was reflected by Antonia in the second conversation:

> It didn't feel like...Ohh, you've gotta come up with the solutions yourself, which
> would be overwhelming…it was a measured way in, in getting people to a solution
> without telling them, and without forcing them to come up with it straight away
> themselves, which I liked cause it felt like a partnership in that sense.

Finally, the accountability aspect of the coaching process, partially created by the identification of specific goals to be achieved between the two conversations, played a key role in supporting participant progress over time. Participants' goals varied widely. Some were procedural, akin to task job crafting, while others were more reflective and closely aligned with cognitive job crafting. This indicates that, despite the clear focus on cognitive job crafting throughout the intervention, in practice, participants utilised a variety of job crafting approaches.

The procedural action plans included: the creation of checklists; behavioural reminders; schedule planners; and ritualistic, recurring actions such as logging off at a

specific time each day, leaving one's laptop at work and taking regular breaks. These actions supported participants to develop a series of habitual and embedded behaviours. A clear example was presented by Aaliyah.

> I think I just need to make time in my diary to plan…just a daily reminder in my calendar. So every day I start the day with…looking at what I need to work on for that day and at the end of the day I do kind of like a, a, tally of alright, this is what I managed to get through, this is what I need to push on to the next day…that daily reminder will hopefully, I think, form into hopefully a habit.

The reflective action plans included self-observations such as: noticing one's self-talk; journalling feelings and cognitions; identifying the tension between different aspects of one's job; actively reframing the challenge; and seeking out social and work related support networks. An example of this came from Daniel who stated "Umm. I will write down those wins and I'll celebrate those wins, not just internally, but I'll also celebrate them with the team to show them that things have gotten better." Writing actions down was a common and self-initiated approach amongst the participants, and at the conclusion of the second conversation, many reflected that this tangible activity had helped them focus on their commitments. For some participants their writing extended to journaling (in-between coaching conversations) as an avenue for: maintaining accountability; reinforcing successes; focusing on positives; and reframing issues. Some participants included scripts and written cues which provided tangible reminders to utilise when faced with their challenge. Alice committed to preparing "a piece of paper with my three most important things I want to achieve for the day…and yeah, like a positive thought or quote on the top of that paper."

For others, writing supported their sense of wellbeing. A case in point was Nora, a senior government executive who had recently been appointed as the lead of a complex project. She chose to use the coaching conversations to address her relationship with her manager who, despite her best efforts, appeared disengaged, unavailable and unaware of the nuances of the project. Consequently, Nora reported expending a lot of time on career limiting, unproductive and unrewarding endeavours. In the first conversation, she expressed feeling undervalued and undermined in her role, leading to defensive behaviour which, she felt, could be remediated by a healthier mindset. In order to observe, identify and intentionally adapt her internal dialogue, Nora committed to extending her journaling practice, stating:

> I have a morning reflection and I do a little bit of journaling…as part of that…I'm going to add a task that, that talks about my mindset. How am I showing up today? How am I thinking about this problem that we've talked about? Reminding myself about the choice to feel positive and find an opportunity in it, and remind myself that it's not personal, there's no malice…that's going to be key. I think just to have some, some phrases that I can just revisit every day in that time so that that's about really setting my my how I'm showing up that day when I feel the negative thinking come in.

This approach was revisited in the second coaching conversation when Nora reflected on the impact of journalling, she stated:

> It was such a good test because I did sit down and actually handwrite it, which we never do. And it was really powerful because by the end of that 10 minutes, all of

those feelings of anxiety and anger and overwhelm…they've gone because I've

worked it through, and I think it was just the writing rather than just sitting there

thinking about it. The writing felt constructive. It felt like I was, I was doing

something with that thinking and it was tangible, and it was relatively slowed down

compared to if I was just talking to you about it…it had quite, well an unexpectedly

powerful result for me.

Nora's example highlights the impact of journaling on cognitive job crafting.

Although slower than verbalising, writing enables individuals to process their thoughts

privately and provides a written record that can be revisited to track changes over time. This

can be particularly useful for intentional long-term reflection, identifying patterns in

thinking, considering alternative narratives, and supporting the reframing process that is

central to cognitive job crafting.

4.3.3 RQ2: What thought processes do participants experience in the development of cognitive job crafting skills

This research question focused on gaining insight into the thoughts participants

engaged in during cognitive job crafting. Both of the themes below reflect a proactive

readiness for change which was drawn out during the coaching process. This phenomenon

is often associated with job crafting (Dewi et al., 2021) and aligns with the suggestion that

cognitive job crafting is particularly associated with a receptive attitude to change as a result

of finding meaning in one's work (Szőts-Kováts & Kiss, 2023).

The two themes explored below suggest a change undergone by participants in

response to the intervention. They are respectively referred to as ***Cognitive strategies***

creating a shifting sense of personal agency and ***Reframing and reprioritising***

characteristics of the role.

<u>Theme 2: Cognitive strategies creating a shifting sense of personal agency</u>

This theme identified the cognitive processes elicited to enhance one's sense of

capacity and conviction to create change, with a focus on the individuals' sense of agency.

Two sub-themes were identified. The first, ***examining how thoughts impact the perception***

of work presented insights into how the individuals' appraisal of the challenge impacted the

challenge itself. Participants' recognition of how their cognitions shaped the perception of

the problem was commonly identified, with many expressing a newly found realisation of

their capacity to influence the work-related challenges that they were experiencing. Daniel

expressed that proactively focussing on how he conceptualised the challenge triggered a

process of cognitive reframing, and was key to changing his attitude toward the problem.

He expressed:

Um. What's changed or developed? I think what has, nothing has changed. The

situation is still there, but what what's developed I suppose is me. Thinking about it

differently, thinking about it as really about, what is my circle of influence?

Similarly, Antonia identified how her thinking had progressed throughout the course

of the coaching, from a passive to a more agentic, proactive and outcome focused outlook.

She reflected, "I'm noticing that my thought process is a lot more around, you know, how

do I use the skills I've already got, to then be able to be effective in what it is that we need".

Also prevalent was an increased perception of influence over the situation which, in

many cases, appeared integral to the cognitive job crafting process. When reflecting on the

best way to deal with the challenges afoot, Ari succinctly stated that one should consider

"What is it that you can control? And act upon that". This was further reflected by others who considered the impact of an expanding locus of control, somewhat akin to Berg et al.'s, (2013) concept of *expanding perceptions* whereby workers broaden out their view of the impact they have in their role. For instance, Cara expressed:

> I think one of the big things is the opportunity to think about it from what I have control and influence over rather than trying to grab hold of things that I don't have control and influence. You know, rather than trying to shift that circle of control, sort of come to a bit of an acceptance that these are the things that I can control.

The second sub-theme, ***using cognitive strategies to reframe workplace challenges***, reflected a narrative approach and provided insight into a series of cognitive strategies, which were developed and consolidated by participants throughout the intervention. Three common strategies were identified. The first was *deconstructing the problem*, a process whereby participants broke the challenge up into its constituent parts and isolated the most concerning elements of the issue so that they could be addressed. This reflects Berg et al.'s (2013) idea of *focusing perceptions* whereby the worker narrows their focus onto the parts of the job that hold value and priority for them. Daniel describes how this cognitive process led him to pinpoint the most troubling issues:

> Break it down, deconstruct it…do a full breakdown of what the problem is and and even breakdown the breakdown. So like, you know, for me, I said culture…focus on culture and that's break that down even further and even to the point where I broke it even further down in and identified individuals who were a cultural problem.

The second strategy, *focusing on positive outcomes* was a process whereby participants reimagined a positive outcome of their challenge, which supported a shift towards a more positive attitude towards their capacity to address their challenge. As Daniel expressed:

> What really helped me with my reframing of my, of the problem, and of even of my mindset, cause I think some of the problem was my mindset, was those wins, you know, finding and identifying and focusing solely on the positive, the positive, the positive, the positive especially in my organisation.

The third commonly used approach was the use of *metaphors* which helped participants re-conceptualise their experiences through visualisations in order to explore better outcomes. This was particularly well expressed by Nora:

> Eat the Elephant one bite at a time…. Just one step at a time. Everything is figure-out-able…and I think that's that's certainly an attribute that enables me to be a really strong leader that inspires people to perform.

A fourth, though less commonly noted strategy, was problem re-labelling in order to alleviate negative feelings associated with the challenge. As is presented below, Nora re-considered her definition of the problem, and in doing so created a stronger sense of influence over the situation. This aligns with Berg et al.'s (2013) posit that during cognitive job crafting individuals tend to ascribe meaningful labels to aspects of their role.

> I think this comes back to that whole mindset thing. You know…it's just a bunch of people behaving in particular ways that create a situation that we're in. It it's neither

good nor bad…you know, the responsibility is on me to a change the way I think

about that and…adjust how I work to fit within it.

Theme 3: Reframing and reprioritising characteristics of the role

The third theme, ***reframing and reprioritising characteristics of the role***, provided

insight into the benefits of reconsidering the schematic view of the role, including

interpersonal ones such as the motives of other people.

It presented two sub-themes. The first, ***challenging preconceptions of individual***

responsibilities, saw participants questioning previously unexplored aspects of their role.

For some, that led to a challenge to the status quo, whereas others, such as Aylee who is

quoted below, saw merit in accepting the status quo and refocusing their efforts on

variables that they could more readily influence. Aylee stated, "Instead of trying to fight the

system it's, why change it?... instead of trying to change the whole kind of way things are

done it's….reframing, what in this situation can I realistically influence or slash control slash

influence?"

This sub-theme also included an element of redefining role parameters, at times

resulting in a more positive outlook on the challenge, and a clearer sense of alignment

between job demands and resources which, as referenced by Wrzesniewski et al. (2013),

can lead to greater work engagement. Ari's quote below reflects this:

There is only one of me, I can't realistically be expected to achieve everything in this

strategy and to implement absolutely everything…so I kind of need to not put that

pressure on myself, that I tend to do, and which is probably what was causing a lot of

the, if you will, anxiety.

The second sub-theme, ***cognitively adjusting preconceptions of working relationships***, honed in on ways in which participants reframed the interpersonal facets of their role. It aligned with research that states that active consideration of work relationships can lead to a greater sense of meaning among workers (Geldenhuys et al., 2021), and reinforced that intrinsic motivation is influenced by the feelings of safety in one's interpersonal connection (Autin et al., 2022).

