Abstract This meta-review synthesizes the existing body of literature on career crafting, a burgeoning area of research within career development studies. Career crafting represents a proactive approach by which individuals shape their career paths, enhancing personal and professional growth. Drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks, including resource conservation theory, career construction theory, and job crafting theory, this review explores the multifaceted nature of career crafting, its antecedents, outcomes, and the current measurement tools developed to assess it. Our analysis reveals a complex interplay of individual and contextual factors that influence career-crafting behaviors, highlighting the importance of adaptability, career competencies, subjective and objective career success, and gender. Contextual antecedents such as organizational characteristics, family support, and external environmental factors further delineate the boundaries within which career crafting occurs. Despite its significant implications for career satisfaction and resilience, the literature reveals gaps in understanding the dynamic processes underlying career crafting and calls for a more nuanced exploration of its theoretical bases. The review identifies the need for future research to deepen the theoretical foundation of career crafting, improve the measurement tools for more accurate assessment, and explore the multilevel antecedents and outcomes through empirical studies. By addressing these gaps, future research can enhance our understanding of career crafting, offering valuable insights for individuals seeking to navigate their careers proactively and for organizations aiming to support their employees' career development.

Keywords: career crafting, vocational behavior, career choice, meta-review

1. Introduction

In the contemporary work landscape, the concept of a career has undergone a significant transformation. No longer seen as a one-time occupational choice, careers are now understood as a dynamic process of continuous evolution and self-management, a notion encapsulated in the term "career crafting" (De Vos et al., 2019; Savickas et al., 2009). This shift reflects the changing nature of work environments, characterized by their increased dynamism and the resultant demand for both employees and employers to share the responsibility of career management (Forrier et al., 2018; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). As organizations navigate through these rapidly changing contexts, the expectation for employee proactivity becomes paramount, underscoring the importance of proactive career behaviors for achieving sustainable career success (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Seibert et al., 2001; Sylva et al., 2019).

The concept of career crafting, as outlined by Tims and Akkermans (2020), serves as a framework for understanding these proactive behaviors. It is defined as the proactive steps individuals take to manage their careers toward achieving an optimal fit between their personal aspirations and career paths. Despite recognizing its significance, the literature reveals gaps in our understanding of the drivers of these behaviors and the role of work context in shaping them. This lack of knowledge presents critical challenges. Firstly, it obscures how organizations can encourage such proactive behavior (Sylva et al., 2019), potentially exacerbating the divide between proactive and less proactive workers (Bolino et al., 2010). Secondly, it overlooks the resource investment required for proactive career behaviors and the constraints individuals may face in their career trajectories (King, 2004).

The primary aim of this meta-review is to synthesize and critically analyze the existing body of research on career crafting, focusing on understanding the diverse approaches to career crafting, its outcomes, antecedents, and the role of career crafting as a moderator in the career development process. This comprehensive review seeks to map out the theoretical underpinnings of career crafting, delineating how individuals proactively shape their career paths in response to both internal desires and external environmental factors. By examining the outcomes associated with career crafting, such as job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and personal well-being, the paper aims to highlight the benefits of proactive career behaviors. Additionally, it explores the antecedents of career crafting, including personal characteristics, organizational culture, and work
environment, to understand what drives individuals to engage in these behaviors. Through this meta-review, the authors aspire to identify gaps in the current literature and suggest directions for future research, thereby contributing to developing more nuanced career development theories and practices.

2. Methods

Planning and Scoping. An initial search employing a combination of terms related to "career crafting" and its various dimensions was conducted to gauge the extent of the existing literature. This preliminary investigation leveraged multiple academic databases, including PsychINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science. The results from this initial foray provided a wide-ranging overview of the literature, facilitating the refinement of the search criteria and strategy. This careful planning and scoping phase was critical in ensuring the exhaustive meta-review and included relevant studies that span the complexity and depth of career-crafting research.

Literature Search Strategy. The literature search strategy was meticulously designed to capture the multifaceted nature of career-crafting research. Utilizing a refined set of keywords, the strategy was deployed across selected academic databases, including Scopus, PsychINFO, and Web of Science, to encompass a comprehensive range of peer-reviewed literature within the social sciences and beyond. The search was restricted to English-language studies published from 1995 to 2024, focusing on empirical studies investigating career crafting within employment contexts. Manual searches of key journals known for their contributions to career development and management studies were conducted to augment the database searches and citation tracking to identify seminal works and recent advancements in the field. This multi-faceted search strategy was pivotal in ensuring the inclusion of a broad spectrum of studies, offering diverse insights into the processes, outcomes, and implications of career crafting.

