Job Crafting and Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Chinese Colleges: The Mediating Role of Meaningful Work

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Abstract

This study examines how job crafting and meaningful work influence organizational citizenship behavior among college teachers in Shandong Province, China. A questionnaire survey was administered to 601 college teachers. After controlling for teachers' demographic information, job crafting is positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior among teachers in colleges. Additionally, meaningful work partially mediates this relationship, suggesting that teachers who find their work meaningful are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization beyond their formal job responsibilities. This study discusses the research findings from the perspective of enhancing organizational citizenship behavior among college teachers in China.

Keywords: *Job Crafting, Meaningful Work, Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior, College Teachers.*

Introduction

Teachers' organizational citizenship behavior refers to actions that go beyond specified role requirements (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000). This behavior plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' self-worth (Devin et al., 2012) and job well-being (Shie & Chang, 2022). In the context of higher education, it is associated with college teachers' satisfaction and levels of organizational commitment (Abdullah & Akhtar, 2016; Noor, 2009). In China, college teachers experience significant pressure from teaching, research, and administrative duties, making this profession particularly susceptible to burnout (Zhong et al., 2009). Teachers' organizational citizenship behavior is essential for reducing turnover intentions (Halid et al., 2024), ensuring the effectiveness of college organizations (Kumari & Thapliyal, 2018), and enhancing the quality of higher education in China (Zhao et al., 2020).

Research indicates a significant relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior across various teacher groups (Siddiq et al., 2022; Tamar et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2023). In Chinese higher education, job crafting is characterized by higher academic freedom and autonomy, allowing college teachers greater discretion in course design, research directions, and project selection (Yang et al., 2007). However, the mechanisms through which job crafting influences the organizational citizenship behavior of Chinese college teachers warrant further investigation.

Additionally, previous studies have found a positive correlation between meaningful work and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Azeez & Genty, 2018; Selamat et al., 2017; Wiroko, 2021). Merdiaty et al. (2023) suggest that meaningful work mediates the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and its antecedent variables. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model's motivation-driven process, understanding the potential mechanisms between job demands, job resources, and job performance is crucial (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job crafting can be seen as a strategy for teachers to enhance job resources to meet job demands (Van Wingerden et al., 2017), making work more attractive and meaningful (Shang, 2022). This adjustment behavior forms the foundation for fostering positive teacher behavior (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019). Therefore, meaningful work may mediate the relationship between job crafting and college teachers' organizational citizenship behavior, though this mediating model has been scarcely explored.

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Job Crafting and Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Colleges

Research has demonstrated that job crafting is a significant predictor of teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Mihalca et al., 2023). Job crafting involves proactively adjusting one's work to manage stress and overcome challenges. This encompasses enhancing work tasks and boundaries, such as increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands (Huang et al., 2022). Previous studies have highlighted that specific elements of job crafting—such as job autonomy and the reduction of job demands—are crucial in forecasting teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Tamar et al., 2022). For example, Tamar et al. (2022) surveyed 111 high school teachers in Indonesia and found that positive job crafting was associated with an increase in organizational citizenship behavior among teachers.

Research conducted in China has also underscored the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. When Chinese school leaders encourage teachers to adjust their work practices for improvement, teachers are more likely to exert extra effort (Shang, 2022). Zheng et al. (2023) found that job crafting among kindergarten teachers fosters greater organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, Wu et al. (2023) revealed that job crafting among primary and secondary school teachers provides sufficient psychological resources for them to undertake additional tasks. Studies focusing on higher education teachers have shown that job crafting promotes work engagement and well-being and is positively correlated with job performance (Shang, 2022). Therefore, across various groups of teachers, job crafting is positively linked to teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Job crafting is related to teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese colleges.

The Mediating Role of Meaningful Work

Meaningful work is defined as the profound sense of value and purpose that teachers experience in their educational roles (Michaelson et al., 2014; Steger et al., 2012; Zeglat & Janbeik, 2019). It can be assessed through positive meaning and making through work, and greater good motivation (Zeglat & Janbeik, 2019). Meaningful work not only serves as a crucial indicator of teachers' professional identity (Richardson & Watt, 2018) but also influences their organizational citizenship behavior and job engagement (Wiroko, 2021).

