Job crafting: a handout

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What job crafting is

Job crafting is the changes you make to your own job, inside the role you already have, so that it fits you better.

The idea comes from Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton (2001), who described three kinds. Task crafting changes what you do or how you go about it, including how much time each part gets. Relationship crafting changes who you work with, and how. Cognitive crafting changes how you see the work and what it means to you.

A later version describes crafting as adjusting what a job asks of you and what it gives you to work with (Tims and Bakker, 2010). If you've filled in my Energy and Capacities Wheel, its 'gives' and 'costs' are the same idea.

Why I use it carefully

Job crafting puts changing your job in your hands, and that has advantages and disadvantages. My main worry is that it can move responsibility for a badly designed job onto the person doing it. There are five catches I keep in mind.

1. Some jobs leave more room than others. In one study, people in junior roles said limited autonomy held them back, and senior staff said time did (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010). How much room you have depends on your role.
2. Adding things you enjoy still adds things. Crafting that only ever adds can tip into overload, however good each addition is.
3. Meaning can be used against you. Across eight studies, people judged it fairer to ask passionate workers to take on extra, unpaid work, especially in jobs seen as a labour of love, such as social work (Kim et al., 2020). Loving your work shouldn't become the reason you put up with low pay or extra hours.
4. Cutting back isn't always relief. Research has found that people who mostly cut back on demands tend to be more burnt out, and that over time the two feed each other (Lichtenthaler and Fischbach, 2019). Crafting that adds things you value goes with feeling more engaged, so it can help to pair easing a demand with adding something that gives you energy.
5. What you drop can land on someone else. In a study of 103 pairs of colleagues, when one person cut back on demands, the other reported more workload and conflict, which went with more burnout (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2015). For those of us who

are AHPs with ADHD, that prospect sits particularly uncomfortably, and it can keep us stuck, not crafting changes at all for fear of the impact on colleagues or clients.

The questions I add

Crafting your job on purpose is a way of working more effectively in line with your neurotype, and of building a working life with more joy and less burnout. I ask three questions of every crafting idea, so that changing things doesn't all land on you.

1. Whose move is it? An idea can sit in one of three places: mine to make, needs a conversation, or needs the organisation. Ideas that need someone else count as much as the ones you can carry out alone. In a meta-analysis of job crafting interventions, plans that included organisational as well as personal objectives had a moderate effect on work engagement (Oprea et al., 2019).
2. What goes with it? If an idea takes something away, ask what you'd miss and who it might land on.
3. Is this making something easier to live with when actually what needs to change is the thing itself, not just making it easier to put up with? This one is for changes in how you see the work. If the answer is yes, keep the idea, and add a second one beside it that changes the thing itself.

What it can look like in your work

These examples come from the kinds of work my clients do in speech and language therapy, other allied health roles and education. Use them to spark your own ideas.

Kind of crafting	What it might look like	Whose move	Watch for
Task	Write reports in one protected morning a week, away from the clinic room	Needs a conversation	Gaps it leaves elsewhere in the diary
Task	Swap a task you find draining, like data entry, for one a colleague finds draining and you don't, like making resources	Needs a conversation	Whether the swap is fair both ways

Kind of crafting	What it might look like	Whose move	Watch for
Task	Take on the team's AAC training because it holds your interest	Needs a conversation	It adds work, so what comes off your plate?
Task	Dictate session notes and tidy them later, if your records policy allows it	Needs the organisation	Information governance sign-off
Task	Group home or school visits by area to cut down travel and switching	Needs a conversation	Whether clients are still seen when they need to be
Task	Write reports in the quieter room, or at home, when you can choose where	Mine to make	Whether the quiet room is free when you need it
Relationship	Work alongside a colleague during admin time, each on your own tasks	Needs a conversation	Choosing someone who finds it useful too
Relationship	Agree with a teacher how they'd like updates, such as a two-line email instead of a meeting	Needs a conversation	Whether it still covers what the child needs
Relationship	Ask for supervision from someone who understands neurodivergent ways of working	Needs the organisation	Who pays for it
Cognitive	See a report as information for one specific reader, such as a parent or class teacher, and write only what they need	Mine to make, then a conversation	Whether your service's report template leaves room for it
Cognitive	Count thinking time between sessions as part of the job	Mine to make, then a conversation	Does your job plan count it too?

Kind of crafting	What it might look like	Whose move	Watch for
Beyond crafting	Protected admin time, or a caseload cap, written into the job plan	Needs the organisation	This is job design, so it's the organisation's to do

Further reading

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