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Following the Tail: A Comparative Analysis of Job Crafting in Academic Setting

Master's thesis in Management of Economics and Innovation

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores how job crafting practices differ between teaching faculty and PhD students at Chalmers University of Technology, with a focus on perceived autonomy, flexibility, and the relational and structural factors that influence proactive role shaping. While both groups engage in job crafting, they do so under different conditions. Our findings show that faculty members, who typically enjoy higher autonomy are more likely to engage in proactive job crafting by aligning their tasks with personal goals and institutional expectations. In contrast, PhD students experience more limited opportunities as their roles are in many cases shaped by supervisory relationships and organizational structure.

We introduced the concept of “follow-the tail job crafting” to describe how PhD students often adjust within predefined boundaries, following the lead of their supervisor rather than fully reshaping their roles. Their ability to craft is often dependent on how much freedom and support their supervisors provide. Supportive supervision was found to be a key enabler of job crafting, while rigid leadership tends to reinforce disengagement and role passivity.

By applying Wrzesniewski and Dutton’s (2001) job crafting framework and integrating theories such as self-determination theory, this thesis provides both theoretical and practical contributions. One of the most important insights is the central role the supervisor and PhD students' relationship has in enabling or limiting proactive job crafting. We argue that academic institutions should raise awareness among supervisors about the potential of job crafting and create structures that encourage autonomy, reflection, and co-creation. This could support greater engagement, motivation, and well-being among PhD students.

Although this study was limited to one department at Chalmers University, the findings offer valuable implications for other academic environments seeking to create a more flexible and supportive environment for PhD students, helping them grow into confident, proactive and independent researchers. However, we also see the potential to use the findings in other contexts with apprenticeship-like relationships.

Keywords: Job Crafting, Relational Crafting, Task Crafting, Cognitive Crafting, Faculty, PhD students

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1. Introduction

In knowledge-intensive organizations, knowledge, competencies, and expertise are the main drivers of innovation and competitiveness. Whereas employees' ability to shape their work roles can be very beneficial. Job crafting, a concept introduced by Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), refers to the proactive adjustments employees make to their tasks, relationships, and perceptions at work to better align with their personal strengths and interests. This self-initiated behavior enables individuals to enhance job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being by tailoring their roles to fit their unique needs (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Academia is a leading knowledge-intensive sector where job crafting can play a crucial role in enhancing research, education, and innovation. This is due to the possible cutting-edge innovativeness and research presented in academia. Since faculty members and PhD students play a key role in creating and sharing knowledge, universities are a useful setting to study how job crafting impacts both individuals and institutions.

Universities are a central hub for knowledge creation, innovation and collaboration making them a particularly relevant setting for studying job crafting. Faculty members and PhD students play distinct, yet interconnected roles in advancing research and education. Faculty members may often juggle teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, requiring them to craft their roles by adjusting workloads, changing teaching methods, or seeking collaborative research opportunities. PhD students primarily focus on research but must also navigate institutional expectations, supervision relationships, and personal career goals, which may influence their job crafting strategies differently. See figure 1.

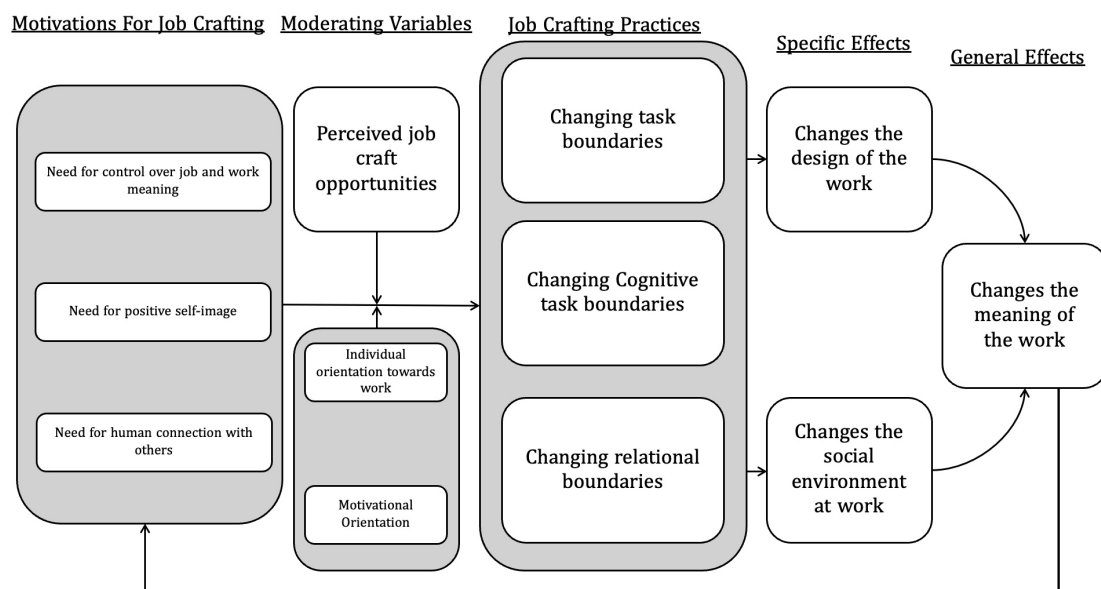


Figure 1: The Initial proposal for job crafting by Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001).

