

Leadership Driven Job Crafting: Exploring the Mediating Role of Meaningfulness between Servant Leadership and Job Crafting

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ABSTRACT:

The current study was undertaken to ascertain the mediating role of meaningfulness linking servant leadership (SL) to job crafting behavior (JCB) of the employees. The study also endeavors to find the association between meaningfulness and JCB. This study collected data from 689 service sector employees through survey design. Data were processed and analyzed through PLS-SMART and SPSS. mainly. The findings manifested a relation between meaningfulness and employees' job crafting behavior. Similarly, SL significantly impacted both meaningfulness and employees' job crafting behavior. The results also unraveled the mediating role of meaningfulness between SL and JCB of the employees. The research has ascertained the previously unexplored mediating role of meaningfulness between SL and JCB. It is also the first study that attempted to explore meaningfulness as a stimulus to job crafting behavior.

JEL Classification: O10, O15

Keywords: Job Crafting, Servant leadership, Meaningfulness, Service Sector

INTRODUCTION:

The ever-changing world renders the stable competitive edge untenable; the firms, working in a changing world, are hard-pressed to adapt to survive and grow (Dima, Begu, Vasilescu & Maassen, 2018; Reeves & Deimler, 2011). The havoc played by COVID-19 with numerous businesses is a case illustrating the challenging potential of change. To face the uncertainty causing changes, firms have realized that employees can play a useful role (Katsaros, Tsirikas & Kosta, 2020; Mahmood & Mubarik, 2020). Firms, using the potential of employees, can work to at least ward off the hardships caused by changes or at most use the changes for their advantage. However, harnessing the real potential of employees itself entails a great change in dealing with employees (Sherringham & Unhelkar, 2020). The methods meant for the manufacturing economy cannot be used to deal with the issues of the knowledge economy (Issahaka & Lines, 2020; Wu & Lee, 2017). The firms, working in a stable environment, had the luxury to chart the path for the employees using their accumulated knowledge. One of the accepted norms of the manufacturing economy was manager-led job design. With the rapidly evolving changes, the

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manager, because of fast staling knowledge, does not possess the knowledge to design a job for the employees (Grant & Parker, 2009). Now it is employees, instead of managers, who actively lead their job design (Menachery, 2018). These employee-led modifications in job design are collectively known as job crafting behavior (JCB) (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). JCB due to its ability to bring positive organizational changes is rapidly getting acceptance. Job crafting positively influences employee performance (Guan & Frenkel, 2018), creativity (van de Riet, Le Blanc, & Oerlemans, 2015), and innovation (Sharma & Nambudiri, 2020).

The overarching usefulness of job crafting has invoked the interest of academicians to search for the determinants of job crafting. The search, beginning with the role of proactive personality to affect job crafting behavior (Bakker, Tims & Derks, 2012), soon included factors like job autonomy (Sekiguchi, Li & Hosomi, 2017; Slemp, Kern & Vella-Brodrick, 2015) and other contextual factors. One of the contextual factors is leadership. There have been studies linking job crafting with different leadership types such as; transformational leadership (Oprea, Miulescu & Iliescu, 2020; Hetland, Hetland, Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Wang, Demerouti & Le Blanc, 2017), transactional leadership (Oprea et al., 2020). The role of servant leadership (SL) in promoting employees' job crafting behavior is understudied; to date, there have been only two research works linking SL and job crafting (Harju, Schaufeli & Hakanen, 2018; Bavik, Bavik & Tang, 2017).

Moreover, there is a need to understand the linking mechanism between SL and JCB. To date, there exists no study that attempted to study the process used by SL to effectuate JCB among employees. An interesting linking mechanism between SL and JCB is job meaningfulness. Though JCB is purported to improve work meaningfulness, the current study proposes to use meaningfulness as a stimulus to trigger JCB. Servant leadership, through its employee-centeredness (Greenleaf, 2002), serving behavior (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008), and empowering way of leading (Patterson, 2003) can make the job a meaningful one for the employees. We propose that the augmented meaningfulness; working as a motivational construct (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010), and a resource (Hobfoll, 2002) can trigger JCB. So instead of drawing meaningfulness out of JCB, the current study uses meaningfulness as a stimulus to invoke JCB.

