

exploring job crafting among construction managers in the nigerian construction industry

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Abstract:

The nature of the construction process subjects employees to excessive work demands, which, when prolonged, can lead to negative health outcomes, such as exhaustion, burnout, and poor mental health. Like other sectors, the construction industry constantly seeks ways to redesign jobs to improve employee health and well-being. One approach trending in the public health domain and emerging in the construction domain is job crafting. This study aimed to provide evidence on job crafting among construction managers by determining job crafting opportunities and examining how construction managers craft their jobs within the Nigerian context. This study employed qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews. Twelve purposively selected construction managers were interviewed, and the data were subjected to inductive content and thematic analysis using the MAXQDA software. The result revealed that construction managers in Nigeria job craft using three dimensions “task crafting”, “cognitive crafting,” and “relational crafting”. Various activities were adopted in the three job crafting dimensions; on subjecting the activities to thematic analysis, seven task crafting, five cognitive crafting and three relational crafting themes were identified. The tasking themes include incorporating technology and training subordinates; relational crafting themes include organising special events and attending social functions, conflict resolution and collegiality; cognitive crafting themes include autonomy and mental health. This exploratory study provokes the need for research into bottom-up job design approaches and highlights areas for further research on job crafting within the construction industry.

Keywords:

Job redesign, Job design, Job crafting, Construction Managers, Mental Health, Construction Industry.

1 Introduction

The construction industry is highly competitive and labour-intensive, with an increased risk of excessive and challenging job demands (AlMemari *et al.*, 2023). Construction professionals often experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and lower levels of accomplishment due to work-related stressors, such as increased workload, low job support, low job control, work-life imbalance (Townsend *et al.*, 2012) and poor interpersonal relationships (Love *et al.*, 2010; Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023; Nwaogu and Chan, 2021; Townsend *et al.*, 2012). These stressors could deteriorate job performance, mental health, and job engagement and increase turnover intention. Poor mental health or mental distress is associated with poorer performance, poor well-being, absenteeism, presenteeism, safety risks and increased employee turnover (Kotera *et al.*, 2020; Nwaogu and Chan, 2021). Meanwhile, protracted poor mental health is a risk factor for suicidality and eventual suicide (Nwaogu and Chan, 2021). The prevalence of poor mental health and suicide rates in the construction industry is concerning (Milner *et al.*, 2015; Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023).

Among construction professionals, 48.4% prevalence of anxiety and 18.5% depression was reported in 2006 (Campbell, 2006). In 2020, the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) deduced an 87% prevalence of anxiety, 70% of depression, and 26% of suicide ideation among a sample of construction professionals (Rees-Evans, 2020). Among construction site supervisors, Nwaogu *et al.* (2023) deduced a 55.1%, 16%, 9.8% prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation; 72%, 36.9%, and 15.3% prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among tradesmen. Like every other country, the construction industry is pivotal to the Nigerian economy (Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023), but there appears to be a prevalence of poor mental health symptoms among on-site construction supervisors (Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023), which can mitigate that. Maintaining good mental health and well-being is essential. For that reason, it is targeted in United Nation's sustainable development goals by Goal 3, "ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all" (Kotera *et al.*, 2020; Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023). The construction industry must ensure its workforce is mentally healthy because poor mental health affects employees' performance and the organisation's productivity and ability to meet economic needs (Thomas *et al.*, 2020; Nwaogu and Chan, 2021).

Several primary, secondary and tertiary intervention measures have been proposed to keep the construction workforce agile and productive for individual and organisational benefit. Those primary intervention measures include job redesign strategies such as reducing workload measures or boosting job resources through job crafting or job sculpting to shift the perception of employees, while the secondary intervention measures entail boosting personal resources (such as coping strategies and resilience (Nwaogu *et al.*, 2022; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). However, because the construction industry is highly demanding and time-bound, with the need to optimise scarce resources, adopting a primary intervention that would entail reducing workload might not be feasible. Several scholars have proposed that employees dealing with job stressors and their effects could benefit from improving job control as a job resource by adopting a bottom-up approach against the traditional top-down approach.

