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Creating conditions for attractive work in the social care services – job crafting as a moderator of the relationship between job demands and resources to job satisfaction

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Introduction: Creating conditions for attractive work is an important and a major challenge in the social care services sector. Support from supervisors and influence at work are regarded as facilitators, whereas heavy workload and role conflicts are considered to be undermining factors for social care service employees' job satisfaction. However, employees can themselves increase the benefit of resources or strategically respond to and reduce demands by job crafting. Using job demands–resources theory, we investigated whether matching approach and avoidance job crafting behavior (seeking challenges/reducing job demands) moderates the respective associations between job resources (i.e., boost effect) and job demands (i.e., buffer effect) and job satisfaction.

Methods: By using a web-based survey, cross-sectional self-reports of job resources (support from supervisors and influence) and job demands (workload and role conflict), job crafting, and job satisfaction were collected from 760 municipal social care employees (28% participation rate).

Results: The results of regression-based analyses showed that the effect of support from supervisors on job satisfaction was moderated (i.e., boosted) by job crafting (seeking challenges), whereas none of the other three tested interactions were found to be significant.

Discussion: We discuss our results in relation to efforts to increase job satisfaction and promote attractive workplaces in social care services; these are directed to address management, work conditions, and preconditions to support opportunities for employees to proactively craft their jobs.

KEYWORDS

attractive work, JD-R theory, job crafting, job satisfaction, moderation, social care

1 Introduction

Many organizations face challenges in the recruitment and retention of personnel. The issue is especially urgent within the health and social care sector, an area in which most Western European societies predict increasing demand and where there is a shortage in both the existing and projected workforce (e.g., [Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021](#); [Wiskow et al., 2010](#)). Attending to employee job satisfaction is highly

relevant since these evaluative judgements are closely related to occupational health and wellbeing, performance, and productivity, as well as sustainable employment and retention (Judge et al., 2017; Roczniowska et al., 2021). Though the concept of attractive work is multifaceted and needs to be understood in relation to sociocultural context and occupational setting, it has been suggested that the vision of attractive work in the Swedish setting should focus on work as a source of health and wellness where employees can develop and be creative (Biswas et al., 2017). In line with this, the World Health Organization advise that to promote attractive work in the health and social care sector, organizational efforts should be directed to increase job satisfaction by prioritizing and focusing on improvements to the work environment that create conditions for employees to perform effectively at work and achieve an elevated level of quality in care (Wiskow et al., 2010). However, there is a need for an improved understanding of whether and how certain prerequisites may condition the link between work characteristics and both job satisfaction and attractive work (Judge et al., 2017).

Job crafting refers to the proactive strategies and behavior that employees use to manage, develop, and co-create their work, and is a concept that is given increased attention within work and organizational psychology (Bakker et al., 2023; Tims et al., 2022). Job crafting has been reported to act as a buffer or a boost of the relationship between work characteristics and occupational health and wellbeing (e.g., Hakonen et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). Hence, job crafting reflects an individual-level prerequisite that may condition organizational efforts directed to improve job satisfaction and promote attractive workplaces in health and social care settings. In the present study, we investigate this possibility.

1.1 Job satisfaction and attractive workplaces

Job satisfaction is defined as peoples' overall evaluative judgement about their job. Research stretching over several decades has reported that job satisfaction is important for occupational health and wellbeing, employee performance, and quality of care, as well as staff retention or turnover (Judge et al., 2017). Thus, job satisfaction is a key factor to consider in relation to concerns of staff shortages and turnover among health and social care personnel (Dilig-Ruiz et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2024). Furthermore, to create attractive working conditions for health and social care employees, job satisfaction and the factors that influence it are considered to be core (Biswas et al., 2017; Hesslink et al., 2023; Vainieri et al., 2021; Wiskow et al., 2010). Attending to job satisfaction can be considered advantageous (compared to work engagement or organizational commitment) for understanding what makes work attractive in the health and social care sector. This is because job satisfaction is closely related to health, wellness, retention, and positive work attitudes, while work engagement pertains to employees' identification with and energy at work, and organizational commitment refers to employees' affective identification and involvement with the organization (e.g., Judge et al., 2017; Geisler et al., 2019; Hakonen and Kaltiainen, 2026; Roczniowska et al., 2021). Moreover, though the concepts of job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational commitment

are closely related (Mazzetti et al., 2023), job satisfaction can be considered to be at the core of attractive work since job satisfaction is an outcome of work engagement (Hakonen and Kaltiainen, 2026) and a predictor of organizational commitment (Srivastiva, 2013).