The current study contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, it adds to the literature of JCB as it tries to explore another linking mechanism between SL and JCB. Second, this study established meaningfulness as a stimulant to JCB thus added new insight to the literature of JCB that has empirical evidence suggestive of JCB causing meaningfulness

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant Leadership

The historical breakthrough in leader aggrandizing leadership came when Greenleaf came up with the idea of SL. A leadership genre that instead of power uses service to influence the followers (Greenleaf, 2002). The follower-directed leadership works for the growth of the employees and readily brings them into decision making and process serving and leading become intertwined (Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). Though the beginning of SL almost coincides with the start of transformational leadership, the initial success of transformational leadership had dwarfed SL into oblivion.

Grappled with a rising number of scandals towards the end of the 20th century, transformational leadership began to infuse doubt despite its effectiveness. The ensuing search for a humble leadership triggered renewed interest in SL towards the end of the 20th century. This newfound interest resulted in a clear definition of servant leadership. Additionally, several models attempting to describe SL emerged. Combining the piled-up narrative of SL, Eva and other scholars defined SL as other-oriented leadership employing one-on-one prioritizing of followers' needs and interests and intend to serve others not only in the ambit of the organization but the overall society (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck & Liden, 2019).

Moreover, if the servant models developed so far are summarized, the unifying picture will depict SL as a leader with the following characteristics; service (Greenleaf, 2002), character (integrity, honesty, and credibility) (Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002), vision, shared decision making (Page & Wong, 2000), and community building (Laub, 1999). Plentiful studies have provided empirical proof for the usefulness of SL for the employees and organization (Aboramadan, Dahleez & Hamad, 2020; Bavik et al., 2017; Donia, Raja, Panaccio & Wang, 2016).

Meaningful Work

The cognitive ability profusely available to humans enables them to relate the two seemingly unrelated ideas. The same cognitive power pushes them to search for meaning in every aspect of their lives. As work consumes a large portion of our time and resources, the meaningfulness of work assumes a sizable proportion of overall meaningfulness (Arnold, Bakker, Scharp, Breevaart & de Vries, 2020). The absence of meaning in work for a traditional craftsman might be death for him. The climax was created by the absence of meaningful work for the industrial workers of the 20th century, despite not being so tragic, yet managed to dissipate their interest and motivation for the work. Fortunately, the realization of the importance of meaning soon came back. Hackman and Oldham while developing the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) proposed that skill variety, skill identity, and skill significance when in abundance improves the meaningfulness of the job which in turn culminates in increased motivation (Hackman, 1980). Meaningful work is often regarded to be more important than job security, promotion, and salary (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019). In other words, to Steger and colleagues, meaningful work is the real motivator today (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy & Steger, 2019; Steger, 2016). Meaningful work is the work that along with being significant holds positive meaning for the worker (Rosso et al., 2010). For the current study, meaningfulness is defined as the value of work concerning a person's ideas (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Job Crafting Behavior

The employee undertaken alterations at the job is termed as JCB. Initially, JCB was defined in terms of roles. According to the role-based definition of job crafting, it is the employee-initiated changes in relation, task, and cognitive boundaries of the job (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As jobs are defined in terms of demands and resources, Tims and colleagues came up with a resource-based definition of JCB. According to the resource-based definition, JCB is the employee-initiated changes in demands and resources (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2012). The changes in job demands manifest themselves as increasing challenging job demands and decreasing higher job demands while resource crafting demonstrates itself in the shape of growing structural and social job resources (Tims et al., 2012). JCB, originally intended to improve wellbeing of the employees (Robledo, Zappalà & Topa, 2019), is found

to be pro-organization. It is found to increase employee productivity, employee creativity, and performance (Dubbelt, Demerouti & Rispens, 2019; van de Riet et al., 2015).

