

Empowering Leadership Fosters Service Employees' Job Crafting



Yunshuo Liu, Ming Guo, Lili Hu, and Long Ye

Abstract Based on conservation of resource (COR) theory, we explore the influence of empowering leadership on service industry employees' job crafting. Multi-level data were collected employees nested within work teams in the service industry. Our findings suggest that empowering leadership is positively associated with job crafting via psychological availability. Moreover, perceived organization support significantly moderated the positive relationship between empowering leadership and job crafting. The present study reveals the cross-level effects of empowering leadership and provides practical suggestions to foster employees' job crafting in organizations.

Keywords Empowering leadership · Job crafting · Psychological availability · Perceived organization support

1 Introduction

Traditional job designs focus on “top-down” style, which mainly conducted by managers. However, with new generations of workers are flooding into the workplace, scholars have pointed out that “top-down” job designs neglect the autonomy of employees and cause limitations. In fact, subordinates are not just required to implement assignment prescribed by the organization but are also expected to initiative to participate in the job design [1]. Job crafting represents the changes that

Y. Liu (✉) · M. Guo · L. Hu · L. Ye
School of Economics and Management, Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing, China
e-mail: 18113085@bjtu.edu.cn

M. Guo
e-mail: gming@bjtu.edu.cn

L. Hu
e-mail: 18113081@bjtu.edu.cn

L. Ye
e-mail: yelong@bjtu.edu.cn

subordinates perform in the assignment or interpersonal boundaries of their work with their capabilities, needs, and preferences [2]. In other words, job crafting can be regarded as a self-initiated and extra-role behavior, which is positively related to various positive outcomes. Some researchers have investigated the antecedents of job crafting, include big-five personality, job autonomy, career orientation, etc. But, most of them are theoretical speculations, and the empirical evidence about the antecedents of job crafting from the organizational level is relatively modest [3]. Furthermore, most previous studies of job crafting carried out in non-service industry situation. Therefore, studying the antecedents of job crafting from the organizational level is supposed to make some contribution.

Empowering leadership refers to the leadership style that supervisor appreciate their subordinates' capacity, stresses the importance of the work of the employees, engage subordinates in strategy formulation, and eliminate workplace barriers for employees [4]. According to Ilgen and Hollenbeck, individuals who in possession of work autonomy are more likely to make redesign of job [5]. Slemp et al. also found that employees with greater free space are more likely to perform extra-role behavior [6]. So, exploring the relationship between empowering leadership and job crafting is extremely important and meaningful.

Early studies suggest that empowering leadership promotes extra-role behavior mainly by stimulating employees' intrinsic motivation. However, motivation is a necessary and insufficient condition. Employees' perception of available resources is equally important. Psychological accessibility refers to subordinates' available awareness of the physical, affective and cognitive resources in the work, which has an important impact on individual attitudes and behaviors [7]. So as to enhance employees' awareness of the availability of their own resources, thereby improving their psychological availability. Thus, by drawing on conservation resource theory, we further explore the function of psychological availability in the impact process of empowering leadership on job crafting.

Job crafting is not fostered by a single factor, but by both personal and environmental interaction effect. Job crafting is not only the result of individual efforts but also the strong support of the organization. Perceived organizational support (POS) is the human's psychological feeling of the degree of organizational support. Therefore, the current study assumed that exist a remarkable difference in the influence of empowering leadership on employees' job crafting under diverse conditions of perceived organizational support.

2 Theory and Hypotheses

2.1 Empowering Leadership and Job Crafting

To meet the needs of work teams and horizontal organizations, managers have replaced traditional supervisory leadership with empowered behaviors. Zhang and

Bartol conceptualized empowering leadership as the style of influencing others that release of authority and delegating with subordinates, providing subordinates with autonomy, motivating support subordinates' learning and giving work guidance [8]. Considerable evidence indicates that empowering leadership can fuel employees to perform productively beyond the limits, such as increasing organizational commitment, enhancing creativity and improving work performance.

Job crafting is considered an initiative behavior that individuals actively use resources of the work to construct their job boundary to maintain work meaning [2]. Job crafting is comprised of questing work resources as well as challenges, and lessen work demands. Researchers have clearly demonstrated that employees' job crafting can be facilitated by their peers, like coworkers or superior [9]. As a representative of the organization, leaders constitute an essential factor impacting on employees' work outcomes. Working with an empowering leader, employees may actively participate to craft their jobs.