Overall, dissatisfaction among employees has been reported to be evidently higher among employees in the health and social care sector than in other sectors, and it has therefore been suggested that efforts to increase satisfaction should focus on fostering engagement among employees, as well as up-skilling and increasing the involvement of supervisors and management (Brand et al., 2017). In Sweden, elderly care has been reported to be a subdivision of the social care sector where the working conditions are particularly problematic and for which low levels of available resources affect employee satisfaction and retention (Erlandsson and Szebehely, 2024). With regard to recruitment of personnel, attending to factors that facilitate job satisfaction, workplace attractiveness, and recruitment in health and social care settings is underlined by research demonstrating that factors that can increase the attractiveness of the workplace include influence and meaningfulness at work along with developing leadership and support from supervisors (Salminen-Tuomaala and Herttuala, 2023). Furthermore, insights from literature reviews suggests that continuous improvements focused on job-related factors associated to influence at work, such as opportunities for development and task variety, should be considered in order to improve job satisfaction among caring professionals (Dilig-Ruiz et al., 2018; Van Ham et al., 2006). Moreover, it has been noted that research needs to take a wider perspective and investigate how organizational efforts interact with employee proactive involvement at work (Brand et al., 2017; Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021).

In the present study, we address this possible interplay by investigating whether the association between job demands/resources and job satisfaction is conditioned by employees matching job crafting behaviors.

1.2 Job demands–resources theory

Job demands–resources (JD-R) theory provides a framework for understanding the organizational and social work environment (Bakker et al., 2023; Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). The basic proposition of JD-R theory is that job demands and job resources set off two different processes in the individual. Job demands are aspects of work that require effort (e.g., mental, physical) and set off a health-impairment process, whereas job resources are aspects of work that contribute to motivation and goal achievement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018).

Numerous studies have contributed to the development of JD-R theory and provide support for the basic propositions (e.g., Andolšek et al., 2026; Bakker et al., 2023; Lesener et al., 2019). Furthermore, developments in JD-R theory propose that factors at the organizational, team, and individual levels can interact, and thus that employees should be regarded as active co-creators of their work environment (e.g., Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). In addition, JD-R theory assumes that by the terms of proactive co-creation, employees can mitigate the associations between work characteristics and outcomes by boosting the benefits of job

resources and buffer or weaken themselves against the negative effects of job demands through job crafting (Bakker et al., 2023). Additionally, the matching hypothesis by De Jonge and Dormann (2006) proposes that mitigating (i.e., moderating) effects are more effective when the moderator type specifically matches the predictor (i.e., the independent variable).

1.3 Job crafting

Job crafting is defined as the strategies and behaviors by which people proactively adapt, adjust, and develop tasks and challenges in their work (Tims et al., 2012). Specifically, job crafting refers to activities and efforts that employees use to seek challenges, seek resources, and reduce demands at work (Petrou et al., 2012). Job crafting has been found to be positively related to employees' work engagement and performance (Tims et al., 2015), as well as to job satisfaction (Li et al., 2023).

Recent reviews have investigated the role of contextual and social factors in relation to job crafting among employees. Park and Park (2021) found that whereas some studies suggest that job demands may prompt employees to seek resources or reduce demands, other studies have found that job demands affect job crafting negatively (Park and Park, 2021). Furthermore, in their review Wang et al. (2020) found that constructive leadership styles and co-worker support were positively related to employee job crafting and concluded that social context is important for individual job crafting behavior.

Job crafting has also been found to buffer the effect of job demands in relation to both exhaustion and work engagement. With specific regard to workload, the results reported by Hakanen et al. (2017) in a sample of dentists suggest that job crafting is especially effective for buffering against the negative effects of quantitative workload on burnout and work engagement. Moreover, Li et al. (2023) reported that job crafting had a direct positive effect on job satisfaction and an indirect positive effect on job satisfaction through person-job fit, whereas Mondo et al. (2023) reported that job crafting partially mediates the relationship between social support from supervisors and job satisfaction. Additionally, Felder et al. (2024) noted that job crafting is important for increasing the sustainability of the nursing work force and suggested that organizational transitions are required to facilitate job crafting and, ultimately, its potential benefits in the health care setting.

Lee et al. (2017) reported that while, in general, job resources relate to work engagement and job demands relate to job stress, job demands and resources induce different job crafting activities. In line with this, Harju et al. (2021) found that whereas approach job crafting (i.e., seeking challenges/resources) was related to increased wellbeing (i.e., work engagement) through increased job complexity, avoidance job crafting (i.e., reducing demands) was found to be related to decreased wellbeing (i.e., lower levels of work engagement and higher levels of exhaustion) through decreased job complexity. Moreover, based on meta-analysis of the relationship between job crafting and work outcomes, approach job crafting seems to be favorable whereas avoidance job crafting appears to be less efficient (Rudolph et al., 2017). The various effects of different

job crafting behaviors have been further noted and explored by Petrou and Xanthopoulou (2021), who reported that the effect of different job crafting activities (i.e., approach/avoidance) in relation to performance and employability may be mutually contingent.