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between job crafting and meaningful work (Dreer, 2023; Pimenta de Devotto et al., 2022; Shang, 2022), as well as between meaningful work and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Chandra et al., 2017; Merdiaty et al., 2023; Safitri & Sulistiyorini, 2022; Wiroko, 2021). Meaningful work frequently mediates the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and its antecedent factors. For instance, Zheng et al. (2023) highlighted the significant role of meaningful work in the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, Merdiaty et al. (2023) found that meaningful work fully mediates the relationship between organizational commitment and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and existing research, it is reasonable to infer that meaningful work may also mediate the relationship between job crafting and organizational citizenship behavior among college teachers. However, this specific relationship has yet to be explored in the literature.Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Meaningful work mediates the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese colleges.

Present Study

Previous research has indicated that the level of teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (TOCB) among college teachers in China is relatively low (Ma et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2020). Chinese college teachers

are required not only to fulfill teaching responsibilities and address the diverse needs of students but also to engage in research activities and manage various administrative duties and social obligations (Meng & Wang, 2018). This combination results in a heavy workload and significant job-related stress (Xu, 2019). To stabilize the faculty workforce and ensure the quality of higher education, it is essential to enhance the organizational citizenship behavior of college teachers (Noor, 2009).

According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), job crafting can enhance teachers' autonomy, increase the challenges they face, and improve relational support, these enhancements contribute meaningful work (Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2021). Meaningful work serves as a crucial psychological resource that further stimulates teachers' intrinsic motivation and positive work performance, ultimately fostering teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Michaelson, 2005; Selamat et al., 2017). In other words, meaningful work may act as a mediator in the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior among Chinese colleges. Therefore, this study explores the following two research questions:

Research Question 1: Is there an association between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese colleges ?

Research Question 2: Does meaningful work mediate the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese colleges?

Participants

This study comprised both a pilot test and a formal questionnaire survey. In the pilot phase, questionnaires were distributed to teachers at two universities in Shandong Province, China, resulting in 183 valid responses. Following the pilot, formal questionnaires were administered to teachers at four additional universities, yielding 601 valid responses. Researchers collaborated with college administrators to disseminate invitations and questionnaire links through several online teacher groups on WeChat. These groups were organized by educational administrators from various departments with the purpose of sharing educational information and notifying teachers about training opportunities. All participants were employed at public universities. The demographic information of the participants in the formal survey is presented in Table 1. Prior to completing the questionnaire, each participant provided informed consent by submitting an online consent form.

Table1. Demographics of the Study's Participants ($N = 601$)

Demographic variables		*n*	%
Gender	Male	243	40.400
	Female	358	59.600
Age	Under 30	180	30.000
	31-40	196	32.600
	41-50	151	25.100
	Over 51	74	12.300

Job Crafting

Job crafting was measured using the scale developed by Tims et al. (2012). This 5-point Likert scale ranges from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Always") and consists of 21 items that assess how frequently teachers engage in

job crafting activities. The scale encompasses four dimensions: increasing structural job resources, decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands. The average score of the 21 items reflects the overall level of job crafting among teachers. The scale demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.923.

Meaningful Work

Meaningful work was assessed using the scale developed by Zeglat and Janbeik (2019), which has been validated for use with Chinese college teachers and shown to possess strong reliability and validity. This 10-item scale asks teachers to rate meaningful work on a scale from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). It includes two dimensions: positive meaning and making through work and greater good motivation. Following a pilot test, one reverse-scored item was removed due to inadequate item analysis results, consistent with the original scale by Zeglat and Janbeik (2019). The scale exhibited excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.953.

Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizational citizenship behavior (TOCB) among college teachers was measured using the scale developed by Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2000), which has been validated in the Chinese context and proven to be reliable and valid (Zhao et al., 2020). The original scale comprised 24 items, but two items were excluded during exploratory factor analysis due to low factor loadings, resulting in a 22-item scale. Teachers rated their TOCB on a 7-point scale from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). The scale is divided into three dimensions: extra-role behavior towards the team, extra-role behavior towards students, and extra-role behavior towards the organization. The average score of the 22 items indicates the overall level of organizational citizenship behavior among college teachers. The scale demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.971.

Control Variables

Consistent with previous research (Jenaabadi et al., 2013; Oplatka, 2009), this study controlled for teachers' gender and age.

Results

Common Method Variance (CMV)

Given that the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, there was a potential risk of common method variance (CMV) (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). To address this, Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was employed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.969 ($p < .001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Four principal components had eigenvalues exceeding 1, with the first factor accounting for 21.061% of the variance, which is below the 40% threshold. Therefore, CMV was not a significant concern in this study.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Correlation analysis revealed that job crafting was positively associated with meaningful work ($r = 0.555, p < 0.001$) and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.517, p < 0.001$). Additionally, meaningful work was positively correlated with teachers' organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.581, p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables *(N=601)*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	JC	MW	TOCB

JC	3.705	0.561	1		
MW	4.131	0.631	0.555***	1	
TOCB	5.758	0.932	0.517***	0.581***	1

Note 1 : JC: Job Crafting, MW: Meaningful Work,TOCB: Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior; *M*: Mean, *SD:* Standard deviations.

Note 2 : $p^{***} < 0.001$

Evaluating the Mediation Model

To investigate the mediation effect, we adopted the methodology proposed by Preacher et al. (2007). Specifically, we utilized the SPSS PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2017) to assess whether Meaningful Work mediates the relationship between Job Crafting and Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (TOCB) in Chinese higher education institutions. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

After controlling for participants' demographic variables—namely gender and age—Job Crafting significantly predicted both Teachers' OCB (Model 1: $B = 0.876$, $SE = 0.062$, $p < 0.001$) and Meaningful Work (Model 2: $B = 0.615$, $SE = 0.041$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, Meaningful Work was a significant predictor of TOCB (Model 3: $B = 0.631$, $SE = 0.057$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, the direct effect of Job Crafting on TOCB remained significant (Model 3: $B = 0.488$, $SE = 0.066$, $p < 0.001$).

A bias-corrected percentile Bootstrap analysis revealed that Meaningful Work partially mediates the relationship between Job Crafting and TOCB (indirect effect = 0.388, Boot $SE = 0.063$, 95% CI = [0.267, 0.511]). This mediation accounts for 30.9% of the total effect, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2.

Table 3. Testing For Mediation Effect

Predictors	Model 1 (TOCB)		Model 2 (MW)		Model 3 (TOCB)	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Constant	2.460***	0.248	1.816***	0.163	1.315***	0.248
Male	0.876	0.062	0.028	0.045	-0.061	0.062
Under 30	0.040	0.112	0.048	0.074	0.010	0.102
31-40	0.105	0.110	0.014	0.073	0.096	0.100
41-50	0.094	0.114	0.022	0.075	0.081	0.104
JC	0.876***	0.062	0.615***	0.041	0.488***	0.066

MW			0.631***	0.057
R^2	0.269	0.309	0.395	
F	43.774***	53.201***	64.629***	

Note 1 : JC: Job Crafting, MW: Meaningful Work, TOCB: Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior, *B*: Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, *SE* : Standard Error.

Note 2 : Aged 51 and above is the reference group, and female is the reference group.

Note 3 : $p^{***} < 0.001$.

Discussion

This study explores the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese universities. The findings indicate that, after controlling for demographic information, job crafting is positively correlated with teachers' organizational citizenship behavior without involving any mediating factors. Additionally, meaningful work partially mediates this relationship. The main results and their implications are discussed below.