First of all, compared to other leadership styles, empowering leader exhibits more delegation behaviors, it facilitates employees to give full play to their own intelligence and wisdom in the workplace. Employees are granted more autonomy without direct supervision or intervention. It helps establish a free work context, where they strive to explore diverse approaches and seek resources to improve job performance. Second, empowering leader show confidence to their subordinates in identifying difficult works and encourage employees to be more involved in tackling these problems. Such empowering leadership behaviors are more likely facilitating rather than directing and controlling employees, employees possibly favor in seeks the challenge. Under empowering leadership, employees develop skills and better adapt to their work environment. Third, empowering leadership provides information and resources to help employees complete tasks like a coach. Thus, employees become capable and engage in reducing demands behavior. With the help of empowering leadership, employees actively working to bring about a change to meet the expectations of the leader.

Based on these aforementioned arguments, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Empowering leadership is positively related to employees' job crafting.

2.2 The Mediating Effect of Psychological Availability

Psychological accessibility is a psychological state that helps people decide whether and how to engage in organizational activities. According to May et al., possession of available resources can influence employees' psychological availability [9]. We speculated that psychological availability shaped by empowering leadership motivate employee job crafting.

As empowering leaders communicate positive vision through grant of power or delegation of authority, attach the importance of their employees' work, and allow employees to participate in decision-making. This could greatly make employees

feel trusted and supported by organization. It was found that individual participation promotes high levels of psychological availability. Additionally, employees achieve more real autonomy from empowering leaders, which enforce employees' ability to control the working environment. Furthermore, empowering leadership provide opportunities for skill development and express concern for work condition. Employee perceived care has been found to be an important facilitator to psychological availability [10].

On the one hand, crafting is a process of trial and error, full of uncertainty and risk. Employees may avoid potential punishment for spontaneous job crafting. With high psychological availability, employees believe that they can take advantage of job crafting and reduce uncertainty, so that they pay more attention to how to solve problems and thus harvests the best work and the career result [11]. On the other hand, employees with psychological availability have more job participation and job engagement. In the face of change, whether they are independent or cooperating with others, they are willing to participate in job modifying process, initiative to make every effort to meet the expectations of leaders.

According to the conservation of resource theory, individuals always have the ability to acquire and maintain their own resources. Individuals with more resources have better resource returns and more likely to facilitate proactive behavior [7]. Empowering leadership provides subordinates with conditional resources such as power and decision-making, and enhance perception of resource availability during crafting process, that is, improve employees' psychological availability. Individuals with more resources have better resource returns, so employees with higher psychological availability tend to invest more resources, thus make a positive change (i.e., job crafting).

Hypothesis 2: Employees' psychological availability mediates the relationships between empowering leadership and job crafting.

2.3 The Moderating Effect of Perceived Organizational Support

According to the conservation of resource theory, resources can be divided into four categories: physical resources, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy. Organizational support can also be classified as an energy resource. POS is considered employee perception about the extent to which organizations pay attention to their contributions and their well-being [12]. A high perception of POS suggests that employees feel that organization values. Employees with high POS feel good organizational environment and mutual help colleagues, reduce environmental uncertainty and increase the possibility of employees using available resources for modification. However, individuals with lower POS should not have sufficient confidence and strong will to make change. Though employees with high psychological availability

can perceive more available physical, emotional, and psychological resources for change, their additional efforts are not recognized and supported by the organization.

Hypothesis 3: POS will moderate the positive effect of psychological availability on job crafting.

3 Method

3.1 Procedure and Sample

We collected data from supervisors and their direct reports from 57 full-service hotel in first-tier cities of China. Questionnaires were collected in groups. Each group has one leader (manager) and 5 to 7 of his/her subordinates. The survey for subordinates asked them to report the supervisor's empowering leadership, psychological availability and POS among group members. Before the test, we assigned an identification number (group number and individual number) of questionnaire to ensure the precise matching of group and individuals. All samples were guaranteed by confidentiality of their answers. In total, 65 leadership and 320 subordinate dates were distributed. Delete the incomplete questionnaire, 49 leadership questionnaires and 293 subordinate useable dates were returned, generating a response rate of 91.56% for subordinates and 75.38% for superiors. Among the participating, subordinates 69.31% were women with mean age of 34.07 ($SD = 4.78$), the mean organizational tenure was 13.26 ($SD = 11.15$), 72% received high school degree or below. Of the participating leaders, 9% were female with mean age of 35 ($SD = 5.78$), the mean group tenure was 3.86 years ($SD = 1.99$), 45% received university education.