The job crafting practices, and theory have been observed in several instances, often related to a specific work profession, see Leana et al. (2009) on educational studies, Edén (2023) production work, or manufacturing by

Ghitulescu (2006). Many reports have been in the subject of theoretical study or analysis, as stated by Tims et al. (2012). However, limited studies have been done on faculty and higher educational environments, exception is Aulén et al. (2024) with “*Teachers’ job crafting to support their work-related well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic – A qualitative approach*”, and Kunnari et al. (2021) “*Teacher-Facilitators’ Job-Crafting: Making Meaning and Relevance in Authentic Learning Environments*”.

1.1 Background

Job crafting is a relatively new concept that is gaining attention in both research and practice. It focuses on how people adjust their roles at work to match their strengths and personal goals while also meeting the demands of their job (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010). Job crafting has been explored in several fields, where job tasks are often more structured and clearly defined (Ghitulescu, 2006; Bakker et al., 2012). However, in the academic world, with its unique mix of teaching, research, and administrative duties, this has not been studied extensively.

In academic settings, job crafting remains somewhat of an unexplored, especially when comparing how teaching faculty and PhD students approach their roles. These two groups deal with very different challenges and opportunities. E.g., teaching faculty must manage immediate tasks like engaging with students while also handling longer-term responsibilities like developing course materials and managing administrative work (Aulén et al., 2024). On the other hand, PhD students often work independently, which gives them more freedom, but they face intense pressure to produce high-quality, original research and contribute to their research field (Aulén et al., 2024)

Job crafting can be particularly relevant in knowledge-intensive work environments, where employees engage in complex problem-solving, innovation, and continuous learning. Environments such as academia require employees to balance multiple roles including research, teaching, and administrative tasks, given the autonomy and flexibility that is often associated with academic roles.

According to Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton (2010), job crafting is influenced by an individual’s hierarchical position, with higher-ranked employees having more formal control over their work but also facing greater institutional visibility and accountability.

Faculty members typically have flexibility in shaping their research focus and teaching approaches. However, they are also affected by institutional expectations such as performance evaluations, funding requirements and tenure assessment, which can limit their ability to engage freely in job crafting. However, faculty members can still engage in task crafting by prioritizing research over administrative work or relational crafting by connecting with colleagues from different fields to collaborate on research and projects.

On the other hand, similar to Berg et al (2010) arguments, lower ranked employees such as PhD students rely more on relational crafting by seeking mentorship, expanding professional networks, and negotiating more autonomy in their projects. This suggests that relational crafting could be used as a key strategy to navigate structural constraints in academia, which is potentially similar to (Berg et al., 2010).

This combination of independence and structured expectations makes academia an interesting but complex environment for job crafting. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model helps explain how job crafting works in this context. This framework looks at how people balance the demands of their job, such as deadlines, heavy workloads, and administrative tasks, against the resources they have, such as autonomy, feedback, and support from peers or supervisors (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Teaching faculty might engage in job crafting by building stronger connections with their students or trying out creative teaching techniques. For PhD students, job crafting might mean adjusting their schedules to maximize focus or finding collaboration opportunities to feel more supported (Olafsen et al., 2024; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

At the same time, the ability to engage in job crafting often depends on what resources are available. Research funding, professional development programs, and institutional support can all make a big difference in how easily faculty and researchers can adapt to their roles. Without these kinds of support, it can be much harder to make meaningful changes that align work responsibilities with personal and professional goals (Tims et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2012).

Some research has looked at job crafting in specific contexts, like during crises or in certain teaching environments (Aulén et al., 2024; Kunnari et al., 2021), but there's still a lot we don't know about how job crafting differs between academic roles. Understanding these differences is crucial because it could help universities and other institutions better support their staff, improve job satisfaction, and boost productivity while making sure employees remain motivated and maintain their well-being.

1.2 Problematization

While interest in job crafting is growing across many fields, it has been less studied in higher education. Most research has focused on areas like healthcare and manufacturing (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims et al., 2013) or roles with clear task structures (Bakker et al., 2012). Few studies have looked at job crafting in academic settings, with some exceptions, such as Aulén et al.'s (2024) study on how educators used job crafting to maintain well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and Kunnari et al.'s (2021) research on crafting to create authentic learning environments. These studies show that job crafting can enhance adaptability, engagement, and resilience in academic contexts but also point to the need for more research on how it differs between specific roles.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring job crafting practices among teaching faculty and PhD students at Chalmers University of Technology. It will examine how their experiences differ and what factors shape these behaviors. This is mainly focused on their specific role at Chalmers, and how PhD students and Faculty intertwine in their work roles. By doing so, this research seeks to provide a clearer understanding of job crafting practices in academia and offer practical strategies to help improve their roles for both personal and institutional success.