A top-down job design approach is the traditional approach that involves the organisations (management and the human resources department) setting targets, job tasks and providing resources for each employee (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) further noted that, unlike the top-down approach, employees proactively change their job tasks in the bottom-up approach to make their work more meaningful. In the traditional view of work (top-down job design approach), managers assume the role of crafting jobs for others, but with job crafting, employees take the role of job crafter for themselves (Leana *et al.*, 2009). There have been calls and attempts to redesign jobs in the construction industry to mitigate stress and its adverse effect (e.g., Yip and Rowlinson, 2009). However, they have followed the top-down approach. One bottom-up approach that has been explored in other industries, such as public health, is job crafting (Roczniewska *et al.*, 2023; De Devotto *et al.*, 2020; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Harbridge *et al.*, 2022; Harbridge *et al.*, 2023). It is gaining attention in construction literature (Ni *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2020; AlMemari *et al.*, 2023).

Job crafting refers to self-initiated changes to one's job or workplace (Shi *et al.*, 2022). Job crafting is an employee-driven job redesign strategy that enables employees to take charge of their work to achieve a better person-job fit (Roczniewska *et al.*, 2023). It holds a promising potential for employee well-being (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Promoting job crafting will be a good point of primary intervention because job crafting is reported to boost employee morale (Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023; Nwaogu and Chan, 2021), increase resilience, mental health and well-being among the working population (De Devotto *et al.*, 2020; Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Job crafting can change the perception of the job since it increases job autonomy or control. Literature suggests that increasing job control autonomy and flexibility

minimises the negative impact of stress as it allows employees to reconcile work and nonwork demands (Uglanova and Dettmers, 2022). Job crafting is an employee-driven job redesign strategy that enables employees to take charge of their work to achieve a better person-job fit (Roczniewska *et al.*, 2023).

Job redesign has been a recurrent recommendation for mitigating work stress and poor mental health in the construction industry. Although most of the attempts at job redesign followed a top-bottom approach, job crafting is gaining attention in the construction industry (see Ni *et al.*, 2022; Nwaogu and Chan, 2021; Thomas *et al.*, 2020; AlMemari *et al.*, 2023). Thomas *et al.* (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of job-crafting intervention in improving employee work engagement among employees in the South African construction industry. AlMemari *et al.* (2023) investigated how job crafting impacts job embeddedness at different career stages among construction professionals in the UAE. Ni *et al.* (2022) examined the mediating ability of job crafting and perceived work meaningfulness to mitigate unsafe behaviours among new-generation construction workers in China. Nwaogu and Chan (2021) and Nwaogu *et al.* (2022), considering a multi-level, multimodal approach to mental health intervention in the construction workplace, examined the perceived importance of job crafting among several intervention measures. All these studies examined job crafting and/or its effect quantitatively without considering specific actions taken to impact a change. Also, the effectiveness and opportunities of job crafting as well as actions taken, are not unified across cultural backgrounds. However, prior studies have been conducted in other jurisdictions. Studies investigating job crafting wholly and in the Nigerian construction context appear scarce. Based on the foregoing, this study fills the gap by examining job crafting strategies among construction professionals in Nigeria and employing a qualitative method to determine some actions taken to job craft within the Nigerian context.

Considering that the perception of job crafting differs because some employees do not find a need to craft their jobs (Harbridge *et al.*, 2022; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and how employees would craft their jobs would differ across work contexts, it becomes imperative to get the perception of construction managers on job crafting and its impact on their mental health. This study aims to provide evidence about job crafting among construction managers. To achieve that aim, the objectives include (i) to determine job crafting opportunities in the Nigerian construction industry and (ii) to examine how construction managers craft their jobs within the Nigerian context. This study provides information for better decision-making regarding designing jobs during the recruitment process or redesigning jobs for existing employees. This exploratory study provokes the need for research into bottom-up job design approaches and highlights areas for further research on job crafting within the construction industry.