Servant Leadership and Meaningful Work

According to Pratt and Ashforth, when employees regard their work roles to be enriched and consider their relationship with the colleagues to be a worthy one, they are in a transcending state of meaningfulness (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003); the state in which they are ready to work for others. SL strives to work for both relations and role enrichment. First, SL explicitly works for community development (Liden et al., 2008); SL regards work to be a conduit to serve the community (Spears, 1998). Additionally, SL works for harmony among the employees; it does not use one against the other through in-group and out-group distinction (Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski & Chaudhry, 2009). Working under such leadership coalesces the employees and resultantly they have enriched relations. Second, SL works for the enrichment of job roles. SL due to its focus on the development of the employees and participative and empowering style of working enables the employees to have enriched job roles (Page & Wong, 2000). When employees find their leadership to be truly interested in their growth and development and actively work for this goal, they begin to regard their work to be the source to accomplish their own goal. Thus, they see their work to be the conduit to reach their own goal and begin to value it greatly. Moreover, the participative and empowering way of dealing causes the work to be meaningful in two possible ways. One of the conduits to increase meaningfulness is the leadership empowering style; when asked about their opinion in decision making, employees begin to value themselves. The other way of augmenting the meaningfulness emanates from the dealing of SL. Working with leadership that shows genuine interest in employees' wellbeing and growth gives a sense of bonding that in turn enriches the relationship with the leadership. So, SL due to its focus on employee development and empowering and participative working style make employees regard themselves and their work to be meaningful. There is empirical evidence that found meaningfulness is influenced by ethical leadership (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020), empowering leadership (Matsuo, Arai & Matsuo, 2019), LMX (Tummers & Knies, 2013), and spiritual leadership (Tourish, 2019). All the above-given leadership styles are relation-based leadership as SL is also a relational leadership, therefore, it can be expected to have a similar effect. The theoretical underpinning and empirical evidence develop the following hypothesis.

H1: SL is related to meaningful work.

Servant Leadership and Job Crafting

According to the theory of conservation of resources (COT), an employee uses the current resource to create more resources (Hobfoll, 2002). The current study conjectures that SL due to its employee-centeredness can be regarded as a resource. Finding such a useful resource in their repertoire, the employees will use it to build new resources. JCB can work as a conduit for creating more resources (van den Heuvel, Demerouti & Peeters, 2015). As JCB is a deviation; though empirically shown to be a beneficial one for employees and organization, needs support from the leadership. The required support is readily extended by SL as it gives empowerment to the employees and is ready to stand at the back at the time of crisis (Page & Wong, 2000). There is also empirical evidence confirming the influence of SL on employees' JCB (Harju et al., 2018; Bavik et al., 2017). So, it can be surmised that SL will positively influence employees' proclivity to indulge in JCB.

H2: SL is related to job employees' JCB.

Meaningfulness and Job Crafting Behavior

Though one of the JCB processes employed by role job crafting is cognitive crafting through which an employee alters the meaning of work with an intent to enhance work meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), the current study uses meaningful work as a stimulus for JCB. Perceiving work to be a meaningful one has the potential to motivate employees (Rosso et al., 2010). No need to say the absence of meaningfulness in the job is enough to drain out all the motivation for the job. In the proceeding lines, an attempt to link meaningfulness with job crafting will be made. The cognitive theory of motivation says that a person experiences cognitive motivation when there is a congruence between self-concept and the environment or activity the person performs. Employees, viewing their job to be meaningful, experience exuberance as they find themselves to be engaged in the activity they regard important that results in the congruence of the self and the activity. Thus motivated, employees not only take more interest in the activity on hand, they also seek to indulge in proactive work behavior (Ozdevecioglu, Demirtas & Kurt, 2015; Supanti & Butcher, 2019). The employee with a meaningful job seeks to increase the meaningfulness of the job by bringing changes to the demands and resources used for the job.