One common aspect of this sub-theme was recognising the strength of positive working relationships which, for many, led to an intention to put more effort into relationship building. As put by Aaliyah "I'm going to, um, notice the dynamics, make some decisions about…how I communicate, who I communicate with…"

Other participants reframed their pre-conceptions relating to others' motives, often resulting in them viewing others in a more positive light. As expressed by Nora, "Reflecting on where other people are coming from, and and you know, recognising that other people aren't necessarily coming from a place of malice."

Cognitive reframing was also identified via clarifying blurred interpersonal roles, improved boundaries and authentic expectation setting. As stated by Alice:

> I just want to have a discussion about my boundaries…I'm quite clear with them as to what's working for me but things have changed a lot in the last month, so I need to go back and reconfirm with them what I need from them in terms of my boundaries and having some focus time set aside for me to get stuff done that I need to get done.

Furthermore, openness to feedback, collaboration and proactively tailoring communication styles to suit the audience was expressed. Aaliyah stated that she would

consider "What approach I can employ to get the outcome that we all need, rather than just shooting off the request and hoping that I get the response back". Similarly, others adjusted their inter-relational preconceptions by reflecting on the benefit of seeking support. For instance, Aylee stated that she would look at "What can I really influence and control in this, whilst also focusing on reminders to seek out support and camaraderie?"

4.3.4 RQ3: To what extent can a cognitive job crafting focused coaching Intervention enhance the experience of work-related meaningfulness?

This research question focused on whether the cognitive job crafting intervention could impact the experience of work meaningfulness and gave way to two clear themes. These were labelled ***Promoting a sense of purpose, empowerment, and positive contribution*** and ***Supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity.*** Both themes are explored below.

Theme 4: Promoting a sense of purpose, empowerment, and positive contribution.

Intrinsic motivation is supported in part by autonomy and a sense of mastery in one's role (Autin, et al., 2022). These factors were reflected in this theme which encapsulated the utilisation of cognitive job crafting coaching techniques to reinforce and emphasise the meaningfulness aspects of the role. It was comprised of two sub-themes. The first, ***enhanced sense of capacity to make effective contributions at work,*** illuminated the positive impact of focusing on one's sense of achievement, rather than focusing on the issues through a problem-saturated prism. It illustrated that participants felt buoyed when recalling positive events that indicated their progression towards important outcomes. As expressed by Daniel:

I was forgetting about what we've achieved and just keep looking at the

problem…but it's a path. It's a journey, it's it's working through. But there has been

small wins along the way….there's still the problem, but….we've forgotten how how

far we've come since the start.

Antonia added that reframing her thoughts supported her to take proactive action and

develop a stronger sense of purpose and agency, particularly when she felt as though she

was not contributing enough. She reflected:

It actually freed me up to focus on that and really take charge….allowed me different

avenues to try and find things that I can contribute in….so finding different ways of

getting that sense of meaning at work and being part of that and taking a bit more of

a role in driving that.

Antonia further displayed a sense of conviction relating to her contribution to the

challenges. She said:

The only person that can really change anything about my situation is me, and you

know, I could easily just sit there and worry about it and say I'm terrible or not doing

a good job or, but unless I kind of push that to the side and step up and do

something about it no one else is gonna do that for me, I think and, and I think that's

part of that realisation that I could just sit and worry about things the whole time, or

I could do something.

Some participants articulated that the focus on purpose and meaning during the

coaching conversations helped them align their workplace challenges with their chosen

actions and values. In some instances, it clarified why the problem had felt so vexing. For instance, in the second conversation, Nora reflected that her attention to the paradoxes she experienced at work enabled her to understand their impact on her core values which, in turn, led to greater clarity regarding her situation.

> I think the values really helped me zero in on "Okay, well is if these are my values and this is my problem what is it about this situation that's that's conflicting with my values?" It just gave me, you know, it was like, straight to the point and help me zero straight in on where the disconnect was...I particularly liked the questions about values. I think that was really helpful for, to draw me back into why am I? Why am I feeling or thinking that way about that situation?

Other participants noted that strengthening their sense of agency resulted in a greater sense of meaningfulness. This aligned with Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) meaning-rooted conceptualization of job crafting, which suggests that when workers are proactive, their personal values are more likely to align with their work approach. This was affirmed by Aylee at the conclusion of her second conversation, where she reflected, "The thing that I really have, have, found is that, that link between feeling more empowered has helped create more meaning".

The second sub-theme, ***Enhanced intentional direction and motivation,*** referenced an increased sense of proactive commitment and accountability as an outcome of the intervention. In some cases, it replaced feelings of inertia or languish. Nico put it well in his reflections:

> So the challenges I think become more concrete...if I go back...a couple of months...(I had) a sense of, you know, drift. That kind of, you know, I just don't feel like...getting

out of bed in the morning and going to to work. And I'm kind of going through the

motions and there's not a sense of purpose.

He added that the coaching "reminded me of, you know, the purpose…and so that

that was a nice little reminder about you know, why we're there and the meaning of the

work that we do." Nora also provided some insights into how she would have ordinarily

dealt with the challenge at hand prior to the coaching:

> I'd probably have ruminated on it, and you know, when you ruminate you you never
>
> really resolve a thought and you just keep going in this spiral and over and over
>
> again…and you never really come out the other end with a resolution. And I probably
>
> would have ruminated on it all afternoon…I would have ruminated on it on my drive
>
> home… I probably would have ruminated on it in my sleep and not slept very well.

Finally, Aylee succinctly added, "I think it's probably just made me realise that I can

do something about it rather than, um, probably just go to another meeting and think that

this is what it is." She continued on to consider how she might encourage someone else to

increase their sense of commitment and accountability and stated:

Think about your values, apply different lenses, work out what you can do…you know, like

once a month, just really sitting back and looking at what I'm doing and going okay, what's

working and what's not and why isn't it working and…why is it working?

Theme 5: Supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity

The final theme, ***Supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity,***

focused on ways in which the cognitive crafting process led to an increased awareness of

the importance of self-care and wellbeing. It aligned with other job crafting intervention

studies which have led to positive wellbeing outcomes (Bakker et al., 2017), and also

concurred with other research that utilized a process of self-assessment to identify a significant link between cognitive job crafting specifically and subjective wellbeing (Devotto et al., 2020).

The first sub-theme, ***Focus on work meaningfulness leading to a heightened sense of wellbeing,*** provided insight into participants' improved sense of coping capacity as an outcome of the intervention. A somewhat compelling reflection was made by Nora:

> Through my career, I have…spent an inordinate amount of energy ruminating about how I did something wrong, how I could have done something better, how I you know, how do I feel about this and I'm, you know, making things mean what they may or may not mean. And I feel like had I had the opportunity to unpack some of that through some structured, skilled coaching.

Aylee's reflections further indicated a shift in wellbeing:

> The helplessness or hopelessness that comes with being stuck where you feel like you can't, you don't have that autonomy. You know, I feel like it's brought that autonomy back…when I first spoke to you, I just felt like…ohh what's the the point of this, I've just made a terrible life decision, whereas since talking and since doing this kind of stuff, I do find that… I'm able to feel that sense of meaning and use that to drive the "okay let's think about how you can have some control over how you do that".

Furthermore, previous studies have found that cognitive job crafting leads to an increased experience of wellbeing beyond the work context (Devotto et al., 2020). This was

reflected in the findings of this study which identified a positive impact on some participants' personal lives. As expressed by one participant:

> I felt a lot better and actually, my partner's not loving his work and he's been feeling a little bit lower, so it kind of made me go how can I address my stuff at work because he needs support and he's been supporting me quite a bit. So there is a sense of going…I can't just worry about this, I've gotta take a bit of control over it…it felt like I was taking charge, so that was that was helped.

The second sub-theme, ***Commitment to active self-care,*** included proactive self-reflection and relaxation. As pointedly mentioned by Daniel, "Just setting aside time to just think and digest and, you know, and assess because that's my brain, it needs time." Whilst for others it presented a stronger focus on physical exertion, as expressed by Rona:

> If I could fit in three runs a week, I would know that I'm doing and at least you know at least several meditation sessions a week that would make me feel like I am at least doing the bare minimum for my health.

4.3.5 An Illustrative Case Study

In order to demonstrate the interaction between the themes identified in this study a case study is provided. Daniel's case serves as an exemplar chosen for his insightful approach and capacity to assess his challenge and progress from multiple perspectives. The case study provides a chronological overview of Daniel's development throughout the intervention and highlights alignment with the themes established in the empirical research, as well as the key concepts presented in this thesis.

Background to the Challenge

Daniel was a government employee with over 10 years tenure with his current employer, and 18 months in his current managerial position. He presented concerns relating to poor team dynamics and unprofessional workplace behaviours which arose as a function of dual staff relationships. He explained that his teams lived in tight-knit regional communities and worked together for the same large employer. This, he opined, made it difficult for them to draw appropriate boundaries between personal and professional relationships. For example, it was not uncommon for a staff member to refuse to cooperate with a colleague due to a domestic dispute.

First Coaching Conversation

Daniel reflected that he had tried several problem-solving approaches, but due to a combination of legacy issues, community culture and geographical limitations, he was unable to adequately resolve the issues. He also recognised that his seniors perceived him as an effective manager. Whilst pleased to be recognised for his capacity to manage the situation, Daniel feared that his 'safe pair of hands' reputation limited his career opportunities as his managers were keen for him to remain in the role. Throughout the first coaching conversation Daniel appeared highly motivated to address the issue but also verbalised a limited sense of agency. This was presented in comments such as "My motivation is at 10, I absolutely wanna fix it, but my my focus, I suppose to do it, is dropped because I know there's something blocking" and "I can't achieve a result because external factors are saying you can't do anything right now". Daniel's lack of perceived agency lent itself well to job crafting which, by definition, can support workers to feel a stronger sense of control over their job (Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). To this end, the coaching conversations

provided cues which supported Daniel to intentionally cognitively job craft. In doing so he employed several techniques that supported his clarity of thought and problem-solving. For instance, he used *metaphors* such as likening the problem to a large, heavy, immobile animal, and then *deconstructed* the problem into its constituent parts (for example, resourcing, financial and other operational functions). He also used cognitive job crafting to reframe the problem by recognising his achievements to date, and applied relational job crafting by reframing his approach based on others' needs. This was reflected in the following comment whereby Daniel referenced the importance of beneficence towards others (Martela et al., 2021), as a pathway towards enhanced work meaningfulness:

> Don't give up on people cause you know…people can change…think of the other people who were in the situation…that are being impacted…and be that strong leader for them and try and help them, umm, help them to, sort, to fix it for them not just to fulfil the KPI or something like that. I can just walk away. I can just say "Well, you know what? I'm done, I'm gonna move on to another job", and then just leave it alone, but there's other people whose situations doesn't allow them to do that.