2 Literature Review

2.1.1 Job Crafting and its Benefits

Job crafting is a bottom-up process that results in job redesign (Harbridge *et al.*, 2022). In job crafting, employees can tweak their jobs to increase resources and reduce or evenly spread demands to support well-being (DeLongchamp, 2020). With job crafting, employees can enhance the meaning of their work and optimise their well-being (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Since employees align their work with their needs and values using job crafting, adopting this job redesign strategy will likely result in more fulfilling work, offer greater opportunities to establish relationships, and enhance the individual purpose (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) noted that employees can turn their jobs into occupational calling through job crafting. This is because it can shift motivation to work beyond financial benefits to a state where motivation is attained from the intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction of the work itself (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014).

2.1.2 Job Crafting Theory

The contents and techniques of job-crafting interventions depend on the theory adopted (Roczniowska *et al.*, 2023). According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), employees craft their job using three dimensions: task, relational, and cognitive crafting. Task crafting consists of physical changes individuals make regarding the number of activities, scope, and type of tasks so their job better fits their personality (Topa and Aranda-Carmena, 2022; DeLongchamp, 2020). The relational crafting includes changes in relationships with colleagues (e.g., peers, supervisors), interactions with clients or suppliers and establishing more contacts. Cognitive crafting involves altering how employees perceive their job, so they see it as part of a larger organisational effort (Harbridge *et al.*, 2023; Topa and Aranda-Carmena, 2022). However, Leana *et al.* (2009) noted that Wrzesniewski and Dutton's approach presents job crafting as an exclusively individualistic activity when in actual sense employees carry out similar work processes, and sometimes work together to customize or modify their work.

Going by Leana *et al.* (2009), job crafting consists of individual crafting and collaborative crafting. Individual crafting involves each employee altering their tasks, while in collaborative crafting, employees work together to review and alter the work process (Topa and Aranda-Carmena, 2022). Leana *et al.* (2009) further opined that collaborative job crafting is essential to job crafting theory because it incorporates the social embeddedness that promotes and prevents individualistic behaviour. A few studies have found collaborative crafting to predict job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while individual crafting did not predict such outcomes (Topa and Aranda-Carmena, 2022). Tims *et al.* (2013) suggested that job crafting behaviours utilized by employees are intended to (i) increase their structural resources, (ii) increase their social resources, (iii) reduce disruptive demands, or (iv) increase challenging demands.

3 Research Methodology

This paper is exploratory, thus, adopts the qualitative methodology to achieve the aim of the study. Qualitative methodology measures what is known or past and discovers the reason behind a pattern (Busetto *et al.*, 2020). Similar to Ni *et al.* (2022), this study combines Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Leana *et al.* (2009)' job crafting dimensions. The three job crafting dimensions of Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), "task, relational, and cognitive crafting" were used to achieve Objective 1. Objective 2 was achieved by determining how construction managers crafted their jobs and if it took an individual or collaborative form. The study employed semi-structured interviews using questions adapted from Harbridge *et al.* (2022) and probed whether the actions involved individual or collaborative means (see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15se34tmHKhh7YM68eSQI267dkiYTfDbf/view?usp=sharing>). Twelve purposively sampled construction professionals practising as construction managers and duly registered with their professional bodies were contacted with a brief of the research. Based on the response and schedule, a semi-structured interview was conducted for approximately 25 minutes via Zoom. The interview data were subjected to inductive content analysis using the MAXQDA software. The respondents were construction practitioners sourced from the Nigerian Institute of Building (NIOB) and had participated in research on mental health. For a respondent to be eligible, they had to be actively involved in an on-site supervisory role at a construction firm and indicate their willingness to participate in the study. The data collected were handled with confidentiality.