Previous research therefore suggests a complex interplay between JD-R/job crafting and occupational outcomes in terms of health and wellbeing. However, the effect of different types of job crafting activities should be considered in relation to matching characteristics in line with the basic rationale of the matching hypothesis in JD-R theory (De Jonge and Dormann, 2006; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). That is, the understanding of the benefits and efficiency of approach and avoidance job crafting behavior may be improved by evaluations that consider approach and avoidance job crafting as type-specific strategies and behaviors. Thus, while acknowledging the urgent need for an improved understanding of directed efforts to create conditions for attractive work in health and social care sector, we explored the notion that employee job crafting could be regarded as an (overlooked) type-specific individual-level translator for the effect of organizational efforts.

1.4 Support from supervisors and influence at work

As a central aspect of employee wellbeing within JD-R theory (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014), numerous studies based on the theoretical framework have investigated associations and effects of various job demands and job resources in relation to job satisfaction. Two examples of such work characteristics that have been found to be important within the health and social care setting are job resources in terms of support from supervisors and influence at work.

Support from supervisors is a central job resource in general, and especially so within health and social care settings (Wiskow et al., 2010). For example, Charoensukmongkol et al. (2016) reported that supervisor support was positively related to job satisfaction among nurses, and Lee and Cummings (2008) found that social support from supervisors was positively related to job satisfaction among front-line nurse managers. However, a significant relationship could not be observed between social support from colleagues and social support from supervisors to job satisfaction among nurses, whereas a significant relationship was found between social support from the organization and job satisfaction (two-wave study; Bradley and Cartwright, 2002). In a sample of public sector human service workers, Fila et al. (2014) reported that social support from supervisors was positively related both to overall job satisfaction and all facets of the global operationalization of job satisfaction.

Influence at work concerns employees' overall evaluation of having opportunities to participate and be involved in finding ways to handle and manage their work. Key features of influence (i.e., influence on handling tasks, decision-making, and time control) have a strong effect on job satisfaction in health care settings (Kinzl et al., 2005). Overall, influence further includes opportunities to actively participate, manage, and adapt ones' working conditions (e.g., decisions, tasks). Employee participation has been reported to be an important determination for job satisfaction, productivity,

and commitment among employees (Bhatti and Qureshi, 2007). Moreover, possibilities for influence and employee participation are work characteristics that seem to be of special importance among the younger generation of workers—and are therefore characteristics that need to be given increased attention (Zhu et al., 2015). Influence at work further reflects employee involvement autonomy and employee involvement decision-making, which are central work characteristics that can be targeted to increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Adham, 2014). In general, social care service workers have limited influence at work, and this in turn is an important factor to consider when trying to understand the challenges in recruitment and retention of personnel faced by social care service organizations (Szebehely et al., 2017; Swedish Association of Local Authorities Regions, 2020).

1.5 Workload and role conflict

Regarding the negative effect in relation to job satisfaction, workload and role conflict are two job demands that are most salient and found to be important for job satisfaction within health and social care settings.

Workload refers to employee perceptions of the quantitative amount or difficulty of work and is a work stressor that has been extensively studied over the last decades, with the results of meta-analysis demonstrating a clear negative relationship to job satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2015). The negative effect of workload on job satisfaction has been reported from literature reviews of studies among health care personnel (Van Ham et al., 2006). Moreover, from a sample of health and social care professionals in Spain, it has been reported that the negative relationship between workload and job satisfaction could be further understood by the fact that dissatisfaction (i.e., low job satisfaction) was associated with reports of poorer relationships with close supervisors and senior management (Hellín Gil et al., 2022). In the Swedish setting, having an extensive workload without sufficient matching resources has also been reported to risk having a negative effect for both individuals and organizations (Erlandsson and Szebehely, 2024).

Role conflict pertains to employee perceptions and experiences of contradicting and conflicting demands at work and has been reported to be a main predictor for burnout among elderly care employees in the United States (Barber and Iwai, 1996) and Hungarian health care staff (Piko, 2006). Moreover, research in social care settings in the United States (elderly care) has reported that role conflict can be understood as a bidirectional construct, instigated by employees' experiences of how work interferes with caregiving as well as how caregiving interferes with work (Gordon et al., 2012). Furthermore, among mental health social workers in both the United States and South Korea, role conflict has been reported to be an important organizational condition predictor for job satisfaction and intention to leave (Acker, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2021) and recent research conducted in India suggests that the negative effect of role conflict on job satisfaction may be reduced

among employees who report higher levels of personal resources (Kalra et al., 2023).