Selection Criteria. A detailed and structured approach was employed to sift through the gathered literature, ensuring the selection was tightly aligned with the study's objectives. The initial search across various databases yielded numerous articles related to career crafting. To manage this volume, a rigorous screening and selection process was established.

Screening and Selection Process. Initially, an exhaustive list of 87 articles was compiled through the search strategy. The first screening level involved reviewing titles, abstracts, and keywords to ascertain their relevance to career crafting, focusing on approaches, outcomes, antecedents, and the role of career crafting as moderators. This preliminary screening excluded articles that did not directly engage with the core themes of career crafting, narrowing the pool to 63 articles deemed potentially relevant.

Inclusion Criteria. To be included in the final review, articles had to satisfy several criteria:
1. Empirical Focus on Career Crafting: Articles must present empirical research specifically on career crafting within employment contexts.
2. Measurement of Career Crafting: Studies needed to measure career crafting using validated methods or provide significant qualitative insights into career crafting practices.
3. Investigation of Antecedents or Outcomes: Articles should explore antecedents or outcomes of career crafting, providing data that could contribute to understanding its impacts.
4. Examination of Moderating Roles: Studies that investigated the moderating effects of career crafting on career outcomes were also included.
5. Peer-Reviewed Publications: Only peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published in English between 1995 and 2024 were considered.

Exclusion Criteria. The following were grounds for exclusion:
1. Non-Empirical Studies: Theoretical papers, literature reviews, and opinion pieces without new empirical data were excluded.
2. Irrelevance to Career Crafting: Articles that mentioned career development or job satisfaction without directly addressing career crafting practices were omitted.
3. Lack of Accessible Data: Studies without accessible full texts or sufficient data to assess their relevance against the inclusion criteria were not considered.
4. Duplicate Studies: Multiple publications reporting on the same data set were consolidated, with only the most comprehensive article included for review.

After applying these criteria, the remaining articles underwent a full-text review to ensure their alignment with the research questions. This led to a final selection of 48 articles for in-depth analysis. This meticulous selection process was instrumental in ensuring the integrity of the meta-review, focusing on studies that provide substantive insights into career crafting, its dynamics, and implications.

Data Extraction and Analysis. A systematic and structured approach was employed to ensure accurate and comprehensive data extraction from the selected studies. This process involved using a standardized data extraction form, which was designed to collect detailed information on study characteristics, methodologies, participant demographics, key findings, and any measures of career crafting, including definitions, operationalizations, and outcomes. The extracted data was analyzed through qualitative synthesis to understand themes and patterns across the literature and quantitative methods,
where applicable, to assess the magnitude of relationships between career-crafting behaviors and various outcomes. This dual approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the career crafting landscape, identifying gaps in the literature and highlighting areas for future research. Statistical tools and software were utilized to ensure rigor and objectivity in quantitative data analysis, facilitating a comprehensive meta-review of the existing body of knowledge on career crafting.

**Quality Assessment.** In this stage of our study, the author implemented a meticulous evaluation process to ascertain the methodological quality and reliability of the studies included in the review. This assessment was conducted using a predefined set of criteria tailored to the specific requirements of career-crafting research, focusing on aspects such as the clarity of research objectives, the robustness of the research design, the appropriateness of the analytical methods used, and the validity and reliability of the measures employed. Each study was scored based on these criteria to ensure that only high-quality research was incorporated into the meta-review. After this rigorous quality assessment process, only 43 articles met the stringent criteria and remained for inclusion in the review. This selective approach enhanced the credibility of the review's findings. It provided insights into career-crafting research's methodological strengths and weaknesses, guiding recommendations for future studies.

3. **Results**

In our meta-review on career crafting, we delved into various theoretical perspectives to unravel the intricate dynamics of how individuals navigate and shape their career paths in today's ever-changing work environment.

3.1. **Career crafting from different theoretical perspectives**

Acknowledging the departure from traditional, linear career trajectories, we drew on the seminal works of Akkermans & Tims (2017) and De Vos et al. (2019), who argue for the necessity of proactive career shaping or crafting to achieve fulfilling careers over the long term. Tims and Akkermans (2020) further contributed to this discourse by introducing the concept of career crafting, defined as proactive behaviors aimed at enhancing the fit between an individual's career and personal aspirations, grounding their concept in the synthesis of the literature on job crafting (Tims et al., 2012), proactive career behaviors (De Vos & Soens, 2008), and career competencies (Akkermans et al., 2013).

