Crafting Their Way Forward: An Exploration of Job Design Among Sport Employees

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As sport managers seek to generate effective workplace models to improve their organization’s performance (Delshab et al., in press; Winand et al., 2013), internal employee-level strategies offer the potential to enhance productivity and effectiveness. One such area is job crafting, which is an active process whereby individual employees reconceptualize and alter the boundaries and tasks of their jobs to best suit their strengths and personalities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is a bottom-up philosophy that stimulates employee growth, meaningfulness, and creativity (Berg et al., 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This study was specifically focused on task crafting or the altering of task boundaries (Berg et al., 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced sport employees to apply elements of job crafting to their professional activities as they worked from home, which provided a unique opportunity to study the viability of job crafting in the sport industry. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore sport employees’ perceptions of how the sport workplace can be reimagined via job crafting and the ensuing implications for innovation practices and organizational performance.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 16 full-time sport employees who were purposely selected (Jones, 2015) based on their engagement in job crafting due to work from home mandates. Participants were asked about their experiences of working at home to uncover elements of job crafting that could contribute to enriched future job designs and transformational organizational practices. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis procedure was utilized to analyze the data and formulate impactful findings.

The findings of the analysis indicated that increased autonomy enabled participants to job craft by innovating their task-completion approaches for work-related goals. For example, participants were able to determine when to perform work tasks and when to engage in active learning strategies used to evolve their skillsets. As a result, participants experienced personal growth which fostered innovations to task completion tactics. Moreover, these enhanced skillsets and innovations were thought to be transferable to the traditional office setting and provided participants with a sense of hope for a progressive sport workplace that would augment organizational performance and capacity.

In all, this study enhances the understanding of job crafting in the sport workplace as participants had agency to craft their jobs toward positive outcomes. Sport leaders who continue to allow their employees to craft their jobs upon return to the traditional office setting are likely to enable continued innovation and ensuing improved organizational performance (Delshab et al., in press). This association is a product of job crafting’s subsequent impact on innovation, which could lead to improved organizational performance due to enhanced human capital (Delshab et al., in press; Winand et al., 2010). The significance of the study is a function of the operative performance of sport organizations impacting not only sport employees, but also sport consumers and participants. Therefore, the role of job crafting within job design theory (Hackman & Oldman, 1976) and human resource management practices in sport management must be acknowledged and expanded.