Towards the end of the first conversation, Daniel committed to actions he would take before the second coaching conversation. From a cognitive job crafting perspective, he reflected that despite his perceived lack of agency, there was an accumulation of small achievements (for instance, slightly fewer complaints) which he could focus on. He expressed that this reframe would be supported by a series of actions to remind himself of his positive contributions. For example he would create a set of cues, whereby he would "put them (the achievements) all on one page and see that you know it, it fills out the whole

page. All those small wins in that, that elephant is now a baby elephant and not a, not an adult elephant." Daniel's cognitive reframing extended to relational job crafting in that he recognised that it was within his locus of influence to share progress with his teams and managers in order to instil a sense of optimism that the situation would improve.

Second Coaching Conversation

Daniel attended the second coaching conversation four weeks later. He reflected on changes that had taken place, stating that although the situation had not objectively changed, his view of it had evolved such that his emotional reactivity had reduced (Lieberman et al., 2007). He had continued to use the cognitive strategy of deconstructing the problem until such time that he was able to logically isolate aspects of the problem, and therefore address a series of small problems. This was subjectively easier than managing one large issue as reflected in his comment, "deconstructing the problems, and, and throwing them (the parts of the problem) all out on the table and then assigning actions…how to address each one?" Daniel also demonstrated his increased capacity to observe the problems through a positive lens over four weeks which supported an evolution in his sense of personal agency. He reflected:

> I was forgetting about what we've achieved and just keep looking at the problem
> and cause the problem still there, right? But it's a path. It's a journey, it's it's working
> through. But there has been small wins along the way and to stop and…smell the
> roses...that's what I hadn't been doing…looking at how far we've come.

Daniel further reflected that his cognitive reframing had supported his relational job crafting endeavours. One recollection was a conversation with his managers whereby he allayed their concerns about the staffing issues, he recalled:

I said "hey, look, let's talk about the wins first. You know, look, we've done this,

we've done that, we've done this...we've come along a path" and I automatically,

always will see them go from sort of heightened anxiety levels to and you just, you

can literally see it coming out and just realising its okay.

Consequent to the aforementioned approaches, Daniel noted changes in his working

style. He allowed himself more time to assess the problems, which led to greater clarity and

emboldened him to set clearer behavioural boundaries with staff. Daniel also noted a

stronger focus on his health and wellbeing which translated into spending more time

working close to home (task crafting), rather than adhering to his previous internal narrative

that ongoing regional travel was necessary. He reflected that this reframe resulted in less

travel and more breaks during which he enjoyed connecting with nature and spending time

with family. Verbalising these changes appeared to support Daniel's capacity to process his

thinking and consequently, during the second conversation, he made the unprompted

connection between increased family time and enhanced sense of purpose and meaning.

He reflected that his new working schedule was:

A lot more family friendly... I think that might have been why I was in that state

because...I'm very family oriented and I need to be close to them and if I'm not, I I

sort of lose my purpose...So I had to, yeah, remember my purpose that you know the

reason why I go to work is to support my family. It's not the other way around.

Furthermore, verbalised reflections related to core values supported Daniel to

develop a new understanding of the dissatisfaction he felt towards aspects of his job, and its

impact on his work satisfaction. For example, Daniel recognised that certain elements of his

role were at odds with his working style, and with the way he derives work meaningfulness. He expressed:

> I'm, I'm a result driven person…I need to see results, and if I don't see results that's why I just been like spinning my wheels…and now because…I'm looking for the results as opposed to being presented the results then I'm achieving what I need to achieve…I'm seeing some action.

Towards the end of the second conversation Daniel took time to reflect on the overall intervention process. He shared that the impartial nature of the coaching had been particularly encouraging, as it provided him with the freedom to use the coaching cues as a tool for developing his own solutions, rather than relying on predefined answers. He emphasised that this autonomy played a significant role in fostering a sense of ownership over his progress. Additionally, Daniel noted that the act of scheduling the second conversation served as a pivotal marker, helping him to stay committed to addressing the problem at hand. This scheduled follow-up created a sense of accountability and continuity, ensuring that he remained focused and motivated throughout the intervention process.

4.3.6 Barriers to Cognitive Job Crafting

Despite the trialling process, the intervention was not without its barriers. For instance, it was noted that one particular participant presented an intra-personal challenge, essentially relating to her working style and experience of stress. Although she did express challenges in her role, they appeared to be a product of maladaptive cognitions, attitudes and behaviours relating to particular aspects of her role, though on reflection, she recognised that her job was objectively reasonable and appropriate. In other words, she did

not perceive her job as problematic, hence was less focused on cognitively reframing aspects of her role, instead, she focused on achieving attitudinal and behavioural change akin to task crafting. For instance, in considering how she could address her stress response, she stated, "Working out what the practical steps are and just making a plan to make them happen…and then also trying to shift my mindset on it because literally the anxiety around it has, has been you know…particularly bad." She later added a reframing statement, referencing her intention to increase self-care and wellbeing. She expressed "(I will) positively affirm for myself that I can do this, and it will be ok…this is not the end of my life or the end of my career. It is not the worst thing in the world."

In short, although the perception of her role was not the focus of the coaching conversations and remained largely unchanged, the participant's self-awareness shifted. She became more focused on her personal accountability, which appeared to impact her task job crafting. However, the efficacy of the intervention in supporting cognitive job crafting was questionable.

4.4 Discussion

This empirical study contributes to previously established knowledge relating to job crafting and work meaningfulness. It does so in three specific ways. Firstly, it establishes the plausibility that a multi-sessional coaching intervention can effectively support intentional cognitive job crafting by encouraging individuals to verbally express and examine their thoughts over time. Secondly, it provides insight into the thought processes undertaken by individuals to achieve cognitive job crafting. These encapsulate a shift in perception related to one's sense of agency and a reframing of certain aspects of one's role. Finally, this empirical study advances current scholarly knowledge relating to the practical association

between job crafting and work meaningfulness. It does so by establishing that a job crafting coaching intervention, such as the one delivered, can enhance the experience of work meaningfulness via a heightened sense of purpose, empowerment and positive contribution, as well as an increased focus on self-care and wellbeing.

In terms of reinforcing previous findings, cognitive job crafting and its association with work meaningfulness is long established and clearly identified in academic literature, starting with Wrzesniewski et al.'s seminal paper published in 2001. This study reinforced these findings, as was evidenced by multiple, spontaneous, participant references to their increased subjective experience of purpose, achievement, direction, and contribution at work. These variables have all been previously established as closely associated with the experience of work meaningfulness (Devotto et al., 2019). A further outcome of this research, reinforcing previous empirical findings, was the elevated focus on self-care and sense of wellbeing as an outcome of the intervention. This aligns with a breadth of previous research which links cognitive crafting with enhanced resilience and positive affect (for example, Morales-Solis et al., 2022).

Beyond reinforcing current scholarly knowledge, this study introduced several novel inputs. For instance, its participant-led, practical coaching method made a valuable empirical contribution in light of the fact that interventions are seldom used to examine organisational behaviour (Luthans et al., 2006). In fact, to date, much of Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation has been tested via interview data (Peng, 2018), questionnaires, surveys and diary studies as ascertained in the SLR presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, no current intervention studies explore cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness simultaneously. This study did just

that by applying current empirical knowledge of job crafting to a practical intervention aimed at understanding the thought mechanisms that underpin cognitive job crafting, and their impact on the experience of work meaningfulness. In doing so it provided an empirical basis upon which to develop a set of practical guidelines for potential utilisation at an organisational, managerial, individual and coach level when developing cognitive job crafting interventions. Additionally, as far as is known, this was the first intervention study of its kind whereby participants were encouraged to verbalise their cognitive job crafting process in real-time using specific methodologies, namely TA and ACTA, to support the process. In doing so it provided a depth of understanding relating to how a brief, though practically oriented, coaching programme can be utilized to elicit proactive cognitive job crafting and enhance the experience of work meaningfulness.

From a methodology perspective, the coaching approach used created the opportunity for a participant-led process. Cues, rather than questions, were used to support participants to cognitively job craft a workplace challenge of their choosing and resulted in a series of findings which provided insight into the participant's subjective experience. This outcome might not have been achieved via a more structured, researcher-led questioning approach such as that used in interviews. Furthermore, previous job crafting research has predominantly utilised the JD-R framework (Devotto et al., 2019) and has rarely delineated between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three elements of job crafting (namely, task, relational and cognitive crafting). This research endeavoured to address this shortfall by drawing out each of the three elements and then shedding light on cognitive job crafting and its association with work meaningfulness.

4.4.1 Limitations of this Study

One limitation of this study was the dual role taken by me as both researcher and coach. The most challenging aspect was balancing the research requirements with the needs of the participants, so as to ensure that the results of the study were grounded in data provided by the participants, and not unduly influenced by my assumptions and judgements. As previously discussed, this dual role was recognised and mitigated in several ways. For instance, in order to minimise interpersonal bias, individuals previously known to me (either personally or professionally) were not included in the research. Furthermore, in order to create a consistent approach, I maintained a set of clear set of principles throughout all of the coaching conversations. These included a pre-determined set of recruitment criteria, the number of coaching conversations, and time spent with each participant. Furthermore, all challenges addressed were entirely of the participants' choice and were not influenced by me even when participants asked for input into their decision. Finally, from a reflexive perspective, I applied a bracketing approach to my cues. This cognitive approach aims to temporarily suspend one's subjective attitude and judgement (Thomas & Sohn, 2023), in order to focus on the participant and their concerns.

Somewhat related to the aforementioned limitation, it is acknowledged that qualitative analyses involve researcher subjectivity. Whilst it is argued that this is one of the strengths of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022b), it is recognised that a different researcher may have derived an alternative set of codes and themes from the exact same data. To mitigate any negative outcomes relating to researcher subjectivity, I rigorously adhered to the stage wise analysis approach, as described in the methodology section of

this chapter, and engaged in reflective supervision at the coding and theme development stage.

The temporal nature of this intervention provided the opportunity for valuable participant reflections and presented the opportunity to consolidate cognitive job crafting over a specific time period. However, this could have been reinforced via further coaching conversations. Alternatively, a short 'check-in' following the second coaching conversation may have supported participants to further crystallise their cognitive job crafting (Roczniewska et al., 2022) and experience of work meaningfulness. A further limitation relating to temporality was that the study did not explicitly differentiate between the participants' development from one coaching conversation to the next. For instance, it did not measure the propensity to cognitively job craft or the experience of work meaningfulness pre and post the intervention. This was due to the qualitative, participant-led nature of the intervention whereby participants were invited to explore their challenges as they wished, rather than explicitly and systematically measuring change over time. This approach would have required a mixed methods approach (i.e. the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection) to objectively measure changes, which was beyond the scope of this study.