4 Findings and Discussion

The twelve (12) construction managers consist of ten males and two females with designated titles as senior builder, site engineer, or project manager. All the respondents were engaged

in on-site construction management duties and had been practising for a minimum of 8 years and a maximum of 15 years. This suggests that the interviewees have the requisite experience to provide a reliable response.

When asked, “have you heard of the job redesigning term job crafting”, only five (5) respondents (5/12) appeared to have heard the term “job crafting”. For the remaining seven (7) respondents, in order to know if they can provide adequate responses, we explained what crafting entails, and they all indicated that they are conversant with the process but not the term. This indicates that although attention to job crafting in the construction industry is still growing, job crafting practices may be predominant in the construction workplace in Nigeria.

4.1 Job Crafting

All 12 respondents (100%) provided at least a task, cognitive and relational crafting comment to the interview questions.

4.1.1 Task crafting

As detailed in Table 1, seven (7) task crafting themes were identified, namely: incorporate technology, revise work processes to eliminate lapses, initiate new projects or portfolios, revise procurement plans to save cost, quality control and improvement, training subordinates, and provide suggestions to top management. These themes summarise what construction managers did to craft their tasks. It was also deduced that the task crafting activities involved individual and collaborative crafting for most of the tasking themes. This agrees with Leana *et al.* (2009), who argued that job crafting is not exclusively an individualistic activity, but in actual sense, employees sometimes work together to customize or modify their work.

Among the task crafting themes, the ability to train subordinates was the most common activity, followed by “revise work processes to eliminate lapses” and “provide suggestions to top management”. Similar to Harbridge *et al.* (2022) among nurses, this suggests that construction managers were actively task crafting by initiating tasks based on their drive, passion and level of authority.

Table 1: Task Crafting themes and exemplar comments

S/N	Themes	No. of responses	Comments	Individual or Collaborative crafting
1	Incorporate technology	1	I introduced the need to communicate with clients using customized bulk SMS. Years ago, I doubled as site supervisor and facility officer and was meant to send out client messages. I ran the advantage of utilizing customized SMS through the administrative manager in terms of giving the firm a good look. The client feedback made the company adopt it to communicate with clients.	Collaborative
2	Revise work processes to eliminate lapses	9	I get to modify the work schedules of craftsmen and subordinate supervisors. Liberty to alter the number of craftsmen or other resources assigned to a job to ensure time and quality are met	Individual Individual
3	Initiate new projects or portfolios	2	I suggested retraining craftsmen and running a graduate work blending programme to help fresh graduates settle into the workplace. I identified the need to have a block industry on the construction site. I work with a real estate firm, and for years we sourced all our sandcrete blocks from several block industries even when we could produce blocks and ensure better quality control.	Collaborative Collaborative

4	Revise procurement plans to save cost	8	I vet material requisition and procurement plans to save costs.	Individual
5	Quality control and improvement	6	I organise and organize material procurement.	Individual
			I can approve materials before they are procured, accepted, or delivered to the site.	Individual
			I have the liberty to modify the construction process accordingly to improve quality.	Individual
6	Training subordinates (craftsmen, assistants and interns)	10	I ensure an intern is on the site when executing a new project, and the concept of setting is explained during a new project.	Individual
			I explain structural and service drawings to interns and graduate-level supervisors. Other senior supervisors and I do this when the iron benders lay reinforcement or when mechanical and service engineers install their pipes. They are sometimes attached to mechanical and electrical subcontractors.	Collaborative
			I introduced a Friday recap for the construction department, where we discuss construction activities and procedures with interns and graduate-level supervisors.	Collaborative
7	Provide suggestions to top management	9	I share my ideas on possible portfolios that the firm can start.	Collaborative
			During weekly staff meetings or outside the meetings, I make suggestions that strengthen my department and project management duties.	Collaborative
			I double as my firm's health and safety officer; I suggested that we should have games evening twice a month, which was considered with improvement. Now, we have games evening on the site once a month and a Jog June where everyone will jog. Someone else suggested skipping.	Collaborative
			I suggest to my CEO areas to cut operational costs without impacting quality.	Collaborative