For social care services, both these negative aspects holds true—high workload and role conflict together with insufficient resources are considered to be key factors in the challenges of recruitment and retention of personnel (Erlandsson and Szebehely, 2024; Strandell, 2020; Swedish Association of Local Authorities Regions, 2020). In Sweden, this problematic issue became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and has motivated national investigative work and highlighted the need for directed efforts to improve working conditions within the health and social care services (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021).

1.6 The present study

In summary, there is a need for an improved understanding of factors that condition job satisfaction and attractive work in social care services. Overall, support from supervisors and influence at work are associated with job satisfaction, whereas workload and role conflict are factors related to job dissatisfaction within the health and social care sector (Erlandsson and Szebehely, 2024; Strandell, 2020; Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021; Wiskow et al., 2010).

Job crafting is one factor that may condition the association between work characteristics and job satisfaction. In general, approach job crafting (i.e., seeking challenges/resources) seems to be favorable, whereas avoidance job crafting (reducing demands) appears less efficient (Rudolph et al., 2017). However, previous research has tended to overlook that the benefits of various job crafting behavior may need to be assessed by different situations and various criteria (Tims et al., 2022). To illustrate, job satisfaction is a positive and a desirable criterion for employees and organizations. Thus, arguably, conditioning factors that either contribute to boost the gain or to reduce the loss in job satisfaction should be regarded as being beneficial.

Hence, in the present study, and based on the framework of JD-R theory, we investigate whether the benefits (i.e., boost and/or buffer) of different job crafting activities (i.e., seeking challenges/reducing demands) can be found in matching situations, that is, in terms of the respective association between support from supervisors and influence at work (seeking challenges) as well as workload and role conflict (reducing job demands) to job satisfaction.

Therefore, we considered the following four hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Job crafting—seeking challenges moderates (i.e., boosts) the positive association between support from supervisors and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Job crafting—seeking challenges moderates (i.e., boosts) the positive association between influence at work and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Job crafting—reducing demands moderates (i.e., buffers) the negative association between workload and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Job crafting—reducing demands moderates (i.e., buffers) the negative association between role conflict and job satisfaction.

2 Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

The data for the present study was collected from municipal social service employees at workplaces enrolled in a model for competence training (<http://www.evikom.se>) in Sweden. The cross-sectional data was collected during three time periods: October–November 2023, April–May 2024, and October–November 2024. The three time periods were chosen due to workplace variations that affected the possibility of contacting employees and inviting them to participate in the study. The data collection was preceded by information dissemination via email and digital meetings that were directed at managers and contact persons at the respective municipality. Information about the study and participation was given to employees through email (one month before invitation to participation) and through information flyers, which were printed and distributed to the workplaces. An invitation to participate by answering a web-based survey was distributed by email to 2,967 municipal social service employees. The survey took approximately 15 min to complete. In all, 830 employees answered the survey (28% participation rate). Out of the 830 participants, thirty-three reported having a managerial position and were excluded from the data analyses of the present study. Furthermore, thirty-seven participants had not completed all of the study variables and were therefore not included in the analyses. The final participants ($n = 760$; women = 80%; Mean age = 45.7 years) were differentiated in terms of *profession* (assistant nurse = 43%; care assistant = 25%; carer = 7%; support pedagogue = 7%) and *professional tenure* (<2 years = 25%; 2–5 years = 20%; 6–10 years = 15%; > 10 years = 39%).

2.2 Materials

2.2.1 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was assessed by use of the four-item measure of global job satisfaction from the validated Swedish version of the Copenhagen psychosocial questionnaire (COPSOQ International Network [internet], 2026; Berthelsen et al., 2020; Burr et al., 2019). Items are rated on 5-point scales, from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 100 (very satisfied). An item example is “How satisfied are you with your work as a whole, all things considered?” In the validation of the Swedish version the reliability coefficient was 0.85 (Berthelsen et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Job demands and resources

The study measured job resources in terms of *social support from supervisors* and *influence*, and measured job demands in terms of *workload* and *role conflict*, using the respective subscales of the Swedish version of the Copenhagen psychosocial questionnaire. The items on the Copsoq subscales are rated on 5-point scales, from 1 (never/almost never, or to a very high degree) to 5 (always, or to a very low degree). Scores were then converted to a scale from 0 to 100 (i.e., 0, 25, 50, 75, 100), in line with the conventional principle

for scoring on the Copsoq (Burr et al., 2019). Item examples are “If you need, do you get support and help from your closest supervisor?” (social support from supervisors, three-item subscale); “Can you influence what you do in your work?” (influence, four-item subscale); “How often do you find yourself unable to complete all your task at work?” (workload, four-item subscale); and “Are contradictory demands placed upon you at work?” (role conflicts, four-item subscale). In the validation of the Swedish version, the following reliability coefficients were reported: social support from supervisors = 0.88; influence = 0.75; workload = 0.85; role conflict = 0.71 (Berthelsen et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Job crafting