3.2 Measures

The present study surveyed empowering leadership with a 12-item scale (see Ahearne, M., Mathieu, J., and Rapp, A.). Sample item included "My leader patiently instructs my work frequently" and "My leader often encourage myself to make work-related decisions on my own". The Cronbach alpha was 0.770. Psychological availability was evaluated with five items from the delegation questions developed by May et al.. Sample items included "I believe I have the ability to show the appropriate emotions at work" and "I believe I can handle the physical needs of my job". Cronbach's alpha was 0.748. We measured POS with 8 items adapted from Eisenberger et al., which was used within the hospitality literature. Cronbach's alpha was 0.760. Sample items included "Organization cares about my career development" and "Organizations often give me help and support when I need it". job crafting's scale has 21-items came from Tims et al. study. Sample items included "I try to improve my skill" and "I can arrange my work in a reasonable and orderly way to reduce my

stress”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.932. We controlled the major demographic variables in our study. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of each scale, the principle of two-way anonymity and scientific translation procedure are adhered to in the formation of the scale. Scales were scored using a 5 point Likert type scales. The scope intense from 1 does not agree expression to 5 intense agreements expression.

3.3 Analysis

Because the present study had a dual-level hierarchical structure model, so we used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to process data. HLM is a forceful method that can test cross-level models and concurrently divide the variance of variables into the components of within and between group.

Data analysis was performed in three steps. First of all, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) was conducted to test distinctiveness of factors. Secondly, to assess the potential between-group variance of variables, two forms of intra-class correlational coefficients (ICC) were conducted, which is a prerequisite for multi-level analysis. Furthermore, HLM was performed to examine whether empowering leadership of group-levels might explain variance in subordinate-level outcomes. Finally, OLS regression analysis was performed to test the moderated role of POS.

4 Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA)

We conduct CFA through maximum likelihood estimation. The hypothesized four-factor model (empowering leadership, psychological availability, POS, job crafting) had a good model fit ($Chi-Square = 728.71$, $df = 300$, $p < 0.01$, $[CFI] = 0.960$, $[TLI] = 0.927$, $[RMSEA] = 0.068$, $[SRMR] = 0.035$). We also compared the hypothesized four-factor model (empowering leadership, psychological availability, POS, job crafting) with several alternative models. Results indicated that four-factor model revealed a dramatically better fit than any other optional models.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variable were showed in Table 1. As we can see, all variables are related to each other, providing initial support for the hypotheses.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.213	0.491	1							
2. Age	2.892	5.787	0.011							
3. Education	2.558	0.783	-0.022	0.040	1					
4. Job tenure	3.164	11.151	0.045	0.020	-0.062	1				
5. Empowering leadership	4.627	0.666	0.134	0.150	0.017	0.092	1			
6. Psychological availability	3.573	0.712	0.171	0.022	0.010	0.431	0.499**	1		
7. POS	3.731	0.821	0.56	-0.091	0.050	0.128	0.173**	0.181**	1	
8. Job crafting	3.986	0.448	0.26**	0.149	0.129	0.011	0.54***	0.341**	0.451***	1

Note N = 293. Alpha reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01

4.3 Aggregation Test

To analyze the suitability of the data aggregation, we conducted ANOVA tests and two interclass correlation coefficients ($ICC[1]$ and $ICC[2]$) on empowering leadership by calculating $rwg(j)$ values. $ICC[1]$ represents a form of proportional consistency, as a criterion for aggregating; $ICC[2]$ refers to an prediction of the fitness of the group means criterion for aggregating. $ICC[1]$ and $ICC[2]$ calculated as follows.

$$ICC[1] = \frac{MSB - MSW}{MSB + [(k - 1) * MSW]} \quad (1)$$

$$ICC[2] = \frac{MSB - MSW}{MSB} \quad (2)$$

Among them, MSB experts between-group mean square. MSW experts within-group mean square; k experts group size (average).

