

Crafting meaning out of contrasts: How illegitimate work tasks ignite job crafting and contribute to meaningful work

Research question:

The question of the meaning of work is becoming increasingly important in social discourse. This study explores the question of how each individual can become an active creator, i.e., a crafting his or her own work-related meaning. This study argues that illegitimate work tasks (IWT) can initiate job crafting (JC) and reinforce in the positive relationship between JC and meaningful work (MW).

Study Design:

To test the model, a diary study was conducted over ten consecutive work days. The sample included 250 individuals with 1,803 daily observations.

Results:

Using multilevel analyses, the results show that at the daily level, IWT from the previous day strengthens the positive effect between JC and MW. At the person level, there is a positive indirect effect between variability in IWT (i.e., the extent of variation in IWT over time) and MW, mediated by increased JC.

Theoretical/practical implications:

Contrasts are necessary to activate employees to craft the meaning of their work themselves. While IWT have been mostly associated with negative outcomes, this study shows that they can have an important influence on employees through its role in the context of MW, which previously has been neglected.