During data collection, job crafting was measured using the job crafting scale (Petrou et al., 2012), which includes three distinct subscales of job crafting behaviors: seeking challenges, seeking resources, and reducing demands. In the present study, only the two subscales for seeking challenges and reducing demands were included. The selection of these two subscales was because they provide the clearest differentiation between approach job crafting and avoidance job crafting. The items are rated on 5-point scales, from 0 (never) to 4 (often); for example, “I ask for more tasks if I finish my work” (seeking challenges), and “I try to simplify the complexity of my tasks at work” (reducing demands). In the initial validation study, Cronbach's alpha for the respective subscales was 0.76 for seeking challenges and 0.69 for reducing demands (Petrou et al., 2012).

2.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were conducted using SPSS statistics (v. 3). Moderation analyses were conducted by the PROCESS macro (v. 5.0) for SPSS. The moderation models tested whether job crafting (i.e., seeking challenges, reducing demands) conditions the respective association between social support from supervisors and influence, as well as workload and role conflict to job satisfaction. Tenure length and gender were used as control variables. In the moderation analyses, both the independent and moderating variables were mean centered, and simple slopes were calculated based on sample values (i.e., estimates of population values: $M - 1$ SD, and $M + 1$ SD), using a 95% CI with 5,000 bootstraps, bias corrected (BCa) (Hayes, 2018).

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and correlations between all study variables. In relation to benchmarks for the Swedish working population (see Berthelsen et al., 2020), the present sample reported lower levels of workload (c.f. $M = 40.9$) and influence (c.f. $M = 50.2$) but comparable levels of support from supervisors (c.f. $M = 75.3$), role conflict (c.f. $M = 42.2$), and job satisfaction (c.f.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations ($n = 760$).

	Mean	SD	α	Skewness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job satisfaction	67.54	18.12	0.84	-0.402	-						
2. Support from manager	74.16	24.45	0.91	-0.714	0.388***	-					
3. Influence	45.78	20.53	0.76	0.301	0.439***	0.382***	-				
4. Workload	33.72	18.66	0.77	0.368	-0.199***	-0.225***	-0.086*	-			
5. Role conflict	40.19	20.23	0.78	0.392	-0.255***	-0.305***	-0.053	0.473***	-		
6. Job crafting—seeking challenges	2.48	0.92	0.75	-0.154	0.180***	0.180***	0.215***	0.097**	0.112**	-	
7. Job crafting—reducing demands	2.01	0.96	0.86	0.044	0.077*	0.078*	0.198***	0.018	0.061	0.268***	-

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; α , Cronbach's alpha; SD, standard deviation.

$M = 64.4$). Regarding job crafting, the mean levels for the present sample were lower compared to the reports of previous studies (c.f. Petrou et al., 2012: seeking challenges, $M = 3.1$; reduce demands, $M = 2.4$). Positive correlations with job satisfaction were observed for support from supervisors, influence, and job crafting (for both seeking challenges and reducing demands). Moreover, negative correlations with job satisfaction were observed for workload and role conflict.

3.2 Moderation analyses

3.2.1 Job crafting—seeking challenges as a moderator of the respective relationships between support from supervisors and influence to job satisfaction

Hypothesis 1 stated that job crafting—seeking challenges will moderate (i.e., boost) the association between support from supervisors and job satisfaction (model 1). Hypothesis 2 proposed that job crafting—seeking challenges will moderate (i.e., boost) the association between influence and job satisfaction (model 2). The tested moderation models are reported in Table 2.

For model 1, the results show that support from supervisors and job crafting—seeking challenges both had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. Furthermore, in support of Hypothesis 1, the interaction effect was found to be significant and positive demonstrating that job crafting—seeking challenges moderates the effect of support from supervisors on job satisfaction. The conditional effect showed that the effect of support from supervisors increased with higher reports of job crafting behavior in terms of seeking challenges (i.e., job crafting—seeking challenges boosts the effect of support from supervisors on job satisfaction).

For model 2, the results demonstrated that influence and job crafting—seeking challenges had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. However, no support was provided for Hypothesis 2, as the tested interaction suggesting a moderating effect of job crafting—seeking challenges on job satisfaction was not significant.

3.2.2 Job crafting—reducing demands as a moderator of the respective relationship between workload and role conflict to job satisfaction

Hypothesis 3 proposed that job crafting—reducing demands will moderate (i.e., buffer) the association between workload and job satisfaction (model 3). Furthermore, Hypothesis 4 stated that job crafting—reducing demands will moderate (i.e., buffer) the association between role conflict and job satisfaction (model 4). The tested moderation models are reported in Table 3.