H3: Meaningfulness is related to JCB.

Meaningfulness as a Mediator between Servant Leadership and Job Crafting Behavior

The study further proposes to investigate the mediating role of meaningfulness linking SL with the employees' JCB. SL undisputedly intends to improve a lot of the employees as it enhances the growth and wellbeing of the employees. One of the possible ways to improve the growth and wellbeing of the employees is to push them towards JCB that in turn improves the wellbeing and growth of the employees due to its wellbeing and learning enhancing potential. To forward meaningfulness as a linking mechanism, we claim that an employee viewing its work not to be meaningful will fester and hardly do what he is required to do. On the other hand, meaningfulness will work both as a personal resource and a motivator. Employees, on one hand, due to the motivating potential of meaningfulness will be ready to indulge in proactive work behavior to benefit the organization such as JCB (Rosso et al., 2010). Additionally, supporting and empowering practices of SL along with its community-building goal make employees feel working on a meaningful job; this meaningfulness works as a personal resource that employees can use to build upon the existing resource (Hobfoll, 2002). One of the ways to further augment the meaningfulness of a job is to indulge in JCB (Amy Wrzesniewski, Berg & Dutton, 2010). So, in light of the cognitive theory of motivation and COR, a mediating role for meaningfulness is proposed between SL and JCB.

H4: Meaningfulness mediates the relationship between SL and JCB.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents

The respondents of the study came from the employees of the service sector across Pakistan. Out of the initially reached 750 employees, 690 responded with a response rate of 92%. The profile of the respondent given in Table 1, shows that 64% of the respondents were males

while 36 % were female. Additionally, Table1, depicts that with 37.9 undergrads, the remaining respondents are either graduates or post-grads. The average age of the respondents is 31 years while the average job span is 7.5 years.

Table 1:
Respondents Profile

Variable	Values	n (689)
Gender		%
	Male	64.00
	Female	36.00
Qualification		%
	Undergrads	37.90
	Grads	53.60
	Postgrads	08.60
Age		Mean
		31.29
	Overall Job Experience (Years)	7.549
	Job Experience in the Current Field (Years)	5.123
Job Experience in the Current Organization (Years)		3.548

Measure

All of the constructs used in the study namely; SL, JCB, and meaning were measured on 7 points Likert scale. SL's shorter scale known as SL-7, which has 7 items, was used to measure SL. The representative item of SL-7 is: 'My leader makes my career development a priority.' (Liden et al., 2015). Job meaningfulness was measured through meaningfulness developed by Spreitzer (Spreitzer, 1995). The scale has three items; one of the representative items is: 'The work I do is meaningful to me.' Moreover, job crafting is measured with 15 items scales developed by Tims and colleagues (Tims et al., 2012). This study also included gender, experience, age, and education as control variables in the study.

RESULTS

Measurement Model

The trustworthiness of the structural model can only be established if the measures used to develop it is of good quality. To this end, the constructs used in the study were evaluated for their psychometric qualities. In light of the revealed results, they are being discussed one by one. First, the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were compared. To term a construct to have internal consistency, it is required to have alpha and CR to be at least 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The results contained in table 2, how all constructs have values for both the parameters to be in excess of 0.7. Thus, the reliability of the constructs is established. Second, to ascertain the validity of the constructs both at item level and construct level, item loadings and average variance extracted were computed (AVE). For item level convergent validity, the item loading on the related construct is required to be 0.7 or more. The loadings as given in Table 2 show all the item loadings to be more than 0.7. Moreover, the values of AVE, a measure of construct level convergent validity are permitted to be at least 0.5 (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014; Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). The results contained in table 2 show the values to be in excess of 0.5

as the minimum AVE is 0.592. Finally, to establish the discriminant validity of the constructs, hetero-trait mono-trait (HTMT) ratios were computed for the pairs of the constructs used in the study. The result shown in table-3 manifests that all the ratios are less than 0.85, the maximum allowable limit for the HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2:
Reliability and Convergent Validity