4.1.2 Cognitive Crafting

The interview data collected for the cognitive crafting was categorized into two aspects: perceived adverse impact of the job and cognitive crafting activities. As detailed in Table 2, the adverse impact included poor mental health and well-being and work-life imbalance concerns, with complaints about lack of work-life balance being most recurrent. This is not surprising because work-life imbalance, as well as excessive work demands and long working hours, which give rise to it, are risk factors for mental health and well-being in the construction industry (Nwaogu *et al.*, 2023; Rees-Evans, 2020). Irrespective of the perceived negative impact of the job, it was deduced that construction managers could alter their perception of their job using some activities, actions or opportunities.

As indicated in Table 3, five (5) cognitive crafting themes were identified: “passion and autonomy”, “significance of work to the organization”, “impact on life”, “mental health”, and “work-life balance”. The cognitive crafting activities involve individual or collaborative decisions but are majorly collaborative. Activities that increase “passion and autonomy” were the most recurrent. It appears that activities that allowed construction managers to fulfil their passion and exercise autonomy gave them the morale needed to perceive their jobs differently. All the activities engaged in cognitive job craft focused on the employee and their firm. Among nurses, Harbridge *et al.* (2022) deduced that activities that changed how they see their jobs were more associated with clients than organization-related. Contrary to that, in this study, all the strategies engaged for cognitive crafting were associated with the organization.

Table 2: Perceived Cognitive Impact of Job

S/N	Themes	No. of responses	Comments
1	Poor mental health and well-being	7	Sometimes, we cast overnight and still have to work the next day. It is definitely stressful on normal working days. We are on a new project, so those instances come up almost every week. Although I get anxious about the job every day, the level of anxiety increases on concrete placement days because I do not want operational or safety issues to arise before or after the placement. It is stressful, headaches, leg pain, and fear. Pressure from work made me develop anger. I almost started reacting to my wife and kids with rage. I developed a poor eating attitude because of work, so when I get to eat, I overeat. I slept while driving owing to stress from work. I had an accident, which caused a shift in my workplace. Imagine having a boss who insults employees. Employees can be fired at any time. I am always scared I could be the next person because anything could upset him. I am always tense and sad when I remember.
2	Work-life imbalance	9	No work-life balance. I work a full day on Saturdays. I work on two Sundays every month and sometimes on public holidays. There is absolutely no work-life balance.

Table 3: Cognitive Crafting themes and exemplar comments

S/N	Themes	No. of responses	Comments	Individual or Collaborative crafting
1	Passion and autonomy	10	I do training alongside my job responsibilities. I like the training and retraining opportunities I get with subordinates.	Individual
			I get to change the task schedule and allocate resources (human and material) as deemed fit.	Individual
2	Significance of work to the organization	3	My CEO appreciates my work. I now report directly to him. He trusts me with material requisition and procurement. It makes me fulfilled.	Collaborative
			I resigned and was called back for an employment offer with a salary increase.	
			I had to take a break from my full-time employment position to obtain a postgraduate, and while away, the Executive Director called me for a Private Practice opportunity.	Collaborative
3	Impact on life	1	The pay is low, but I am entitled to a 2.5% commission on the purchase price when I get a client to procure a property (house or land). If a client purchases the property, it is a jackpot for me. I am also building capacity in real estate sales, so I am grateful for the opportunity.	Collaborative
4	Mental health	3	I slept while driving owing to stress from work. I had an accident, which caused a shift in my workplace. Now, if anyone is fatigued and stressed, the employee can ask for a break.	Collaborative
			I love my job cos it gives me time to balance work and family. In my position as project manager, I can resume after traffic. It isn't an absolute 8-5 pm or 8-6 pm job. I just have to meet schedules, and all work sections are subcontracted. Therefore, I am not necessarily fatigued or stressed from work and travel time.	Collaborative
			Our game evening and the Jog June are the absolute best. So we can unwind and relate like family. We laugh and giggle and not the work/task discussions.	Collaborative
5	Work-life balance	1	I get to balance work and family. I resume after traffic, it isn't an absolute 8-5 pm or 8-6 pm job.	Collaborative

