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Proactive personality and mental health: The role of job crafting

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Abstract: In this study, we examined the relationships among proactive personality, job crafting, and mental health. A total of 1971 full-time Chinese employees completed the survey. The results of structural equation modeling analyses indicated that job crafting mediated the positive relationship between proactive personality and mental health.

Keywords: 12-item General Health Questionnaire; job crafting; mental health; 8-item Patient Health Questionnaire; proactive personality

Mental health is an important issue in the workplace. Traditionally, scholars have shown that the well-designed—or well-re-designed—job, characterized by sufficient job resources and challenging demands, has a positive effect on employees' mental health. Recently, *job crafting* has emerged as a new perspective on job redesign focusing on employee proactivity. The most widely accepted and adopted theoretical model has been developed by Tims and Bakker (2010), who define job crafting as employees' behaviors to change their job resources and demands in order to increase the fit needed for their job characteristics and their own abilities (Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017). On the basis of this model, Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012) have identified four dimensions of job crafting: (1) increasing structural job resources, (2) decreasing hindering job demands, (3) increasing social job resources, and (4) increasing challenging job demands.

Proactive people are those who search for opportunity, take action, and persevere until reaching meaningful change (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Thus, proactive employees are more likely to change their job demands and resources to match their environment in terms of needs and abilities (Tims & Bakker, 2010). A recent meta-analysis with 122 independent samples indicated that proactive personality is an important individual difference antecedent of job crafting, and showed a positive relationship between job crafting and work engagement (Rudolph et al., 2017). Also, empirical studies have provided support for the basic assumption of job crafting, that employees initially change their job characteristics to motivate themselves at work by increasing resources, seeking challenges, and decreasing hindrances (Tims et al., 2012). Considering the positive relationship between job characteristics and mental health

and the unique, incremental impacts of work engagement on depressive symptoms (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012), we expected that job crafting would positively correlate with mental health and would further mediate the relationship between proactive personality and mental health.

With procedural approval from the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, data were collected in an online survey, with voluntary participation solicited through a job recruitment website in China. In total, 1,971 full-time Chinese employees (1,090 females, 881 males) completed the survey, including four scales: (1) Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer's (1999) 10-item Proactive Personality Scale; (2) the 21-item Job Crafting Scale developed by Tims et al. (2012); (3) the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988); and (4) the 8-item Patient Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (Kroenke et al., 2009). The average age of the participants was 27.3 ($SD = 5.84$) years with the average tenure 3.3 years ($SD = 3.94$). Participants' education levels were relatively high and more than 80% of the sample reported completing at least junior college.

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the factorial validity of the hypothesized job crafting model. First, a four-factor model of the original job crafting scale was estimated, but the fit was found to be poor, $\chi^2(183) = 3016.2$, $p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .835, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .089, standardized root-mean residual (SRMR) = .088. According to the modification indexes, we deleted one item from each of the four dimensions (i.e., Items 5, 8, 16, and 20 of the original scale) for their cross-loading or covariance with other items. Then, the four-factor model of the revised job crafting scale was estimated again and was proved to

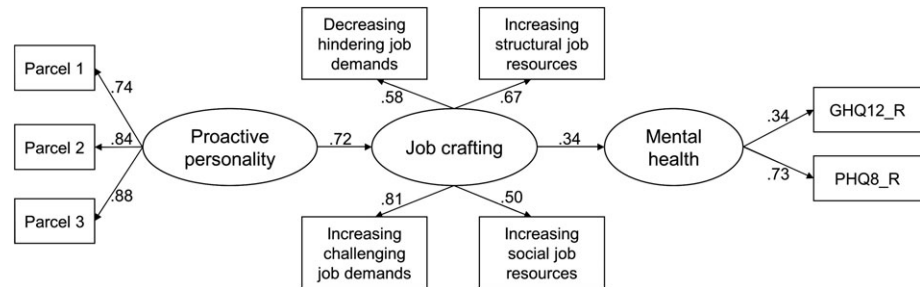
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Figure 1. Estimated coefficients for the structural model. Standardized pathway coefficients and factor loadings are reported. All coefficients are significant at the .001 level. GHQ12 = 12-item General Health Questionnaire; PHQ8 = 8-item Patient Health Questionnaire; R = reversed score.



fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(112) = 758.9$, $p < .001$, CFI = .952, RMSEA = .054, SRMR = .046, indicating the four-factor model was acceptable for the revised job crafting scale. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to examine the measurement model, including three latent variables modeled with parceled item means (i.e., proactive personality) or scale means (i.e., job crafting and mental health) as indicators. The results indicated that the measurement adequately fit to the data: $\chi^2(21) = 232.1$, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .066 (.059, .074), and SRMR = .038. All factor loadings were significant at the .001 level and ranged from .51 to .94.

We proposed that job crafting mediated the effects of proactive personality on mental health. The results of the structural equation model analyses indicated an adequate fit to the data: $\chi^2(25) = 284.0$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .073 (.065, .080), SRMR = .048. As shown in Figure 1, proactive personality was positively related to job crafting ($\gamma = .72$, $p < .001$) and job crafting was positively correlated with mental health ($\gamma = .34$, $p < .001$). A bootstrap analysis was conducted to further examine the mediational role of job crafting. The results indicated that the standard indirect effect of proactive personality on mental health was significant ($\beta = .244$, $p = .006$), and the 90% confidence intervals (.212, .296) did not include 0, supporting the hypothesis that job crafting mediates the relationship between proactive personality and mental health.

Our findings contribute to proactivity research in three ways. First, by showing that proactive employees also intentionally change their approach to their work environment by attaining job resources, seeking challenges, and reducing hindrance demands, our findings support another possible reason why proactive personality is positively correlated with mental health. Second, this is the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to show a positive relationship between job crafting and mental health, thus adding to the current body of knowledge on job crafting by expanding its outcomes to a context-free and more distal variable compared with previous outcomes. Third, the current study validated the most widely used scale, Tims et al.'s (2012) Job Crafting Scale, which has mainly been used in Western cultures, with a large sample in a Chinese context.

Our results confirm its four-factor structure in China and expand its use to Eastern cultures. In the future, a longitudinal study will be needed to further examine the possible causal relationships to overcome the limitation of the current cross-sectional design and could incorporate multiple data sources, such as peer-rated proactive personality, to decrease the possibility of common method variance.

Disclosure of conflict of interest: The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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