	JC	Meaningfulness	SL	Alpha	CR	AVE
JC1	0.749			0.951	0.956	0.592
JC6	0.705					
JC7	0.751					
JC8	0.760					
JC9	0.719					
JC10	0.757					
JC11	0.823					
JC12	0.828					
JC13	0.809					
JC2	0.763					
JC14	0.759					
JC15	0.767					
JC3	0.799					
JC4	0.788					
JC5	0.752					
M1		0.916		0.914	0.946	0.853
M2		0.936				
M3		0.918				
SL1			0.776	0.921	0.937	0.679
SL2			0.840			
SL3			0.810			
SL4			0.863			
SL5			0.828			
SL6			0.840			
SL7			0.806			

Table 3:
HTMT Criteria

	JC	Meaning
Job Crafting		
Meaning	0.652	
Servant Leadership	0.743	0.579

Structural Model

The process of testing the proposed structural relations is preceded by the strength of correlations among constructs. Too low values of correlations render the testing of structural relations useless. On the other hand, too high correlation values, especially between the independent variables, brings in the issue of multicollinearity. Table 4 shows the correlation values to have

moderate strength as the values of correlation range between 0.531 and 0.698. The moderately strong correlations show the appropriateness of testing the structural relations. Moreover, the moderate strength of correlations points to the absence of multicollinearity. However, to further strengthen the claim of non-existent multicollinearity, variance inflations factors (VIF) were computed. Table 5 shows the VIF values for the constructs. The maximum value of VIF (VIF = 1.398) is found between meaningfulness and servant leadership, thus further confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

Table 4:
Descriptive Statistics

	M	SD	Correlation		
			(1)	(2)	(3)
SL (1)	4.781	1.356	1		
Meaningfulness (2)	5.361	1.313	.531**	1	
Job Crafting (3)	5.079	1.136	.698**	.602**	1

Table 5:
Inner Values of VIF

Variables	JC	Meaning
Job Crafting		
Meaningfulness	1.402	
Servant Leadership	1.402	1.000

The study was undertaken to test four relations. The table 6 reflects that all the hypotheses were found to be significant. The first hypothesis, claiming a relationship between SL and JCB, was recorded as significant ($\beta = 0.519$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, the second hypothesis, relating SL to meaningfulness, was also found to be significant as shown in table-6 ($\beta = 0.534$, $p = 0.000$). The third hypothesis relating to meaningfulness and job crafting was also significant ($\beta = 0.334$, $p = 0.000$). The last hypothesis, conjecturing a mediating role for meaningfulness between SL and JCB, was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.178$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 6:
Structural Model

Relation	β	SD	t-test	p-value	95% Bias Corrected Confidence Interval	
					LCL	UCL
Servant Leadership > Job Crafting	0.518	0.03	17.033	0.000	0.456	0.576
Servant Leadership > Meaning	0.535	0.033	16.302	0.000	0.470	0.598
Meaning > Job Crafting	0.335	0.036	9.328	0.000	0.261	0.403
Servant Leadership > Meaning > Job Crafting	0.179	0.021	8.656	0.000	0.138	0.219

Table 7:
Hierarchical Regression

		Model 1	Model 2
Step		Meaningfulness	Job Crafting
1	Gender	-.066	-.005
	Age	.067	-.062
	Job Tenure	.058	.041
	r ²	.022	.001
	Δr ²	.022	.001
	ΔF	5.08**	.213
2	Gender	-.054	.011
	Age	.133	.023
	Job Tenure	.005	-.027
	Servant Leadership	0.538**	.698**
	r ²	.310	.486
	Δr ²	0.288	0.485
3	ΔF	286.432**	645.121**
	Gender		.030
	Age		-.023
	Job Tenure		-.029
	Servant Leadership		.510**
	Meaning		.348**
	r ²		.569**
	Δr ²		.084
ΔF		132.347**	