Finally, this study focused on the positive aspects of job crafting and work meaningfulness, as have most peer reviewed studies on this subject. However, there is a small but compelling body of evidence that job crafting and work meaningfulness can lead to unfavourable work outcomes, such as burnout, disengagement, reduced self-care, and workaholism amongst others (Grant et al., 2009; Harju et al., 2021; Schnell et al., 2019; Silapurem et al., 2024). This study did not address the 'dark side' of job crafting and work

meaningfulness, and points to an opportunity for research which clearly emphasises less

favourable or concerning aspects of these two concepts.

4.4.2 Theoretical Implications and Contributions

As previously noted, this intervention study contributed to the theoretical

understanding of the relationship between cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness.

It demonstrated that a proactive cognitive job crafting intervention can enhance work

meaningfulness through mechanisms relating to the experience of purpose, empowerment,

and positive contribution, particularly through an increased sense of intention and direction.

Additionally, it highlighted the potential of cognitive job crafting to support work

meaningfulness, leading to heightened self-care and wellbeing. Consequently, it can be

reasonably concluded that job crafting practices can foster a greater sense of work

meaningfulness among employees.

This study was particularly pertinent as so few empirical studies have focused solely

on cognitive job crafting to the exclusion of relational and task job crafting. In doing so it

established that although cognitive, relational and task job crafting are theoretically distinct,

in practice they are not mutually exclusive. This was demonstrated in this study whereby,

even though participants were encouraged to focus solely on cognitive job crafting, they

often tended to simultaneously and concurrently employ other job crafting types. This

aligns somewhat to previous research which states that in practice all three job crafting

types are used in conjunction with each other (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013), and that job

crafting interventions tend to stimulate participants' engagement in a variety of crafting

behaviours (Devotto et al., 2019). It can therefore be concluded that whilst theoretically

differentiating between the three job crafting types is a valuable endeavour in terms of

understanding the components of job crafting, consideration should be given to the practical application of this differentiation.

4.4.3 Implications for Future Research

In reference to the aforementioned theoretical implications, the nature and extent of the synergistic relationship between cognitive, relational and task job crafting provides an opportunity for further examination. In particular, future research could explore whether, and how, applying all three types of job crafting could impact the experience of work meaningfulness more effectively than isolating cognitive job crafting. Furthermore, utilising Bailey et al's. (2016) aforementioned concept of *Holistic Meaningfulness*, further research could examine the relationship between work meaningfulness and task and relational job crafting respectively.

As discussed by Devotto et al. (2019) in their review of intervention studies, lagged designs result in increased skill consolidation. As such, future considerations could focus on a more extended coaching programme comprising additional coaching conversations and/or longer lapses in time between conversations.   In addition, combining coaching with other interventions, such as a skill development programme, may amplify its magnitude and long-term impact, as opposed to using coaching in isolation (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Furthermore, cognitive job crafting studies, using a combination of interventions, could shed light onto the optimisation of cognitive job crafting when used in conjunction with other interventions.

Furthermore, as previously referenced, this study elicited important insights from the employees' perspective, which could be extended in two ways. Firstly, by giving closer attention to collaborative job crafting. This has the potential to positively impact both

individual and team outcomes, inclusive of job performance, engagement and innovation (Tims et al., 2022), as well as commitment, satisfaction and output quality (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Secondly, future research could also focus on the perspective of self-employed professionals and entrepreneurs, a cohort which, as far as is known, has not previously been identified in the research relating to job crafting and work meaningfulness. Mousa (2022) indicated that self-employed (gig) workers can benefit from job crafting, and more recent research provides evidence that job crafting can potentially support entrepreneurs to address the impact of financial demands, though not all job crafting strategies are helpful (Boesten et al., 2024). This encouraging new research supports the case for a deeper examination of job crafting and work meaningfulness amongst self-employed individuals.

Finally, though outside of the scope of this study, the impact of the absence of job crafting and work meaningfulness could be addressed. Future research could expand on the notion that certain work contexts (for instance, firefighting and law enforcement) may not support job crafting, and assess how certain workplace factors may restrict meaningfulness. Previous research has indicated that these factors may be: value misalignment; poor relationships; disempowerment; lack of purpose; and perceived inequality (Bailey et al., 2016).

4.4.4 Implications for Practice

The practical nature of this intervention lends itself to a breadth of practice-related implications for consideration by organisations, managers, individuals and coaches as addressed below.

Organisational Considerations

Research suggests that job crafting can be a vehicle through which individuals adapt to organisational change (Demerouti et al., 2013; Dewi et al., 2021; and Szőts-Kováts et al., 2023). However, despite job crafting's proactive, self-initiated nature, it can be enhanced and promoted by effective, organisationally initiated interventions (Bakker, 2015). Furthermore, in their review of psychological interventions, Burgess et al. (2020) state that workplace context (for example, organisational readiness) is vital to the success of workplace interventions. Thus, creating an organisational culture that supports cognitive job crafting can lead to positive outcomes, particularly when agility is required, for instance in times of increased change (Demerouti et al., 2013).

Additionally, successful job crafting interventions, require a combination of organisational, top-down involvement, and individual bottom-up actions (Roczniewska et al., 2022). The former because successful initiatives are usually supported by the business, and the latter because they require employee engagement and proactivity. In consideration of this, cognitive job crafting coaching conversations could reasonably lead to a well-considered integration of workers' individual needs and values with that of their team, department and the wider organisation. This could be achieved by proactively integrating job crafting conversations into people and culture initiatives, such as performance reviews and personal development sessions, potentially leading to increased agency, engagement, and wellbeing among workers

People leaders

People leaders are instrumental in ensuring that interventions work well (Burgess et al., 2020), and employees who feel that their managers are taking an interest in them are

more likely to work towards better outcomes. Conversely, even in the face of abundant resources, poor leadership buy-in to an intervention renders it less likely to be effective (Burgess et al., 2020). This suggests that leadership development, aimed at helping managers understand the concept and application of cognitive job crafting, may be instrumental in the application of cognitive job crafting endeavours. Interestingly, this study found cognitive job crafting to be an accessible, easy-to-grasp concept by participants. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that skill development, such as leadership coaching designed to enhance the utilisation of cognitive job crafting, could empower leaders to consciously encourage and exhibit cognitive job crafting behaviours. This type of role modelling aligns with previous research which identified that empowering and effective transformational leadership practices are antecedents to job crafting outcomes and can lead to increased purpose and meaning (Kim & Beehr, 2017).

<u>Individuals</u>

As previously discussed, participants were expedient in their comprehension of cognitive job crafting and reported that they derived benefits from the coaching approach in a relatively short time. It can therefore be inferred that cognitive job crafting is an effective starting point in developing employees' job crafting skills. This is supported by previous research which states that because cognitive job crafting is a mental reframing process that does not require outward behavioural change, it may be a precursor to task and relational job crafting (Devotto et al., 2019).   Indeed, this was observed in the coaching conversations whereby, even within the first coaching conversation, some participants were able to reframe their role perception independent of any behavioural change occurring.

Coaches

This study utilised ACTA and TA methods, both of which are rarely used in the realm of coaching and, as far as is known, have not previously been used in conjunction with job crafting and work meaningfulness. As such, this study provides a two-fold implication for coaching practices. Firstly, it provides a fundamental basis upon which to develop a coaching process that encompasses the development of cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. Secondly, it opens up new possibilities relating to the application of ACTA and TA in the realm of coaching. This may be particularly pertinent when encouraging thought verbalisations (as per the TA approach) in order to address a particular challenge. Alternatively, when seeking to understand the cognitive demands experienced by a worker or subject matter experts, ACTA principles may be incorporated into coaching conversations.

Chapter 5: Overall Conclusions and Future Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

This chapter summarises and synthesises the findings of Study 1 (the SLR) and Study 2 (the empirical study), with a focus on the contributions that this thesis makes to the conceptual and empirical understanding of the association between cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. It places particular attention on the implications for theory, research and practice, and in doing so considers the limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research approaches.

5.1 Overview of this Thesis

The SLR considered the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness. It investigated the magnitude and direction of the relationship, with a focus on Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting (task, relational and cognitive), and provided an exploration of the empirical presence of intervention studies involving job crafting and work meaningfulness. The empirical study took a qualitative research approach. It investigated the impact of two practical, targeted, coaching conversations on participants' capacity to undertake cognitive job crafting, and the impact of this process on their experience of work meaningfulness. A comparison of the two studies is presented in *Table 10* below using the SPIO guidelines (Robertson et al., 2015) and is followed by a synthesis of the overall findings.

Table 10: A Comparative Overview of the SLR and Empirical Study

	SLR	Empirical Study
Research Questions	What is the relationship between job crafting and work meaningfulness? 1. How and to what extent are job crafting and work meaningfulness associated? 2. What are the antecedents, mediators and moderators which impact upon this association? 3. To what extent has research differentiated between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three forms of job crafting in terms of how they relate to work meaningfulness? 4. What, if any, organisational interventions and initiatives effectively enhance job crafting and work meaningfulness?	1. How can a targeted coaching intervention support the development of cognitive job crafting. 2. What thought processes do participants experience in the development of cognitive job crafting? 3. To what extent can a cognitive job crafting coaching intervention enhance the experience of work-related meaningfulness?
Study Design	A stepwise search strategy was used to identify existing peer reviewed literature pertaining to job crafting and work meaningfulness published since 2001. This was followed by data analysis and integration using SPIO guidelines, including: Study Design & characteristics; details pertaining to sample population; workplace Intervention used; and outcomes achieved. 367 papers were initially identified using three databases. Following the progression of sifts, the final number of reviewed studies was 16.	An intervention study, consisting of two coaching conversations, over two time points, was undertaken with 14 participants who identified themselves as having a workplace challenge that could be addressed within the parameters of the study. Participants were familiarised with the protocols of the intervention (namely Think-Aloud and Applied Cognitive Task Analysis) prior to committing to partake in the study. Purposive sampling was used, and recruitment was done via social media channels. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken using reflexive analysis techniques.
Participant Population	**Sample size**: Varied from 114-1151 **Location**: Various countries. Half the studies were based in either China (n=4) or South Africa (n=4) **Gender**: All studies included a mix of men and women **Age range**: Mean 20-46 yrs	**Sample size**: 14 participants **Location**: Australia **Gender**: 10 women, 4 men **Age range**: 25-64 yrs