Exploring career crafting from various theoretical lenses offers a rich tapestry of insights into how individuals navigate and shape their career paths in response to evolving workplace dynamics. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, Career Construction Theory (CCT), and Job Crafting Theory provide foundational frameworks for understanding the multifaceted nature of career crafting.

**Conservation of Resources Theory.** From the COR theory perspective, career crafting is conceptualized as proactive resource management, where individuals engage in behaviors aimed at using, maintaining, and acquiring career resources to fulfill their career aspirations (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001). This theory elucidates the dual motivations of resource conservation and resource acquisition that underpin career-crafting activities. Specifically, it posits a U-shaped relationship between career success and career crafting, indicating that individuals with either low or high levels of career resources are most motivated towards resource acquisition, thereby engaging in more active career reflection and construction (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Furthermore, the COR theory suggests that individuals with greater resources are more inclined to invest in career crafting, illuminating a linear relationship between objective career success, such as promotions, and career crafting engagements.

**Career Construction Theory.** CCT offers a dynamic perspective on career crafting, emphasizing individuals' adaptive responses to career exploration and planning (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This theory frames career crafting as an adapting response, where career planning and exploration are viewed as proactive strategies for navigating structural demands and leveraging adaptability resources. A key proposition of CCT is that differences in motivation for adaptation and the presence of adaptive behaviors lead to varied outcomes in career development. Recent studies have shown that career adaptability, a core concept within CCT, significantly predicts career crafting behaviors, highlighting how perceived structural demands and availability of adaptive resources facilitate career crafting (Akkermans & Tims, 2017).

**Job Crafting Theory.** Job Crafting Theory, primarily focused on the modifications employees make within their job roles to enhance fit and satisfaction, has significantly influenced the conceptualization of career crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Career crafting extends this notion to the broader career level, incorporating task, cognitive, and relational crafting to achieve a personal career match. This extension of job crafting to career crafting signifies a shift from immediate job alterations to long-term career development strategies, emphasizing the balance of resources and demands across one's career trajectory. Vidwans (2016), followed by Tims and Akkermans (2017), have expanded the job crafting framework to encompass elements of family, organization, and environment, thereby broadening the scope of crafting behaviors to include career-level considerations.

**Integrating Perspectives.** Integrating these theoretical perspectives reveals that career crafting is a complex, proactive behavior influenced by an individual's resource base, adaptive capabilities, and the broader role and task dynamics within their career ecosystem. The COR theory highlights the importance of resource management in career crafting, CCT underscores the
adaptability and planning aspects, and Job Crafting Theory expands the scope of crafting to include environmental and organizational factors. Each perspective contributes to a nuanced understanding of career crafting, emphasizing individuals' active role in shaping their career paths in pursuit of fulfillment and success.

Empirical studies support these theoretical frameworks, demonstrating how proactive personality traits significantly predict career-crafting behaviors (Crant, 2000; Becherer & Maurer, 1999; Bakker et al., 2012). Moreover, the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001) further enriches our understanding by classifying job characteristics into demands and resources, thus providing a structural basis for job and career crafting activities.

3.2. Research methods and measurements of career crafting

In exploring career crafting, our meta-review has identified a triad of research methodologies that have significantly contributed to the empirical understanding of the concept. Firstly, the questionnaire method stands out for its widespread application, leveraging large samples to validate hypotheses via structural equation modeling (SEM). This approach, characterized by its efficiency and objectivity, allows for the quantitative assessment of relationships between career-crafting behaviors and various psychological and organizational outcomes.

Secondly, experimental intervention methods provide a robust framework for examining the causal effects of career-crafting interventions. By employing a systematic intervention mapping program, researchers can delineate the impacts of specific career-crafting strategies on outcome variables. This method is invaluable for its ability to trace causality, though its reliability hinges on carefully controlling external variables.

The third methodology, qualitative research, offers a depth of insight into the personal narratives surrounding career crafting. Through semi-structured interviews with professionals, researchers can extract rich, detailed accounts of career-crafting experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of its mechanisms and impacts. This method's strength lies in its ability to uncover the complex interplay of individual, organizational, and societal factors shaping career-crafting behaviors.

Concerning the measurement of career crafting, the field has seen the development of nuanced scales. Tims and Akkermans (2020) introduced a pioneering scale that tested and validated in a Western context, focusing on proactive career reflection and construction. Similarly, Lee et al. (2021) devised a comprehensive scale by amalgamating elements from existing job crafting and career planning scales, offering a multidimensional view of career crafting behaviors. These scales, each demonstrating strong reliability and validity, underscore the multifaceted nature of career crafting.