Results revealed that there was a significant difference between between-store variance and within-store variance for the empowering leadership ($F = 2.01, p < 0.01$). The mean $rwg(j)$ across stores was 0.93 of empowering leadership, representing an acceptable degree of inter-rater agreement. The values of the inter-rater reliability index $ICC [1]$ is 0.329 and the reliability of group-mean index $ICC [2]$ is 0.883. All of these values were comparable to Bliese's (2000) suggestion on team-level constructs. On the basis of these results, we concluded that aggregation was justified.

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

HLM was conducted to examine the hypotheses, effects of the Level 2 predictor. Specific analysis steps are shown below:

First step:

$$L1: Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \gamma_{ij} \quad (3)$$

$$L2: \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} X_j + \mu_{0j} \quad (4)$$

Second step:

$$L1: M_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \gamma_{ij} \quad (5)$$

$$L2: \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} X_j + \mu_{0j} \quad (6)$$

Third step:

$$L1: Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(M_{ij} - M_{.j}) + \gamma_{ij} \tag{7}$$

$$L2: \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}X_j + \gamma_{02}M_{.j} + \mu_{0j} \tag{8}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} \tag{9}$$

Note: Y_{ij} represents the dependent variable, X_j represents independent variable, M_{ij} represents mediate variable, it represents the i sample of the j group, $M_{.j}$ represents the mean of the M_{ij} of the j group.

Table 2 presents the results of these models. Regarding Hypothesis 1, as we can see, empowering leadership is certainly associated to subordinates' job crafting ($\gamma = 0.671, p < 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was verified.

For Hypothesis 2, the test of mediating effects of psychological availability was followed by the procedures of Baron and Kenny's (1986). The first step was to examine the direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable (Hypothesis 1). In Step 2, determine whether independent variable was significantly related to mediating variable (psychological availability). This requirement was also

Table 2 Hypotheses testing of H1, H2 and H3

Variable	Psychological availability				Job crafting			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M6	M7	M8	M9
<i>Interpret</i>	4.484**	4.577**	4.770**	4.240**	4.350**	4.420**	4.280**	4.450**
<i>Level-1</i>								
Gender		0.020			0.040	0.060	0.06	0.04
Age		0.190			0.080	0.03	0.05	0.03
Education		0.050			0.010	0.00	0.01	0.00
Job tenure		0.080			0.020	0.01	0.02	0.02
PA							0.260**	0.217**
<i>Level-2</i>								
Team scale		0.030	0.010		0.030	0.040	0.030	0.040
Empowering leadership			0.470**			0.671**		0.55**
Variance (τ) Between-group	0.343	0.324	0.242	0.392	0.392	0.225	0.277	0.184
Variance (σ^2) Within-group	0.746	0.748	0.747	0.94	0.411	0.374	0.318	0.216

Note for level-1, n = 293, for level-2, n = 49; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

supported ($\gamma = 0.470, p < 0.01$). Finally, we identified whether the effect (regression coefficient) between independent variable and dependent variable in Step 1 decreased in order of growth (partial mediation) or eliminated (complete mediation) when psychological availability was added in the model. Results showed that empowering leadership has a positive effect on subordinates' job crafting ($\gamma = 0.260, p < 0.01$), and the positive relationship of the two was reduced but remained significant ($\gamma = 0.210, p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was verified.

Hypothesis 3 stands for an interaction effect on level 1. As Fig. 1. and Table 3 showed, the interaction effect of psychological availability and POS was significant for job crafting ($\beta = 0.192, p < 0.05$), indicating that POS moderated the effect

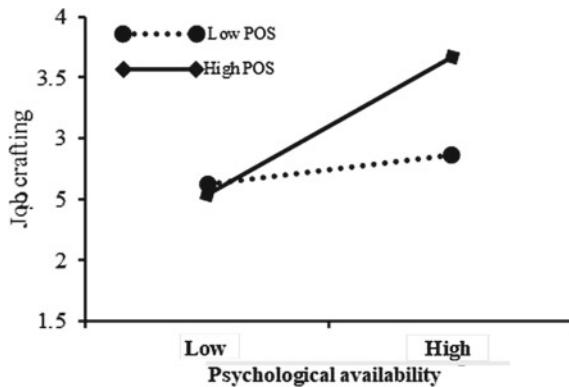


Fig. 1 Moderating effect of leader delegation on the relationship between career uncertainty and psychological safety