	Industry: Various, (inc. manufacturing, retail, teaching & consulting) **Tenure in role**: wide ranging. Up to 40 yrs **Seniority**: 3 studies focused on people leaders	**Industry**: Various (inc. government, HR, professional services, financial & education) **Tenure in role**: 1-4 yrs **Contract:** full time **Seniority**: 11 participants
Interventions and measures	No intervention studies were identified. Most studies took a cross-sectional approach using self-reports. Common measures were: - The Job Crafting Questionnaire (Slemp et al., 2013) - The Work and Meaning Inventory (Steger et al., 2012) - Utrecht work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006)	A targeted coaching approach, comprising of two, one-hour conversations were delivered a month apart. Coaching conversations addressed a specific workplace challenge of the participants choosing.
Outcomes and Key Findings	There is a conceptual and empirical link between job crafting and work meaningfulness, particularly cognitive job crafting. In particular, work meaningfulness plays a central mediating role in connecting job crafting endeavours with favourable workplace attitudes and behaviours. When comparing Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three job crafting types, cognitive crafting is most closely associated with meaningfulness. However, it is also the most underrepresented in the scholastic literature, calling for deeper empirical research in this area. There was a clear absence of workplace interventions relating to both job crafting and work meaningfulness in academic literature. This pointed to the need for intervention research aimed at broadening and deepening the theoretical and practical understanding of the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness.	The study established the plausibility that a coaching intervention can effectively support intentional cognitive job crafting, and enhance the experience of work meaningfulness. It also provided insight into the cognitive processes undertaken by individuals when undertaking cognitive job crafting. These were clustered into five themes as below: 1. Creating opportunities to develop and consolidate cognitive job crafting over time 2. Cognitive Strategies creating a shifting sense of personal agency 3. Reframing and reprioritising characteristics of the role 4. Promoting a sense of purpose, empowerment, and positive contribution 5. Supporting an increased focus on self-care and coping capacity

5.2 Overall Findings and Themes

5.2.1 The Association between Job Crafting and Work Meaningfulness

Both studies provided strong evidence of the link between job crafting and work meaningfulness. In particular, the SLR identified that job crafting and work meaningfulness have a long-established conceptual and empirical association, particularly in relation to Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) job crafting conceptualisation. It further established that work meaningfulness is a key mediating factor between job crafting and a breadth of favourable work-related variables (such as performance, commitment, and work engagement), across a range of roles and professional settings.

The qualitative empirical study concurred and added a deeper, more nuanced set of insights to the quantitative outcomes provided by the SLR. It signposted that workers can be supported to proactively and purposefully undertake cognitive job crafting and increase their subjective experience of work meaningfulness through engagement in coaching activities. This was underpinned by several cognitive processes which were observed and consolidated throughout the course of the coaching conversations. More specifically, the study demonstrated that via a process of conversation and verbalisation, participants appeared to reframe their somewhat negative view of their work challenges. This shift was often underpinned by a process of focusing on their capacity to make positive and effective contributions at work, which steered them towards an enhanced sense of purpose and empowerment. This commonly occurred in tandem with participants' increased sense of direction, motivation, commitment and accountability (often replacing rumination and inertia). For some this appeared to help create a more tangible and agentic overview of their work challenges, and a refocus on their core values.

5.2.2 Isolating Cognitive Job Crafting

Limited evidence relating to the empirical association between cognitive job crafting specifically and work meaningfulness was found in the SLR. Despite this, some studies found that cognitive job crafting has a greater convergent validity with work meaningfulness, in comparison to task and relational job crafting (Geldenhuys et al., 2021; Tims et al., 2016), and work meaningfulness was identified as a mediator between task and cognitive job crafting (Geldenhuys et al., 2021).

Further to this, the SLR found that cognitive crafting is an individualistic, personal process of reflection that is influenced by the working environment, but can occur in a range of contexts (Lee et al., 2021), and is therefore applicable in a breadth of situations, roles and environments. This was reinforced by the empirical study which accessed participants from a variety of environments, none of whom reported that their work context limited their capacity to cognitively job craft, even when their work challenges were distinctly related to their working environment.

A further point of interest highlighted by the empirical study was that in practice participants did not isolate cognitive job crafting, or differentiate between Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2001) three job crafting types. This was despite considerable support given to the participants to develop their conceptual and practical knowledge of cognitive job crafting, for example, reading material, a practice session, and cues provided throughout the sessions. Instead, participants tended to integrate their use of cognitive, relational and task job crafting, particularly the former two. This indicates that, despite their conceptual differences, from a practical perspective the different forms of job crafting work symbiotically and may well lead to greater gains for individuals in comparison to just

focusing on cognitive job crafting. This aligns with previous research (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013) which concludes that whilst the three aspects of job crafting are helpful conceptual distinctions, in practice they work in concert with each other to create holistically sound outcomes for workers. One such example in this study, was that cognitively reframing the nature of workplace relationships and interpersonal dynamics supported a participant to view the advantages inherent in constructive workplace relationships. This, in turn, supported them to shift towards the view that peers and managers are enablers for problem-solving, rather than detractors. Thus, cognitive job crafting appeared to act as an enabler for relational job crafting in this case. This example is one of several which underscore two points. Firstly, as referenced above, the different aspects of job crafting are inextricably linked in practice. Secondly, although cognitive job crafting is an individualistic and reflective technique, this does not preclude the positive impact of working collaboratively to develop work meaningfulness through job crafting. This aligns with previous research which established that workers could create a greater sense of work meaningfulness in collaboration with others (Geldenhuys et al., 2021)

5.2.3 Thought Strategies Used in Cognitive Job Crafting

The findings of the SLR indicated that, to date, there has been no scholarly focus on the underpinning thought processes leading to cognitive job crafting. This was consequently addressed by the empirical study which provided a clear insight into participants' experiences of reframing their work-related challenges by changing their appraisal of the situation and shifting their previous, often problem-saturated, narrative.

Some common reframing strategies identified across the participant group were: (1) deconstructing the problem into its constituent parts; (2) focusing on the possibility of

positive outcomes emerging from their challenge; and (3) creating metaphors to create an alternative and more malleable version of their workplace challenge. On the whole, these approaches helped participants move towards solution-focused outcomes. For instance, in some cases re-envisioning the problem led to an acceptance of the status quo and helped participants challenge their (sometimes preconceived) role parameters, leading to a clearer re-prioritisation of the important and meaningful aspects of their job. During this process, participants would, at times, focus on creating a stronger alignment between their work demands (such as workload) and resources (such as time available to complete the work). This outcome presents a novel parallel between cognitive job crafting and the JD-R model which were previously found to have no direct link (Mäkikangas et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2017). In other words, from a process perspective, participants were found to concurrently reframe their challenge (as per cognitive job crafting) and focus on demands and resources (as per the JD-R conceptualisation).

5.2.4 Utilising a Cognitive Job Crafting Intervention to Enhance Work Meaningfulness

As previously stated, the SLR highlighted an absence of interventions simultaneously relating to cognitive job crafting and work meaningfulness. This created an opportunity to empirically examine how participants develop cognitive job crafting skills and apply them in the moment, and in doing so how their experience of work meaningfulness is impacted.

The nature of the intervention, which included two separate interactions with the participants, created the benefit of providing time and space for participants to explore their thoughts and reactions to their challenges, and make considered job crafting decisions via a process of trial, error and consolidation. This was aided by the opportunity to verbalise

thoughts which helped participants to cognitively re-formulate their work challenges, focus on previously unexplored nuances, and consider new problem-solving approaches. These benefits were represented in participant reflections which stated that ongoing rumination did not yield positive outcomes, though discussing the issues during the coaching conversations did. This aligns with Lieberman et al.'s (2007) claims that verbalisation helps reduce emotional reactivity and can aid participants in overcoming emotional barriers such that the individual is better able to focus on the important and valued aspects of their role.

Further to this, the two-way conversational nature of the coaching intervention also appeared to influence the outcomes. It was found that the discussions enhanced participants' intentional job crafting, particularly as they were carried out in collaboration with an independent researcher-coach who provided the opportunity for timely self-observations and reflections and helped steer conversations towards an increased commitment to proactive action.

5.2.5 The Link Between Cognitive Job Crafting and Employee Wellbeing

The SLR indicated that an increased sense of value and purpose at work can enhance workers' sense of resilience when undertaking cognitive job crafting (Morales-Solis et al., 2022). This was reinforced by other research which concluded that an increase in work meaningfulness can reduce burnout and other negative consequences relating to poor work experiences (Fouché et al., 2017).

The SLR results were supported by the empirical study which identified that when participants proactively focused on work meaningfulness (during job crafting conversations) they also tended to present an increased commitment to self-care and a greater coping capacity. As identified through participant reflections, underpinning this outcome was the

act of creating a temporal space to consider one's latitude of control and influence (even in the face of adversity), which led to a greater emphasis on physical and emotional health. It also led to a stronger commitment to wellbeing and resilience strategies, both inside and outside of work.

5.3 Limitations

Despite the contributions made by the two studies included in this thesis, as discussed in previous chapters, a series of limitations were identified and managed where possible. They fell into three broad areas: sampling bias; researcher bias; and quality. They are summarised below.

The first area of limitation refers to *sampling bias*. The SLR accessed a limited number of databases thus potentially limiting the breadth of suitable studies identified. This was remediated by a process of hand sifting (Suarez-Almazor et al., 2000) in order to seek out relevant studies that may have been missed in the initial SLR sifts, as well as any new publications subsequent to the initial SLR searches.

Further to this, the empirical study took a purposive sampling approach, the advantage of which is that it identifies participants who are likely to provide rich, research-relevant data (Palinkas et al., 2015). However, a disadvantage of purposive sampling is that it can lead to a skewed, uniform sample because it avoids randomisation. Furthermore, all the participants in the empirical study worked in Australia, as employees (rather than contractors), and were predominantly women based in office environments. This somewhat homogenous sample can impact the generalisation and transferability of findings. Despite the potential bias introduced by this sampling method, the advantages of the approach were considered greater than the disadvantages.

The second area of limitation refers to *researcher bias.* Kepes et al., (2012) reference the tendency to publish favourable results, and indeed the scholarly literature accessed for the purposes of this thesis made scant reference to the negative aspects of job crafting and work meaningfulness. Likewise, this thesis adopted a favourable view of job crafting and its impact on work meaningfulness. In doing so it may have inadvertently overlooked negative (short and long term) consequences of the job crafting intervention employed in the empirical study. Although such consequences did not emerge during the study, this doesn't preclude the risk of negative outcomes. For instance, the cognitive focus on work challenges may have led to the realisation that one's chosen career is personally undesirable or demotivating. Alternatively, a focus on work meaningfulness may have highlighted irreconcilable disparities between one's core values and the organisational culture and led to an escalation of negative feelings towards the participants' senior leaders.