Despite these methodological advances, the field faces challenges in scale development and the need for further validation across diverse populations and work contexts. The predominance of cross-sectional studies limits the understanding of career crafting's temporal dynamics, pointing to a future research direction that embraces longitudinal and cross-level designs. Such approaches will be crucial in unraveling the complex, evolving nature of career crafting, providing richer insights into its antecedents, processes, and outcomes.

3.3. Antecedents of career crafting

The antecedents of career crafting, as synthesized from our comprehensive meta-review, span various individual and contextual factors that catalyze engagement in career crafting behaviors. Empirical studies, such as those conducted by Nalis et al. (2022) and Janssen et al. (2021), have illuminated how intensified career planning and decision-making demands and subjective/objective career success influence career crafting. These studies underscore the dynamic nature of career crafting, highlighting its responsiveness to individuals' internal motivations and external successes.

Regarding individual antecedents, intensified career planning and decision-making demands have been shown to correlate positively with career-crafting activities (Nalis et al., 2022). This finding suggests that as individuals face the complexities of managing their careers, they are more inclined to engage in proactive behaviors such as active career reflection and construction. Additionally, the relationship between subjective career success and career crafting was U-shaped, indicating that individuals at both low and high levels of subjective success are motivated to engage in career crafting, albeit for different reasons (Janssen et al., 2021).

Adaptability and career competencies emerge as critical personal resources that facilitate career crafting. Akkermans and Tims (2017) highlight how these competencies, as a bedrock for career agency and employability, enable individuals to navigate and sustain their career paths effectively. Moreover, gender plays a significant role in career crafting, with studies by Vidwans (2016) revealing how women, in particular, navigate career, family, and personal identities through career crafting practices, challenging traditional gender norms and expectations.

Contextually, the learning value of a job significantly impacts career-crafting behaviors. For instance, high learning value in a job and psychological resources like perceived career success propel individuals towards career crafting as a means of personal and professional growth (Janssen, 2021). Organizational characteristics, including learning opportunities and supervisory support, also play a pivotal role in facilitating career crafting by creating an environment conducive to career exploration and development (Akkermans and Tims, 2017).
Family characteristics, including support from both one's birth family and family of procreation, have been shown to influence career-crafting decisions and behaviors significantly. Research indicates that emotional, financial, and spousal support can provide essential resources for effective career management (Vidwans, 2016). Additionally, external environmental factors such as social, cultural, and technological changes prompt individuals to adaptively respond through career crafting, highlighting the importance of external influences on career development strategies (Tims and Akkermans, 2017).

In conclusion, the antecedents of career crafting are complex and varied, involving a combination of personal motivations, competencies, and external conditions. Understanding these antecedents is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policies that support individuals in proactively managing their careers fostering a workforce that is adaptable, resilient, and prepared for the challenges of the modern career landscape.

3.4. Outcomes of career crafting

As elucidated through our meta-review, the outcomes of career crafting encompass a broad spectrum of individual and organizational benefits, underscoring the multifaceted impact of proactive career behaviors. Empirical research, including studies by Akkermans & Tims (2017) and De Vos et al. (2019), consistently highlights the positive correlation between career crafting and various dimensions of career success, both objective, such as salary increments and promotions (Heslin, 2005; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a, 2009b), and subjective, including job satisfaction and career fulfillment (Spurk et al., 2019; Shockley et al., 2016).

One of the primary outcomes of career crafting identified is enhanced job satisfaction, as individuals who engage in career crafting activities often tailor their work roles to better fit their personal interests and skills, leading to increased job fulfillment and motivation (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). Furthermore, career crafting has been linked to greater career resilience, with proactive reflection and construction enabling individuals to navigate career transitions and challenges more effectively (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

Another significant outcome is developing a robust professional network, as career-crafting behaviors such as networking and relationship-building contribute to stronger professional ties and support systems (Hirsch et al., 2018). This, in turn, opens up new career opportunities and pathways, facilitating career progression and growth. Additionally, career crafting has been associated with higher levels of employee engagement and organizational commitment, as employees who actively shape their career paths tend to exhibit greater dedication and loyalty to their organizations (Koen & Parker, 2020).

The psychological well-being of individuals also benefits from career crafting, with research indicating that engaging in proactive career behaviors can lead to reduced stress and increased feelings of career control and empowerment (Bolino et al., 2010; Pingel et al., 2019). Moreover, career crafting can foster a sense of purpose and meaning in one's work, contributing to overall life satisfaction and well-being (Judge et al., 1999; Spurk et al., 2019).