Relationship between Job Crafting and Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Universities

Data analysis reveals a positive correlation between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese universities. This aligns with previous research (Huang et al., 2022; Siddiq et al., 2022; Tamar et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2023). While prior studies primarily focused on kindergarten and primary school teachers, this study extends the empirical evidence to college educators. Several factors may explain this relationship: First, effective job crafting increases teachers' sense of control and flexibility in their roles, making them more likely to engage in voluntary behaviors that go beyond their formal job requirements (Tamar et al., 2022). Additionally, in collectivist cultures like China, maintaining strong interpersonal relationships is crucial (Triandis et al., 1988). Teachers who actively craft their jobs often seek guidance from colleagues and leaders, which not only improves teaching quality but also provides emotional support and constructive feedback (Brenninkmeijer & Hekkert-Koning, 2015; Wang et al., 2016). Moreover, support from leaders and colleagues serves as a valuable social resource that can stimulate teachers' intrinsic motivation, encouraging them to exceed formal job expectations and exhibit higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior (Lavy, 2019; Runhaar et al., 2013). Finally, when faced with challenging work, teachers may take on greater responsibility and feel a stronger sense of influence in their roles, motivating them to contribute more significantly to their organizations (Ahmad et al., 2014). These factors collectively contribute to higher levels of teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese colleges, driven by increased autonomy, social support, and a heightened sense of responsibility.

The Mediating Role of Meaningful Work

The results demonstrate that meaningful work plays a mediating role in the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese universities. This underscores the importance of meaningful work in this dynamic (Merdiaty et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). Specifically, job crafting directly influences organizational citizenship behavior and also indirectly affects it by enhancing the sense of meaningful work. This partial mediation is consistent with the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which posits that job crafting, as a job resource, can influence organizational citizenship behavior both directly and indirectly by enhancing meaningful work—a psychological resource. Interpersonal relationships, a key social resource in job crafting (Tims et al., 2013), play a significant role in this process. By actively adjusting their interactions with colleagues, leaders, and students, teachers foster

greater cooperation and support, thereby improving the work environment and increasing efficiency (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).Under the influence of Confucian culture, Chinese college teachers place high value on harmonious interpersonal relationships (Zhu & Guo, 2021). Positive interactions resulting from job crafting efforts enhance the meaningfulness of work for teachers, which in turn boosts their organizational citizenship behavior.

In the Chinese context, college teachers often face multiple role conflicts involving research, teaching, and social services (Meng & Wang, 2018), coupled with high pressure and stringent requirements in resource acquisition and performance evaluation (Xu, 2019). These pressures can limit teachers' autonomy, increase burnout, and diminish the sense of meaningful work (Li, 2024). Consistent with previous research, this study finds that job crafting enhances the meaning of work (Shang, 2022), and meaningful work motivates teachers to exhibit organizational citizenship behavior (Merdiaty et al., 2023). This study is the first to demonstrate that meaningful work serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior among college teachers. Therefore, job crafting contributes to a heightened meaningful work, which in turn fosters greater teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese college settings.

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusions

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences between job crafting, meaningful work, and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. Future research should employ longitudinal or intervention-based designs to better understand the causal relationships among these variables. Second, all data were collected through self-reports, which may introduce bias. Future studies should consider using multi-source reports or methods to mitigate shared method variance. Finally, the study was conducted solely in Shandong Province, China, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions and cultural contexts.

Despite its limitations, this study has practical implications for higher education. First, school leaders can establish teacher-led job crafting support groups, where members regularly share and discuss their experiences and challenges related to adjusting their work. Second, school leaders can organize regular training sessions focused on career development and the sense of meaningful work. These sessions would help teachers recognize the social value and long-term significance of their work, and through case studies and experience sharing, enhance their awareness of the meaning of their work and foster emotional connections to it.

In conclusion, this study contributes to higher education management practices by highlighting the significance of enhancing job crafting and meaningful work. After controlling for demographic characteristics such as gender and age, meaningful work partially mediates the relationship between job crafting and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior in universities. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering an environment that supports job crafting and the cultivation of meaningful work to promote organizational citizenship behaviors among college teachers.

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