Further potential researcher bias occurred as a result of the dual researcher-coach role. The most challenging aspect was balancing the needs of the participants with the research requirements. As previously discussed, this was recognised and mitigated in several ways. Actions taken included: (a) reducing interpersonal bias, (b) maintaining consistent processes and coaching principles, and (c) mindfully making a series of active, reflexive, self-observations to maximise researcher neutrality by suspending judgement both in the moment (i.e. during the coaching conversations) and during data analysis.

The third limitation references *quality*. The 16 studies reviewed in the SLR were identified based solely on their research objectives rather than methodological rigour. In other words, if they explored the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness they were included in the review. Whilst this provided a representative view of current

peer-reviewed research, it also created the potential for placing undue reliance on a set of

statistically questionable results. To mitigate this, the higher quality studies were more

closely considered.

The limitations summarised provide an opportunity for future contributions to

theory, research and practice, and are addressed in the following section.

5.4 Contributions to Theory, Research and Practice

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

The SLR found limited theoretical research focused solely on cognitive job crafting

(Tims et al., 2022), particularly when paired with work meaningfulness (Vuori et al., 2021).

The empirical study endeavoured to address this gap and identified that proactive cognitive

job crafting can be utilised in a variety of work contexts to address a multitude of

challenges.

Further to this, cognitive job crafting was shown to support the agentic process of

reframing, re-envisioning and reprioritising different aspects of one's role, and in doing so

directly impacted the subjective experience of work meaningfulness. This outcome was

linked to a process of verbalisation where individuals access their thoughts, illuminate their

concerns, and reorder their thinking to focus on aspects of the role they can influence for

better outcomes. Furthermore, a somewhat novel finding pointed to parallels between

cognitive job crafting and the JD-R model, such synergies were previously unidentified in the

peer-reviewed research.

As previously referenced, comparatively limited scholarly attention has been given

to work meaningfulness (Steger, 2019) and the factors that influence it (King et al., 2021).

This research progressed this status by drawing a direct link between cognitive job crafting

and work meaningfulness. It identified that a focus on cognitive job crafting skills can lead to an increased experience of work meaningfulness, which can, in turn, enhance participants' sense of purpose, empowerment and professional contribution, and support their focus on self-care and coping strategies.

5.4.2 Implications for Practice

The practical nature of the empirical study lent itself to in-situ application, and its outcomes can be used to inform current workplace approaches toward employee satisfaction, motivation and wellbeing via a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. It is particularly relevant to workplace leaders, peers, coaches, wellbeing specialists and others who employ coaching principles to support staff development. For instance, given the importance of people leaders in the acceptance and engagement of organisational initiatives (Burgess et al., 2020), the insights provided by this study illuminate how leadership development initiatives can be designed to train managers to engage in effective cognitive job crafting conversations with a view to enhanced work meaningfulness (amongst other benefits).

From a workplace coaching perspective, the approach developed provided a structured, novel and targeted way of supporting workers in their endeavour to address their perception and interpretation of concerning challenges. Namely, it provided insight into how support can be effectively and practically deployed via the utilisation of TA and ACTA. Though these are two well-established methods (Militello et al., 1997; Whitehead et al., 2020), they are rarely used in coaching and were adapted, as part of the empirical research, to help participants verbalise their thought process and emotional responses throughout the coaching conversations. Of further interest to professional coaches, the

study also suggested that participants do not differentiate between cognitive, task and relational job crafting, and so whilst the three aspects are helpful conceptual distinctions, in practice they work in concert with each other to create holistically sound outcomes for coaching clients.

Previous research claims that behavioural workplace interventions often take a generalised group approach that does not consider individual development needs (Nielsen, 2013), and that intervention studies are rarely used to test organisational behaviours (Luthens et al., 2006). The latter claim was reinforced by the SLR which did not identify any intervention studies. Consequently, the empirical study addressed both of these gaps by applying the first individually targeted initiative of its kind (as far as is known) aimed at examining the use of cognitive job crafting, and its impact on work meaningfulness. In doing so, it provided insight into how such an approach can effectively support collaborative, co-created cognitive job crafting and enhanced work meaningfulness.

A final, yet important practical aspect of this study is the use of cognitive job crafting in contexts where behavioural change and adaptation (as per task and relational crafting) is not possible, yet the maintenance of a meaningful work experience is important. An example of this is an environment where strict health and safety rules dictate rigid procedures, for instance amongst firefighters (Dan et al., 2020), whereby spontaneous changes to the way the job is done (i.e. task job crafting) would introduce undue risk. Alternatively, in an environment of poor interpersonal dynamics or power imbalances, relational job crafting could disadvantage the worker. Under such circumstances, job incumbents may employ a cognitive approach to job crafting to experience a sense of agency and meaning in the role, without exhibiting outward, behavioural change.

5.4.3 Implications for Further Research

5.4.3a Longitudinal and Mixed Methods Approach.

The underrepresentation of longitudinal studies in organisational research (Kelloway et al., 2012) was partially addressed by the temporal, dual-phased, nature of the empirical study which provided data relating to participants' capacity to consolidate cognitive job crafting over time, and the impact that it had on their experience of work meaningfulness. Despite this, further studies could apply a more longitudinal approach to explore the consolidation of cognitive job crafting, and its association with work meaningfulness over time. For instance, a series of ongoing conversations, questionnaires or support material, could be used to support participants to further consolidate their newly acquired skills (Roczniewska et al., 2022).

Coupled with this, although the research reviewed in the SLR provided a quantitative link between job crafting and work meaningfulness, no qualitative studies were identified. This aligned with Geldenhuys et al.'s. (2021) findings which reported a dearth of qualitative studies exploring the psychological processes via which people job craft and led to the empirical qualitative study which provided a granular understanding of participants' experience of job crafting and work meaningfulness as previously outlined. The next step in the study of job crafting and work meaningfulness could involve the inclusion of a mixed methods approach. For instance, by incorporating a quantitatively based pre and post-intervention survey, and accessing a broader, more extensive population, in order to identify patterns and trends across time within a wide sample of workers.

5.4.3b A Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach.

As addressed above, Demerouti et al. (2021) discuss that job crafting endeavours are more likely to foster positive outcomes when they combine a top-down and bottom-up approach. To test this, further research could apply a multi-faceted method by combining an individual intervention (akin to the empirical study in this thesis) with leadership involvement. Based on previous studies, research design could involve managers encouraging the take-up of the intervention (Xu et al., 2023), or senior leaders could be supported to actively role model and reinforce the behaviours that the intervention seeks to develop (Guo et al., 2022; Meng et al., 2021; Vermooten et al., 2019). Alternatively, a feedback loop could be embedded into the process which has been previously shown to stimulate job crafting (Tims et al., 2010) and support an increased experience of work meaningfulness and motivation (Lee et al., 2021).

A further exploration of the cumulative effects of a combined top-down and bottom-up approach could be achieved via the introduction of a job design element. This is supported by current research showing that job design fills the strategic role of optimising work processes and organisational outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2009), and that combined top-down, bottom-up, approaches can be applied in parallel to achieve favourable outcomes in the face of somewhat diverse workplace needs (Demerouti et al., 2024). In fact, workers were found to derive greater meaning from their work by idiosyncratically combining both approaches (Tims et al., 2016). In light of this, the suggestion that agile job design approaches, which encourage more autonomy (Slemp et al., 2015) and increased latitude of decision making (Demerouti et al., 2024), could be tested alongside a job crafting intervention. Alternatively, established scholarly awareness that

the quality of work conditions provided by the employer (top-down) are significant

determinants of worker wellbeing (McManus, 2016), could be researched alongside a

bottom-up cognitive job crafting approach. Such research may further broaden empirical

knowledge relating to worker wellbeing and other favourable outcomes.

5.4.3c Seniority, Leadership and Tenure.

The empirical intervention recruited participants irrespective of seniority and did not

extensively differentiate between levels of seniority in its analysis. Given that a focus on

leadership is currently lacking in job crafting research (Mäkikangas et al., 2021), further

studies could address the impact of one's seniority and leadership on the propensity for job

crafting and work meaningfulness. This could extend to the impact of leadership style on

workers' meaningfulness, particularly in light of Bailey et al's. (2016) findings that good

quality leadership does not impact work meaningfulness either way, but poor leadership

negatively impacts it.

Likewise, although both studies identified role tenure, the SLR studies did not

actively consider the impact of tenure on job crafting and work meaningfulness. For

instance, are workers with longer tenure likely to display different job crafting habits in

comparison to those with a shorter tenure? Furthermore, the empirical sample provided a

somewhat narrow and homogeneous role tenure (equal to or less than 4 years). This

provides a further variable for exploration in future studies, particularly regarding its

association with seniority which, one could hypothesise, may have an interaction effect.

5.4.3d Collaboration.

This study focused solely on individual coaching. It did not explore the impact of

collaborative job crafting, for instance with peers in small groups. This provides an

opportunity for research with teams or groups of participants. Such an approach could be embedded in regular group briefing sessions whereby peers discuss and support each other's job crafting journey, whilst still allowing for individual reflection time.

5.4.3e Applicability of Job Crafting.

As addressed above, not all job types and organisational cultures are equally conducive to job crafting, and it is plausible to predict that in some cases job crafting may negatively impact the subjective experience of work meaningfulness. This provides a research opportunity to explore how current empirical knowledge of job crafting can be expanded to develop greater insights into the way that workers develop agentic strategies, and how this supports their sense of work meaningfulness in environments that do not actively encourage or allow job crafting.

5.4.3f Expanding on the Work Meaningfulness Concept.