For model 3, the results showed that workload had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction. Moreover, job crafting—reducing demands was found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction. Yet no support was provided for Hypothesis 3 as the tested interaction which posited a moderating effect of job crafting—reducing demands for the relationship between workload and job satisfaction was found to be non-significant.

For model 4, the results demonstrated that role conflict had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction. Moreover, job crafting—reducing demands was found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction. Seeking challenges had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. However, no support was provided for Hypothesis 4, as the tested interaction that postulated a moderating effect of job crafting—reducing demands for the relationship between role conflict to job satisfaction was found to be non-significant. Though the tested interaction effect did not reach significance, the conditional effect illustrates the tendency that the effect of role conflict on job satisfaction decreases with higher reports of job crafting—reducing demands.

4 Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate possible interaction effects between work characteristics (i.e., job demands and resources) and approach and avoidance job crafting strategies and behavior (i.e., seeking challenges and reducing demands) in relation to job satisfaction. Specifically, the aim of the investigation was to contribute insights into how efforts to increase job satisfaction and the attractiveness of work should be directed within

TABLE 2 Moderation analyses testing the conditional effect of job crafting—seeking challenges on the relationships between social support from managers (model 1) and influence (model 2) on job satisfaction (n = 760).

	Job satisfaction								
	R	R ²	F	b	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Model 1	0.422	0.178	(5, 754) 32.64				>0.001		
Constant				64.838	2.78	23.29	>0.001	59.372	70.305
Support from supervisors (SS)				0.279	0.025	11.13	>0.001	0.230	0.328
Job crafting—seeking challenges (JC-SC)				2.212	0.660	3.35	0.008	0.912	3.508
Interaction 1 (SS × JC-SC)				0.089	0.025	3.64	0.003	0.041	0.138
Tenure				0.018	0.045	0.40	0.692	−0.070	0.105
Gender				1.261	1.504	0.84	0.402	−1.692	4.214
Conditional effects									
−1 SD JC-SC				0.196	0.033	5.98	>0.001	0.132	0.26
M JC-SC				0.279	0.025	11.13	>0.001	0.230	0.328
+1 SD JC-SC				0.361	0.035	10.41	>0.001	0.293	0.429
Model 2	0.455	0.208	(5,755) 39.53				>0.001		
Constant				61.915	2.761	22.43	>0.001	56.495	67.335
Influence (IF)				0.384	0.030	12.87	>0.001	0.326	0.443
Job crafting—seeking challenges (JC-SC)				1.820	0.654	2.78	0.006	0.536	3.105
Interaction 1 (IF × JC-SC)				−0.031	0.028	−1.09	0.275	−0.086	0.024
Tenure				−0.036	0.048	−0.82	0.413	−0.122	0.050
Gender				3.280	1.490	2.20	0.028	0.355	6.206

Gender coded as 1 = man; 2 = women. Tenure coded as: 1 = less than 2 years; 2 = 2–5 years; 3 = 6–10 years; 4 = more than 10 years. R, correlation coefficient; R², R-squared; F, F-statistics; b, unstandardized beta; se, standardized error for unstandardized beta; t, t-value; p, significance of t-value; LLCI, Lower Level Confidence Interval; ULCI, Upper Level Confidence Interval.

the social care services sector (Hesselink et al., 2023; Strandell, 2020; Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021; Vainieri et al., 2021; Wiskow et al., 2010). The second aim of the investigation was to examine the potential benefits of evaluating job crafting behaviors as type-specific behaviors to match (boost/buffer) job resources and job demands to the same criteria (De Jonge and Dormann, 2006). Hence, we hypothesized that the benefits of both approach and avoidance job crafting behaviors in terms of having a conditional effect (i.e., buffer and boost) on the respective association between job demands (workload and role conflict) and resources (support from supervisor and influence) and job satisfaction.

The results confirmed one out of the four hypotheses. A significant interaction (i.e., boosting effect) was found for job crafting—seeking challenges for the association between supervisor support and job satisfaction (providing support for Hypothesis 1). This result suggests that social care service employees who experience support from supervisors may boost the positive impact of the support on their job satisfaction if/when they engage in self-initiated behaviors and strategies aimed at seeking challenges at work (e.g., advance developments, assignments, or extra-role performance). However, in contrast to our assumptions, job crafting—seeking challenges was not a significant moderator for the association between influence and job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2). In addition, the results did not provide support for the expectations that job crafting—reducing demands would moderate (i.e., buffer) the respective associations between workload (Hypothesis 3) and role conflict (Hypothesis 4) and job satisfaction.