4.1.3 Relational Crafting

The activities engaged in relational crafting were majorly individualistic. As detailed in Table 4, three (3) relational crafting themes were identified: “special events and social functions”, “conflict resolution and collegiality”, and “mentoring subordinates”. All the themes were focused on work interactions. “Special events and social functions” appeared to be a typical relational crafting behaviour in the firms represented. This indicates that construction managers tend to craft their jobs by organizing or participating in special events or social functions, which could, in turn, promote healthy workplace interactions and job meaningfulness. All the relationships deduced were mainly collegial; thus, this result differs from Harbridge *et al.* (2022) on registered nurses who reported some employee-client relationships.

Table 4: Relational crafting themes and exemplar comments

S/N	Themes	No. of responses	Comments	Individual or Collaborative crafting
1	Special events and social functions	11	I initiated a welfare committee, so when employees in my department have something to do, like during birthdays, we get the company to buy a cake or an agreed gift for the colleague. We organize a mid-year party and/or end-of-year party. We attend functions together, like inviting colleagues to family functions.	Individual Collaborative Individual
2	Conflict resolution & collegiality	4	Conflict resolution is on average. Although we do not always have poor interpersonal relationships, conflicts and disagreements arise a few times. The firm does not have good conflict resolution. However, within my department, I try to resolve conflicts between my team members, whether it involves me or not. I ensure that I do not have bad energy towards anyone.	Individual Individual Individual
3	Mentoring subordinates	7	I am intentional about the training and retraining on my site. I see it as a medium to mentor, especially because I did not get that opportunity when I started working in the industry, so I help them integrate into the system calmly. I motivate my subordinates to upgrade themselves academically and through professional certification.	Individual Individual

5 Conclusion and Further Research

This study qualitatively explored a bottom-up job redesign approach in the Nigerian construction industry by determining job crafting opportunities and examining how construction managers craft their jobs within the Nigerian context. Twelve purposively selected construction managers were interviewed, and data collected were subjected to inductive content and thematic analysis. The study found that job crafting opportunities were indeed common in the Nigerian construction industry as construction managers were job crafting in all dimensions “task crafting”, “cognitive crafting” and “relational crafting”. It was deduced that a range of activities was adopted along the three job crafting dimensions and that activities in each dimension took an individual and collaborative approach. The activities were grouped using thematic analysis, after which seven (7) task crafting themes, five (5) cognitive crafting themes and three (3) relational crafting themes were identified.

The tasking themes include incorporating technology and training subordinates; relational crafting themes include organizing special events and attending social functions, conflict resolution and collegiality; cognitive crafting themes include passion and autonomy, the

impact of work on life, and mental health. Unstructured training of subordinates was a common activity in all job crafting dimensions. Thus, allowing construction managers to train and mentor in the construction workplace can boost their sense of fulfilment, morale and improve their mental health. Since training of subordinates was recurrent, human resource managers may need to explore sculpting it into their job roles. There were complaints about poor mental health and work-life imbalance, which signals that the Nigerian construction industry must implement measures to mitigate those risk factors. Proactively providing chances for job crafting and other bottom-up approaches could help.

This study did not test any relationship; further studies should consider adopting a mixed-method approach among construction managers to test the relationship between job crafting, job satisfaction and mental health or well-being. Such studies will likely provide new evidence and information on job crafting activities. Those findings can be used to determine how construction jobs can be sculpted by utilizing deeply embedded life interests to promote health and well-being. This study provides information for better decision-making regarding designing jobs during the recruitment process or redesigning jobs for existing employees. This exploratory study provokes the need for research into bottom-up job design approaches and highlights areas for further research on job crafting within the construction industry.

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