Additional Analysis

To see the extent to which control variables affect the models and evaluate the incremental role of each construct to affect the target variable, hierarchical regression was run. In the first step of Model 1, where meaningfulness was the target variable, the control variables gender, age, and job tenure explained 2.2% variation. In the second step for Model 1, where SL along with the control variables was incorporated as an indigenous variable, the explanatory power of the model increased significantly ($\Delta r^2 = 0.288, p = 0.000$). Model 2, used to estimate the JCB of the employees, found the control variables to be non-significant while explaining only a 1% variation in the target variable. In the subsequent step, step 2 of Model 2, SL was incorporated as an explanatory variable along with the control variables and they collectively improved the explanatory power of the model significantly ($\Delta r^2 = 0.485, p = 0.000$). In the 3rd step of model 2, meaningfulness, SL, and controlled variables were used as explanatory variables. The results revealed that meaningfulness and SL both were found to be significantly affecting the JCB of the employees. Moreover, the inclusion of meaningfulness as an explanatory variable along with SL and control variables augmented the explanatory power of the model in a significant way ($\Delta r^2 = 0.084, p = 0.000$).

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, proposing a relationship between SL and meaningfulness, was found to be significant. This finding is matched with the earlier studies that had unraveled the relation between positive leadership such as ethical, empowering, LMX, and spiritual leadership (Tummers & Knies, 2013; Matsuo et al., 2019; Tourish, 2019; Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020). Similarly, the second hypothesis, relating SL with employee JCB, was also supported by the findings; this finding is aligned with the earlier findings indicating a positive influence of SL on employees' JCB (Bavik et al., 2017; Harju et al., 2018). The relation between meaningfulness and JCB, as conjectured in the third hypothesis, was in line with the positive pro-organizational effects confirmed by Ozdevecioglu and colleagues (2015), Suptani and Butcher (2019). The last hypothesis that proposed a mediating role for meaningfulness linking SL to JCB was also found to be significant as predicted in light of COR and cognitive theory of motivation.

Theoretical Contribution and Managerial Implications

Though job crafting, by definition, is employee behavior that increases job meaningfulness; the current study took an inverted view. If leadership can infuse meaningfulness, what will be the consequence? To divulge the effect, meaningfulness was used as a mediating link between SL and JCB. The study found that meaningfulness mediates the relationship between SL and JCB. The employee-centric and community-oriented behavior manifested by the SL increases the work meaningfulness of the employees. As a result, meaningfulness works as a motivational construct and a resource that in turn increases employee proclivity to indulge in JCB.

As the findings reveal that SL affects JCB and meaningfulness works as a mediator between SL and JCB; there are some managerial implications. First, firms need to train their managers in the use of SL. The employees of the service industry, because of their accumulated knowledge, don't give themselves into any controlling attempt. Instead, they work well when they are facilitated. So, if organizations begin to use the tenets of SL in their dealing, the resulting meaningfulness will spur them to indulge in JCB. Second, the practices of SL can enhance the meaningfulness of the employees. As meaningfulness is a motivational construct, organizations can use it to bring other pro-organizational benefits.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study employed two methods that can cause the possibility of common method bias; collecting data from a single source and collecting the data at a single point in time. The use of multi-source and longitudinal data collection can mitigate the effect of common method bias. Moreover, to ascertain the extent of common method variance, Herman's single factor test was conducted. The result revealed the first factor explained 35% variation; thus, confirming the extent of common method bias was acceptable as it was less than the threshold level of 50%. The current study used individual-level factors; the researchers are suggested to test the model at the team level.

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