Overall, the findings of our study do not fully corroborate the theoretical assumptions (Bakker et al., 2023) or the main results reported regarding job crafting in previous studies (e.g., Hakanen et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). Nevertheless, in our sample of social service employees, we did find that the association between supervisor support and job satisfaction was moderated by job crafting in terms of seeking challenges. That is, when employees engage in strategies and efforts to seek and develop tasks in their work it may boost the association between support from supervisors and job satisfaction.

This result is intriguing as it suggests that the benefit of supervisor support for creating conditions for attractive work is to some extent conditioned by the opportunities for (and initiative of) employees to engage in proactive co-creation of work. This interpretation is in line with the theoretical propositions in JD-R theory (see Proposition 6 and Proposition 7 in Bakker et al., 2023) as well as the report by Wang et al. (2020), advocating that constructive leadership styles and social context are related to employee job crafting. Moreover, our result provides some additional support to the notion that job crafting plays a role in the association between supervisor support and job satisfaction (Mondo et al., 2023) and that organizations should facilitate opportunities for employee job crafting in order to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of the health and social care sector (Felder et al., 2024).

The observed interplay between supervisors and employees further provides an example of how employee job crafting can be regarded as an (overlooked) individual-level translator for efforts

TABLE 3 Moderation analyses testing the conditional effect of job crafting—reducing demands on the relationships between workload (model 3) and role conflict (model 4) on job satisfaction (*n* = 760).

	Job satisfaction								
	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Model 3	0.222	0.049	(5, 755) 7.81				>0.001		
Constant				65.180	2.998	21.74	>0.001	59.296	71.065
Workload (WL)				-0.196	0.035	-5.71	>0.001	-0.265	-0.129
Job crafting—reducing demands (JC-RD)				1.157	0.671	2.33	0.020	0.249	2.881
Interaction 1 (WL × JC-RD)				0.043	0.032	1.33	0.183	-0.020	0.106
Tenure				-0.009	0.048	-0.190	0.849	-0.103	0.085
Gender				1.325	1.621	0.817	0.414	-1.858	4.507
Model 4	0.279	0.078	(5, 755) 12.79				>0.001		
Constant				65.488	2.950	22.20	>0.001	59.697	71.278
Role conflict (RC)				-0.2422	0.032	-7.63	>0.001	-0.304	-0.180
Job crafting—reducing demands (JC-RD)				1.843	0.662	2.78	0.006	0.543	3.143
Interaction 1 (RC × JC-RD)				0.049	0.029	1.69	0.092	-0.008	0.105
Tenure				-0.010	0.047	-0.21	0.830	-0.103	0.082
Gender				1.132	1.596	0.71	0.478	-2.001	4.264
Conditional effects									
-1 SD JC-RD				-0.289	0.045	-6.42	>0.001	-0.377	-0.201
<i>M</i> JC-RD				-0.242	0.032	-7.63	>0.001	-0.304	-0.180
+1 SD JC-RD				-0.195	0.039	-5.01	>0.001	-0.272	-0.119

Gender coded as 1 = man; 2 = women. Tenure coded as: 1 = less than 2 years; 2 = 2–5 years; 3 = 6–10 years; 4 = more than 10 years. *R*, correlation coefficient; *R*², R-squared; *F*, F-statistics; *b*, unstandardized beta; *se*, standardized error for unstandardized beta; *t*, t-value; *p*, significance of t-value; LLCI, Lower Level Confidence Interval; ULCI, Upper Level Confidence Interval.

directed at creating conditions for attractive work in the health and social care sector. However, as the results of our study did not provide support for the assumption that job crafting—seeking challenges would also moderate (i.e., boost) the association between influence and job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2), it is important to note that the benefit of job crafting needs to be further specified with respect to the specific type of job resource, the specific criteria of occupational health and wellbeing, and the specific occupational setting.

A further interpretation of this result is that in general, and as indicated by the low mean level observed in the sample of the present study, social care employees only experience a limited amount of influence at work (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021; Strandell, 2020; Wiskow et al., 2010). Thus, it may be that when social care service employees engage in job crafting to seek challenges, they do so to try to achieve the influence that they are lacking and are only able to craft within the restricted framework given by the organizational setting.