Table 3 Index extraction

	β	t	R	ΔR^2
Step 1			0.009	-0.002
Gender				
Age	-0.028	-0.292		
Education	0.028	0.277		
Job tenure	0.093	1.572		
Step 2			0.357	0.346
PA	0.345***	6.699		
POS	0.183**	2.788		
Step3			0.365	0.351
PA \times POS	0.192*	1.989		

Note PA = Psychological availability, POS = Perceived organizational support, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

pathway between psychological availability and employees' job crafting. Hypothesis was strongly supported.

We also plotted the significant dual-interaction effect with plotting means at ± 1 SD. in Fig. 1. As shown in Fig. 1, when employees perceived high levels of POS, the direct effect between psychological availability and job crafting was stronger. On the contrary, it was found that the positive relationship weakened when POS is low.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Our study has made possibly several theoretical implications to relevant literature. First, we examined the positive effect of empowering leadership on employees' job crafting. Most of the existing researches focus on the individual contributing factors of job crafting, organizational level factor with empirical are limited [13]. The present study proposed and verified that empowering leadership have a large use in facilitating job crafting on the cross-level. Moreover, we extended empowering leadership to service industry. To our knowledge, this the first study empowering leadership in service context. Second, the present study explored the mechanism between empowering leadership and service industry staff job crafting. Drawing on conservation of resource theory, we also found that psychological availability mediated the effect of the relationship mentioned above. It responds to the call for investigating the influence mechanism of organizational situational factors and job crafting [14]. The study uncovered the "black box" between empowering leadership and job crafting, which further enriches the empowering leadership and job crafting by applying conservation resource theory perspective. Third, we demonstrated that the moderating effect of POS. Scholars have found that POS is the key organizational factor that influences employees' crafting behavior. Consistent with their conclusions, we further extended job crafting literature by showing the different effect of POS. Specifically, POS strengthened the positive effect of psychological availability on job crafting. We respond to the call that the relevance of the resource to the specific situation should be taken into consideration when individuals determine the value of resources.

5.2 Practical Implications

Our study may provides some implications for organizational management practice. First of all, leaders should consider empowering leadership to facilitates employees to take the initiative to job modification. Leaders need to make it clear that leadership style play a key role in employees' behavior from enhancing subordinates' job

autonomy, decision-making and self-development support. Furthermore, interventions aimed at improving psychological accessibility can also facilitate employees' resources to craft their jobs. To enhance staff perceived availability, managers should establish a harmonious employment relationship and strengthen the construction of the organization team, so that employees can feel the care from the leadership and the support from the team. Our findings contributing to POS revealing that interpersonal differences in perceived support intensity from organization can also impact employees' motivation to display proactive behavior. By means of strengthening organizational justice, improving welfare level and giving employees fair opportunities for promotion, the organization should effectively improve employees' sense of organizational support, make subordinates full of confidence and dare to challenge, so as to promote the occurrence of crafting behavior.

5.3 Limitations, Future Directions and Conclusions

Although our study makes important contributions to theory and practice concerning job crafting, it has several potential limitations. First, cross-sectional design was used for testing hypotheses, failed to analyze the dynamic process of empowering leadership influence on subordinates' job crafting. Future research using a longitudinal design with a time lag may provide more conclusive results concerning job crafting. Second, the present study limits themselves to only psychological accessibility as a mediating variable. Future research can comprehensively consider psychological safety and psychological contract might also mediate relationships between the main effect. Third, we obtained employee job crafting data from their supervisors. Future studies can combine objective data and subjective measures to further validate the research results.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the research on the relationship of empowering leadership and subordinates' job crafting by using cross-level model that based on service industry situation. Empowering leadership at the group level has a significant positive cross-layer effect on individuals' job crafting via psychological availability. In addition, POS can moderate the relationship between psychological availability and job crafting, and the positive impact of psychological availability on job remodeling will be stronger when subordinates have high level of POS. All in all, the empirical analysis results of the current study provide solid support for all hypothesized relationships. Indeed, there is a lot of uncertainty situation about the work of service industry employees, which provides opportunities for job remodeling. We hope that our study results can provide some reference and enlightenment for the management of service employees.

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