Although the study incorporated work meaningfulness as a central element, it concentrated on a relatively narrow definition of work meaningfulness, primarily drawing on Steger's conceptualisation, and utilising the WAMI to generate coaching cues. Whilst this approach facilitated participants to reflect on their experience of work meaningfulness, incorporating a broader range of work meaningfulness conceptualisations could potentially enhance the current findings. By exploring alternative or more expansive frameworks of work meaningfulness, future studies could offer a broader understanding of the diverse ways in which workers experience work meaningfulness. Such an approach could offer a more nuanced perspective on contemporary conceptualisations of work meaningfulness, thereby contributing to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this critical aspect of work

5.5 Concluding Reflections

As addressed at the outset of this thesis, workers' capacity to apply agentic, proactive job crafting and link it to an enhanced sense of work meaningfulness is ever important given the all-encompassing nature of our working lives. This thesis endeavoured to shed light on the association between job crafting and work meaningfulness via a systematic review of the current peer-reviewed literature and a practical empirical study. The results provided insight into the benefits of a proactive cognitive job crafting coaching intervention, and how it can be used to support the experience of work meaningfulness. Promising results indicate that the sense of agency that comes with job crafting can create positive employment experiences, such as a heightened sense of meaning, purpose, empowerment, contribution, professional satisfaction and self-care.

It is intended that the methodological elements of this thesis will benefit workers, leaders and coaching practitioners alike, not just from a theoretical stance, but from a practical standpoint by stimulating novel job crafting initiatives. It is also hoped that this thesis will encourage further empirical research, for instance, group job crafting, in order to shed more light on the experience of work meaningfulness and how its benefits can be enhanced.

Appendix 1: Information Provided to Potential Participants Prior to

Empirical Study

Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Invitation to take part in Occupational Psychology doctoral research

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How do people develop job-crafting through coaching conversations?

As part of my professional doctoral studies in Occupational Psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London, I am conducting a research study exploring how people develop job-crafting skills and meaningfulness in their work. When complete, the research will provide practical guidelines, to both individuals and organisations, relating to enhancing job-crafting and work-meaningfulness.

What's involved?	You will be invited to partake in 2, confidential, one-on-one coaching sessions where you will be supported to address a difficult or challenging aspect of your role. You choose what you would like to discuss. Each coaching session will last 1 hour, and the 2 sessions will be held approximately 4 weeks apart. Sessions will be run via MS Teams at a mutually convenient time.
Who can take part?	Employees based in Australia who are over 18 years and have been employed for 5 years or more in a part-time or full-time capacity. Self-employed people, business owners and independent contractors are out of scope as their capacity for job-crafting is likely to present differently to employees.
Your rights as a participant	This study complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You have the right to anonymity and confidentiality as per ethical guidelines set out by the University of London. Furthermore, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time until 2 weeks after the second coaching session.
What will be done with the data?	Data will be stored confidentially and will be anonymised prior to inclusion in my professional doctorate thesis and any future presentations or publications.

GET INVOLVED
Make A Difference

Next Steps

If you would like to take part, please contact me on **rsetti01@student.bbk.ac.uk** to arrange an initial discussion and address any queries.

Student
Rachel Setti

Primary Supervisor
Professor Almuth McDowall
a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk.

Department of Organizational Psychology
Birkbeck, University of London
Clore Management Building
Malet Street, Bloomsbury
London, WC1E 7HX

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: How do people develop job crafting through coaching conversations?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research project, which is part of my Professional Doctorate in Occupational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. This project has received ethical approval. To make an informed decision on whether you want to take part in this study, please take a few minutes to read this information sheet.

Who is conducting this research?

The research is conducted by Rachel Setti, an Occupational Psychology doctoral student, under the guidance of supervisors Professor Almuth McDowall (primary supervisor) and Dr Rachel Lewis (secondary supervisor), both from Birkbeck College, University of London.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am conducting a research study exploring how people develop job crafting skills and a sense meaning in their job.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting Australian based employees who are interested in receiving two coaching sessions relating to a challenging aspect of their role. The study requires all participants to have been in employment for 5 years or more and be over 18 years of age, though not self-employed people, independent contractors or business owners.

What are the procedures of taking part?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to take part in 2, individual, confidential coaching sessions. The sessions will occur approximately 4 weeks apart, and each session will run for about 1 hour.

The sessions will focus upon a challenging aspect of your role that you choose to explore. During the sessions we will use two exploratory techniques to focus on job crafting and meaningfulness. One is called the Think-Aloud (TA) protocol where you will be encouraged to verbalize your thoughts as you work through the challenge. The other method is referred to as Applied Cognitive Task Analysis (ACTA) and will help explore information relating to the cognitive demands of the challenge. In order to help you feel prepared, prior to the first coaching session you will get a short practice opportunity, and I will be able to answer any questions that you may have.

The coaching sessions will be conducted remotely. They will be audio recorded via Microsoft teams which has been chosen for its strong privacy and data security functionality. For information about Microsoft Team's privacy statement please visit https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/trust-center/privacy

Upon completion of your participation you will be provided with a debrief and offered the opportunity to access a summary of the findings, by contacting the research team (details below).

What are my participation rights?

Participation in this research guarantees the right to withdraw, to ask questions about how your data will be handled and about the study itself, the right to confidentially and anonymity, the right to refuse to answer questions, to have audio recording turned-off and to be given access to a summary of the findings.

What if I want to withdraw my information?

If you wish to withdraw responses or any personal data gathered during the study you may do this without any consequences. You can ask for your data to be removed up until the point of analysis,

which will take place on approximately two weeks after the second coaching session. If you would like to withdraw your data please contact the researcher directly (details below).

What will happen to my responses to the study?

Data collected in this study will be analysed and used for the research student dissertation. Data may also be used for presentations and academic publications although no identifying information will be released or shared at any stage.

Will my responses and information be kept confidential?

All information will be treated with the strictest confidence throughout the study. It will be kept in secure folders on a password protected computer, or a secure filing cabinet. Access to such information will only be allowed to the researcher and researcher's supervisors. During the marking process, external examiners of my project may also have access.

What are the possible risks to taking part?

There are no perceived risks involved in taking part in this research. However, in the unlikely event that you experience discomfort following either of the coaching sessions, please reach out to one of the following to discuss:

- Your **Employee Assistance Programme** (if you have one)
- **Beyond Blue**: Hotline for mental health support. 1300 224 636. www.beyondblue.org.au
- **Lifeline:** 24-hr telephone counselling, information and referral service. 13 11 14. www.lifeline.org.au
- **13YARN:** Free, confidential 24/7 crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. 13 92 76. www.13yarn.org.au

Any further questions?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study before or during your participation, please contact either:

The Research Student: **Rachel Setti** at Rsetti01@student.bbk.ac.uk

and / or

The Research Primary Supervisor: **Professor Almuth McDowall** at a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk.
Department of Organisational Psychology,
Birkbeck, University of London,
Clore Management Building,
Malet Street, Bloomsbury,
London, WC1E 7HX
For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please visit:
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#9

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at:
BEI-ethics@bbk.ac.uk.

School Ethics Officer
School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London
London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's
Office https://ico.org.uk/

Appendix 2: Empirical Study Approval

FOR COMPLETION BY THE RESEARCHER:

I consider the application: **routine**

2. If 'non-routine': **NA**
Please provide details of the ethical concerns briefly here:

I have answered the above questions as fully and honestly as possible.   **YES**

I agree to inform my supervisor/departmental ethics officer if there is any change to the research project detailed here and if my supervisor deems necessary will seek additional ethical approval.   **YES**

I agree to carry out the study in an ethically informed way and to ensure that participants, researcher(s) and the college are safeguarded.   **YES**

I agree to carry out the study in line with current Freedom of Information and Data Protection regulations, including storing and transferring data securely.   **YES**

I confirm that the research conforms to expectations of ethical research in my discipline.   **YES**

SIGNATURE of researcher: Date: 21st June 2023

(Rachel Setti)

Almuth McDowall (supervisor)

FOR COMPLETION BY THE DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS OFFICER (DREO):

I consider the application: routine / sensitive / extremely sensitive

2. If 'non-routine':
Please provide details of the ethical concerns briefly here:

SIGNATURE of DREO: Date: 28 June 2023

Appendix 3: SLR Quality Assessment Ratings

Assessment Criteria	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6	Study 7	Study 8	Study 9	Study 10	Study 11	Study 12	Study 13	Study 14	Study 15	Study 16
How appropriate was the chosen methodology (2)	1	1	1	1.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Appropriateness of chosen methods (1)	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.75	0.5
Quality of study design (2)	1	0.5	0.5	1.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1.25	1
Reliability (2)	1	2	2	1.5	1	1	1	1	1.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Validity (2)	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Objectivity of the chosen methods (1)	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.5	1.25	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	1
Response rate (2)	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.5	0.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Appropriateness of chosen data analysis methods (2)	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Control of confounding variables (1)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Score	7	7.5	9.5	10	6.5	7	5.5	7.5	10.3	8	7.5	7	6	6	7.5	9
Range	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int	Int

Score Description	Range
Low	0-4
Intermediate (int)	5-10
High	11-15

Authors: 1.Chang et al. 2021 2.Dan et al. 2020 3.Fouché et al. 2017 4.Geldenhuys et al. 2021 5.Guo at al. 2022 6.Haffer et al. 2021 7.Hulshof et al. 2020 8.Lee et al. 2021 9.Meng et al. 2021 10. Morales-Solis et al. 2022 11.Mousa et al. 2023 12.Peral et al. 2016 13.Sen et al. 2018 14.Tims et al. 2016 15.Vermooten et al. 2019 16.Xu et al. 2023

Appendix 4: Examples of Studies Included and Excluded in Sift 1

(Title) and Excluded in Sift 2 (Abstract).