Furthermore, the results did not provide support for the hypothesized interaction effect (i.e., buffering effect) of job crafting—reducing demands, for the respective associations between workload and role conflict and job satisfaction. These results were unexpected, since high workload and conflicting demands have been reported to be evident among health and social care services workers (e.g., Erlandsson and Szebehely, 2024; Swedish Government Official Reports, 2021; Van Ham et al., 2006), and since job crafting – reducing demands specifically

assesses individual efforts to handle and adjust the negative effects at work (e.g., Petrou et al., 2012). Additionally, the buffering effect was reported in previous studies in other samples in which the interaction effect was particularly evident with respect to the negative impact of workload (e.g., among dentists; Hakanen et al., 2017). Why the buffering effect was not observed in our present sample of social care service employees may to some extent be explained by the fact that the present sample reported surprisingly low levels of job demands (especially workload) and the matching job crafting behavior (i.e., reducing demands). Although the interaction effect was not found to be significant, the conditional effects for how job crafting—reducing demands affects the association between role conflict and job satisfaction indicate that this issue may need further investigation within the social care services sector. For instance, alternative assessments may be needed to better capture the specific type of conflicting demands confronted by social care service employees. However, in contrast to the present study, recent research (based on longitudinal data and conducted among church ministers) suggests that the continuation of employees’ job crafting seems to be driven by self-concordant goal attainment but may be interrupted over time by the incorporation of organizational goal attainment and extrinsic motivation (Clinton et al., 2025). This suggests that job crafting is a personal phenomenon and that the benefits of job crafting depends on the congruence between self-concordant goals and organizational goals. Moreover, based on the results of a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies on job crafting, Silapurem et al.

(2024) reported that the correlational effect size of job crafting on job satisfaction tends to decrease over time.

Taken together, our results did not provide support for the basic assumption that the benefits of approach (i.e., seeking challenges) and avoidance (i.e., reducing demands) job crafting for the same criteria (i.e., job satisfaction) depend on matching circumstances (i.e., either boost the gain of job resources or reduce the loss of demands). Instead, our results add support to the suggestion that approach job crafting is more favorable and avoidance job crafting seems to be less efficient (Rudolph et al., 2017; Tims et al., 2022). However, we note that recent bibliometric analyses suggest that current research tends to conceptualize job crafting as a flexible and context-sensitive strategy (Andolšek et al., 2026).

4.1 Strengths and limitations

Several limitations of the present study need to be considered alongside interpretations of the results. The data is cross-sectional, which means it is only possible to specify associations and not to make any causal claims. Moreover, the data is based on self-reports, and so the results need to be interpreted with potential common biases in mind (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, the present study used job satisfaction as the dependent variable chosen to operationalize attractive work. Even though job satisfaction is considered to be an important feature of attractive work (e.g., Judge et al., 2017) and is related to occupational wellbeing and retention (e.g., Geisler et al., 2019), the use of this single dependent variable can be questioned and may be considered a limitation.

We encourage future research to investigate attractive work in social care services by designing a longitudinal study that includes other measures and data in addition to self-reports and expands the operationalization of attractive work to include additional indicators beyond job satisfaction. Furthermore, a qualitative (or mixed method) design could be used to investigate the role and importance of job crafting in relation to job demands and resources, as well as occupational wellbeing and attractive work among social care service employees. Alternatively, it would also be of interest for future research to investigate the present study's assumptions with a focus on the organizational level (e.g., team or workplace level), in line with the idea that job crafting may be shared (e.g., Peeters et al., 2016; Tims et al., 2013) and that the understanding of attractive work could benefit by going beyond the individual level (Roczniewska et al., 2021). Finally, future research may explore the benefit and efficacy of approach and avoidance job crafting in terms of context-sensitive strategies in relation to job crafting interventions (Roczniewska et al., 2023) and job crafting profiles (Zhang et al., 2025).

4.2 Conclusions and implications

Our study contributes by demonstrating how proactive strategies and behaviors among social care service employees may boost the positive association between supervisor support and job satisfaction. The significant interaction observed in the

present study adds a novel perspective to previous research that has mainly reported direct associations or effects between supervisor support and job satisfaction in similar settings (e.g., Bradley and Cartwright, 2002; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Lee and Cummings, 2008). Thus, the conditional effect observed in the present study illustrates that employees are not simply passive receivers of working conditions that, in turn, affect their occupational wellbeing, but need to be regarded as active agents who can themselves increase the benefit of basic resources through job crafting (Bakker et al., 2023). Nevertheless, as only one out of the four tested interactions was found to be significant, this study further contributes by demonstrating that assumptions pertaining to employee opportunities to increase gains or reduce losses need to be reasonable and adjusted to the specific setting. That is, our study suggests that social care service employees only have limited options to adapt and adjust their work through job crafting. Hence, it is important to note that it is not a responsibility or a general requirement for employees to find ways to manage and cope with problematic working conditions. Instead, it is a necessary obligation for organizations and management to adhere to and continuously follow up on providing the prerequisites and support that employees need in order to have reasonable opportunities to craft their work—and also to provide conditions that foster attractive work.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Board (Dnr: 2023-03645-01). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MG: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Data curation. AA: Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing. AH: Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Data curation. MS: Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing, Resources, Investigation, Methodology. GS: Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Resources, Funding acquisition.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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