Despite these positive outcomes, the relationship between career crafting and career success is not linear but exhibits a U-shaped pattern, as posited by the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). This suggests that individuals at both low and high levels of career success are likely to engage in career crafting, albeit for different reasons related to resource conservation and acquisition motives (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

In summary, the outcomes of career crafting are extensive and varied, offering significant advantages for both individuals and organizations. By fostering a proactive approach to career development, career crafting contributes to enhanced job satisfaction, career resilience, professional networking, employee engagement, and psychological well-being, highlighting its critical role in contemporary career management.

4. Discussion and practical implications

Our review underscores the importance of career crafting as a pivotal mechanism through which employees can proactively shape their career paths, enhancing their job satisfaction, career resilience, and overall well-being. The antecedents and outcomes of career crafting, from individual competencies to organizational and contextual factors, highlight the complex interplay between personal agency and environmental conditions in career development.

From a theoretical perspective, our meta-review contributes to the career development literature by synthesizing diverse strands of research on career crafting, offering a comprehensive framework that integrates individual and contextual antecedents with their respective outcomes. This holistic view encourages future research to explore the dynamic processes underlying career crafting, particularly how individuals navigate and respond to changing career landscapes. Furthermore, our findings suggest a nuanced understanding of the relationship between career success and career crafting, challenging linear assumptions and highlighting the role of subjective interpretations of career achievements.

Practically, our review suggests several implications for career practitioners, HR professionals, and organizational leaders. Firstly, the positive association between career crafting and various measures of career success underscores the need for organizations to foster environments that encourage and support career crafting behaviors. This can be achieved through
developmental opportunities, mentorship programs, and career workshops that empower employees to take charge of their career trajectories.

Moreover, the identified antecedents of career crafting, such as adaptability, career competencies, and the learning value of the job, point to the importance of investing in employee development and continuous learning. Organizations should strive to create a culture that values growth, learning, and adaptability, providing employees with the resources and support needed to engage in career crafting.

The influence of gender on career crafting also calls for a more inclusive approach to career development, recognizing and addressing the unique challenges and barriers faced by women in the workplace. Implementing flexible work arrangements, fostering inclusive leadership, and promoting gender equity in career development initiatives can help mitigate these challenges, enabling all employees to craft fulfilling and successful careers.

Finally, the role of external environmental factors in career crafting highlights the importance of preparing employees for future work challenges, including technological advancements and shifting industry trends. By fostering a proactive, adaptable workforce, organizations can better navigate the uncertainties of the future work landscape, ensuring long-term sustainability and success.

5. Conclusions

Our meta-review of career crafting literature consolidates existing knowledge and reveals significant gaps, presenting a roadmap for future research to enhance the theoretical and empirical understanding of career crafting. Firstly, there’s a pressing need to expand the theoretical underpinnings of career crafting beyond the current frameworks of resource conservation, career construction, and job crafting theories. These theories, while foundational, offer limited perspectives on the multifaceted nature of career crafting. Future studies could explore career crafting through additional lenses, such as self-determination theory and regulatory focus theory to provide richer insights into the motivations and processes underlying career crafting behaviors.

Secondly, the measurement of career crafting remains in its infancy, with existing scales by Tims and Akkermans (2017) and Lee et al. (2019) requiring further validation across diverse contexts and populations. Future research should aim to integrate and refine these measurement tools, ensuring they capture the full spectrum of career-crafting behaviors in varying cultural and organizational settings. This endeavor could benefit from incorporating qualitative methodologies to develop more comprehensive and nuanced scales.

Empirically, there is a vast territory to explore regarding the antecedents and outcomes of career crafting. Multilevel research designs that consider individual and organizational factors and their interactions could unveil the complex dynamics driving career crafting. Investigating the role of personality traits, motivational factors, and personal resources in promoting career crafting will deepen our understanding of who engages in career crafting and why. Additionally, examining the impact of leadership styles, organizational culture, and external events such as economic shifts or global crises on career crafting behaviors could reveal valuable insights into how contextual factors shape career crafting.

Lastly, exploring the effects of career crafting across multiple life domains remains a fertile area for research. While the positive outcomes of career crafting on career success are well-documented, future studies should also consider potential negative effects, such as job conflict or turnover intentions. Furthermore, investigating the impact of career crafting on non-work-related outcomes, including personal well-being and life satisfaction, would provide a more holistic view of its implications.

The future research agenda for career crafting is rich and varied, offering numerous opportunities to build on the current knowledge base. By addressing these gaps, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of career crafting, ultimately informing practices that support individuals in navigating their career paths more effectively.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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