Sift 1: Examples of Included Titles

Title	Author and Date	Publication Title
The roles of self-efficacy and leader–member exchange in the relationship between job crafting and work–self facilitation: A moderated mediation model	Tresi & Mihelič, 2018	Personnel Review
The search for meaningful work: A network analysis of personality and the job characteristics model	Simonet & Castille, 2020	Personality and Individual Differences
The Working for Wellness Program: RCT of an Employee Well-Being Intervention	Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2013	Journal of Happiness Studies
Toward an integrated model of intrinsic motivation and career self-management	Quigley & Tymon, 2006	Career Development International
Unpacking the predictive effects of social characteristics on job crafting: The moderation role of neuroticism personality	Li & Takao, 2020	International Journal of Organizational Analysis
What Makes Work Meaningful -- Or Meaningless	Bailey & Madden, 2016	MIT Sloan Management Review
When and for Whom Ethical Leadership is More Effective in Eliciting Work Meaningfulness and Positive Attitudes: The Moderating Roles of Core Self-Evaluation and Perceived Organizational Support	Wang & Xu, 2019	Journal of Business Ethics: JBE
When and why skill variety influences employee job crafting: Regulatory focus and social exchange perspectives	Li, Sekiguchi & Qi, 2020	Employee Relations
When the job does not fit: The moderating role of job crafting and meaningful work in the relation between employees' perceived overqualification and job boredom	Sánchez-Cardona, Vera, Martínez-Lugo, Rodríguez-Montalbán, & Marrero-Centeno, Jesús, 2020	Journal of Career Assessment
Why work meaningfulness alone is not enough: The role of social identification and task interdependence as facilitative boundary conditions	Lee, Shin, & Kim, 2021	Current Psychology
Work engagement, job crafting and innovativeness in the Indian IT industry	Sharma & Nambudiri, 2020	Personnel Review
Work Outcomes of Job Crafting Among the Different Ranks of Project Teams	Haffer, Haffer, & Morrow, 2021	Project Management Journal
Work Volition and Job Satisfaction: Examining the Role of Work Meaning and Person-Environment Fit	Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015	The Career Development Quarterly

Sift 1: Examples of Excluded Titles

Title	Author and Date	Publication Title
The Roles of Job-Related Psychosocial Factors and Work Meaningfulness in Promoting Nurses' Bridge Employment Intentions	Yisheng, Xu, Jex & Chen, 2020	Journal of Career Development
The state of boredom: Frustrating or depressing?	Hooft & Hooff, 2018	Motivation and Emotion
Themes of climate change agency: a qualitative study on how people construct agency in relation to climate change	Toivonen, 2022	Humanities & Social Sciences Communications
Timeline of engagement research and future research directions	Kunte & Rungruang, 2018	Management Research Review: MRN
Understanding organizational deviance: An interactive model of perceived job characteristics and personality	Arkan & Acar, 2020	METU Studies in Development
What makes employees engaged with their work? The role of self-efficacy and employee's perceptions of social context over time	Consiglio & Schaufeli, 2016	Career Development International
When does customer CSR perception lead to customer extra-role behaviors? The roles of customer spirituality and emotional brand attachment	Won-Moo, Tae-Won & Kim, 2020	Journal of Brand Management
Who is called to work? The importance of calling when considering universal basic income	Rowles, Cox, & Pool, 2021	Industrial and Organizational Psychology
Why Individuals Participate in Micro-task Crowdsourcing Work Environment: Revealing Crowdworkers' Perceptions	Deng & Joshi, 2016	Journal of the Association for Information Systems
Why we should stop measuring performance and well-being	Bal, 2020	Zeitschrift für Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie
Work Engagement of Older Employees: Do Employee and Work-Related Factors Matter?	Korsakienė, Raišienė & Bužavaitė, 2017	Economics & Sociology
Workers Age 55 and over Working with Pain. A Descriptive Interpretive Study	Marie-Christine & Marie-José, 2020	Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation
Work–family enrichment: an integrative review	Agrawal & Mahajan, 2021	International Journal of Workplace Health Management
Workplace flourishing: Measurement, antecedents and outcomes	Redelinghuys, Rothmann & Botha, 2019	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology

Sift 2: Examples of Titles Excluded

Title	Author and Date	Publication Title
An exploration of the component validity of job crafting	Hu, Taris, Dollard & Schaufeli, 2020	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology
Can Job-Embedded Employees Be Satisfied? The Role of Job Crafting and Goal-Striving Orientations	Zhang, Lam, Longzhu & Y, 2021	Journal of Business and Psychology
Cognitive crafting and work engagement: A study among remote and frontline health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic	Wijngaards, Pronk, Bakker, & Burger, 2022	Health Care Management Review
Conceptualizing meaningful work and its implications for HRD	You, Kim, Kim, Cho, & Chang, 2021	European Journal of Training and Development
Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work	Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001.	Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review
Demands–abilities fit, work beliefs, meaningful work and engagement in nature-based jobs	de Crom, & Rothmann, 2018	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology
Does work engagement mediate the influence of job resourcefulness on job crafting?: An examination of frontline hotel employees	Chien-Yu, 2019	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
Emergent Organizing in Crisis: US Nurses' Sensemaking and Job Crafting During COVID-19	Surabhi, & Dwyer, 2021	Management Communication Quarterly : McQ
Job Crafting: A Critical Review	Dash, & Vohra, 2020	South Asian Journal of Management

Appendix 5: Details of SLR Journals and Titles

Journal Title	Title	Authors and Date
Career Development International	Day-level job crafting and service-oriented task performance: The mediating role of meaningful work and work engagement.	Hulshof, Demerouti, Le Blanc & Pascale
Current Psychology	Why work meaningfulness alone is not enough: The role of social identification and task interdependence as facilitative boundary conditions	Lee, Shin, & Kim 2018
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	How task, relational and cognitive crafting relate to job performance: a weekly diary study on the role of meaningfulness	Geldenhuys, Bakker, & Demerouti 2021
Frontiers in Psychology	Job Crafting and Performance in Firefighters: The Role of Work Meaning and Work Engagement	Dan, Rosca, & Mateizer 2020
Human Service Organizations Management Leadership & Governance	Job Crafting Paths for Job Engagement: An Empirical Study among Chinese Social Workers	Meng, Wang & Tian 2021
Information Technology & People	Does IT matter for work meaningfulness?: Exploring the mediating role of job crafting	Xu, Wang, Ou & Song 2022
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	The effects of job crafting on tour leaders' work engagement: the mediating role of person-job fit and meaningfulness of work	Guo & Hou 2022
International Journal of Organizational Analysis	Resiliency and meaningfulness in work: a job crafting perspective.	Morales-Solis, Chen, May & Schwoerer 2022
Journal of Management	Mediating Role of Psychological Conditions in the Relationship Between Job Crafting and Employee Engagement.	Sen & Rajkamal 2018
Journal of Vocational Behaviour	Job crafting and its relationships with person–job fit and meaningfulness: A three-wave study	Tims, Derks, & Bakker 2016
Leadership & Organization Development Journal	Sense of calling, job crafting, spiritual leadership and work meaningfulness: a moderated mediation model	Chang, Gao & Wu 2021
Personnel Review	Job crafting, meaningfulness and affective commitment by gig workers towards crowdsourcing platforms.	Mousa & Chaouali 2022

Project Management Journal	Work Outcomes of Job Crafting Among the Different Ranks of Project Teams.	Haffer, Haffer & Morrow 2021
South African Journal of Industrial Psychology	Antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work among school teachers	Fouché, Rothmann & Vyver 2017
	The effects of job crafting on subjective well-being amongst South African high school teachers	Peral & Geldenhuys 2016
	Job crafting, proactive personality and meaningful work: Implications for employee engagement and turnover intention	Vermooten, Boonzaier & Kidd 2019

Appendix 6: Empirical Study Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: How do people develop job crafting through coaching conversations?

Please read the following items and tick the appropriate boxes to indicate whether you agree to take part in this study.

☐ I have read the information sheet in full, I understand the purpose of this research is to explore how people at work engage in job crafting skills and increase their experience of meaning at work.

☐ Any questions I had have been answered, and I understand I may ask further questions at any time.

☐ I understand what is involved in participating, that it is voluntary, and that I may withdraw without consequences and penalty within 2 weeks of the second coaching session.

☐ I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio recorded by Rachel Setti.

☐ I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio recording to be turned off at any time during the coaching sessions.

☐ I understand that the data will be transcribed word-by-word by Microsoft Word software.

☐ I understand the results may be used for academic publications, such as dissertation, thesis or journal articles.

Name _____

Signed _____   Dated: _____

Appendix 7: Empirical Study Participant Debrief

DEBRIEF FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: How do people develop job crafting through coaching conversations?

Thank you very much for taking part in this research project, as part of my Professional Doctorate in Occupational Psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London.

The research question/aims of my research are to:
1. What is the experience of being coached for cognitive job crafting?
2. How can a targeted coaching intervention support the development of cognitive job crafting, and to what extent can participants verbalise effective crafting strategies?
3. To what extent can cognitive job crafting focused coaching support the experience of meaningfulness at work?

The results of this research will be multi-fold. It will gather knowledge aimed at incrementally adding to the existing body of research. Furthermore, from an industry perspective, it is hoped that the research will provide insight into how employees undertake job crafting, and the impact that this has on their experience of work-meaningfulness.

I would like to thank you and affirm that your data will be treated confidentially and that your name and personal details will be anonymized.

If you have any concerns about the way that this study was conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the primary research supervisor, Professor Almuth McDowall at a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk.

If you would like to find out the outcome of this research, please do not hesitate to keep in touch with me and I will send you a summary of the results.

Thank you.

Rachel Setti - Rsetti01@student.bbk.ac.uk

There are no perceived risks involved in taking part in this research. However, in the unlikely event that you are experiencing discomfort, please reach out to one of the following to discuss:

- Your **Employee Assistance Programme** (if you have one)
- **Beyond Blue**: Hotline for mental health support. 1300 224 636. www.beyondblue.org.au
- **Lifeline:** 24-hr telephone counselling, information and referral service. 13 11 14. www.lifeline.org.au
- **13YARN:** Free, confidential 24/7 crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. 13 92 76. www.13yarn.org.au

For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please visit:

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#9

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at:

BEI-ethics@bbk.ac.uk
School Ethics Officer
School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London
London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office https://ico.org.uk

Appendix 8: Representation of Initial Data Themes and Code Names

Examples of Initial data themes	Example of Code Names
Cognitive job crafting	Acceptance of status quo
	Deconstructing and chunking the problem
	Recognizing own capacity and agency
	Focusing on positive outcomes
	Pulling on previous experience as a guide for future action
	Reframing perception of one's role
Relational job crafting	The importance of collegiate relationships
	The benefit of having conversations
	Building proactive relationships
	Expanding (support) networks
	Mentoring others in order to build relationships
	Using role models to influence own behaviour
	Considering the impact of relationships with leaders at work
Task job crafting	Experimenting with new ways of doing things
	deciding how to get tasks done by re-ordering and re-prioritising
Work meaningfulness	Developing a sense of contribution
	deriving a sense of meaning from relationships
	Feeling an increased sense of influence over work issues
Leadership and organisational practices	Impact of culture norms on the individual's capacity to address the challenge
	The efficacy of manager training
	Suggestions made by participants for organisations based on benefits they derived from the coaching
Perceived benefits of coaching process	An increased sense of direction and commitment to action and accountability
	Independent and unbiased cues approach from coach
	Space to think and address the issue over an extended period of time
	Verbalisation of thoughts to help process issues
Professional growth	Reflections on possible career and professional achievement
	Noted developments between 1st and 2nd session
Wellbeing	Recognising self-limiting thoughts and behaviours
	Focusing on thoughts which promote a sense of achievement
Future focused thinking	Consideration of the consequences of not job crafting

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N.B. Bold references are the studies which formed the basis of the SLR

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