1.3 Purpose and detailed research question

The purpose of this study is to examine current job-crafting practices and explore the extent of flexibility and autonomy available to employees in the academic sector. This is done by exploring the following research questions:

How do job-crafting practices differ between teaching faculty and PhD students?

What is the perceived level of flexibility and autonomy among faculty staff in education roles compared to PhD students?

1.4 Delimitations & Limitations

The scope of this thesis includes delimitations and limitations in order to reach the purpose and scope. One key delimitation is that this study will be conducted at one department at Chalmers University of Technology. By narrowing the research to this department, the study gains depth and specificity in understanding job crafting within a particular academic environment. However, this limits the data from different perspectives in different environments such as different departments. Furthermore, the findings may not fully capture the variability of job crafting practices across the entire university or other academic institutions.

Another delimitation is the decision to focus only on two groups: teaching faculty and PhD students. While this provides a focused comparison, it excludes perspectives from other academic roles, such as administrative staff or postdoctoral researchers, who may also engage in job crafting in unique ways.

2. Theoretical Framework

To explore how job crafting influences employee engagement, well-being, and performance in knowledge-intensive work environments, a structured theoretical framework is necessary. This section integrates relevant theories and models to provide a comprehensive understanding of job crafting.

2.1 Job Crafting

This section introduces the concept of job crafting and provides a structured overview of the key theories, forms, and factors relevant to understanding how employees reshape their work.

First, theoretical models are introduced, presenting key frameworks that explain how individuals proactively shape their work roles. The second

subsection looks at the different types of job crafting, task, cognitive and relational based on well-known and accepted theoretical models. The third subsection focuses on the factors that influence job crafting, with special emphasis on autonomy and flexibility, alongside personal and organizational drivers. The fourth subsection outlines potential outcomes of job crafting, such as improved wellbeing, motivation, and performance. The fifth subsection focuses on job crafting in academic and knowledge-based work, showing how it could affect faculty and PhD students. Finally, the sixth subsection discusses challenges and barriers to job crafting, including structural constraints and limitations in support and agency.

2.1.1 Theoretical Models of Job Crafting

The concept of job crafting has evolved through various theoretical models that aim to explain how employees actively reshape their work environment to better align their skills, values, and interests. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) introduced the concept of job crafting as a self-initiated process where employees redefine their work by changing task boundaries, relational boundaries, and cognitive boundaries (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Their model emphasizes that job crafting is not a formal organizational process but rather an informal way for employees to take ownership of their work roles. The authors argue that job crafting is fundamentally driven by intrinsic psychological needs that motivate employees to reshape their work in ways that make it more meaningful, satisfying, and aligned with their personal and professional goals. They identified three core motivations that explain why individuals engage in job crafting.

One of the primary reasons employees engage in job crafting is to gain a sense of control over their work environment and responsibilities. Employees seek to adjust their tasks, interactions and work conditions in ways that allow them to have greater autonomy over their work. This sense of control is essential for reducing stress, increasing engagement, and fostering a sense of ownership over one's work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

From a psychological perspective, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al. 2017) suggests that autonomy is one of the three fundamental human needs that contribute to intrinsic motivation. When employees have the ability to make decisions about their work, they are more likely to feel empowered and committed to their roles. Conversely, when employees lack control, they may experience alienation, leading to disengagement and lower job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Building on this, Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) found that job crafting can act as a key mechanism through which individuals satisfy these intrinsic needs, particularly autonomy and competence. Their study demonstrated that employees who engage in job crafting report higher levels of well-being and mental health, not only because they reshape their work, but because this process helps them feel more in control and more effective in their role.

Another fundamental motivation for job crafting is the desire to reinforce a positive self-concept in the workplace. Employees strive to be seen as

competent, valuable, and respected professionals, and job crafting provides a means to shape their work in ways that highlight their strengths and aspirations (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

This motivation is based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggests that individuals define themselves based on their membership in social groups and the roles they play within them. When employees can adjust their tasks to align with their strengths, they are more likely to feel confident, satisfied with their job and fulfilled in their professional role.

Humans are naturally social beings, and the workplace is no exception. Employees engage in job crafting to enhance their social interactions, build stronger workplace relationships and create a sense of belonging (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). A work environment where individuals feel connected and valued leads to increased engagement, collaboration, and emotional well-being.

Zhang & Parker (2018) introduced a model that divides job crafting into two types: approach crafting, which involves adding positive elements to the job (actively seeking positive changes in job tasks or relations), and avoidance crafting, which focuses on reducing or eliminating negative aspects of the job. Their research shows that approach crafting is generally associated with positive outcomes such as engagement and better performance, while avoidance-oriented crafting is generally associated with less positive outcomes such as less engagement. This model expanded the understanding of job crafting by showing that employees not only add to their jobs but also remove or reduce unhelpful elements, all within the same framework (Zhang & Parker, 2018).

Recent research has highlighted how top-down work design and bottom-up job crafting influence each other in a dynamic way. Parker et al. (2025) present a multilevel perspective showing that formal work characteristics, such as autonomy, support and job demands both influence and are influenced by job crafting behaviors over time. While traditional models like the job characteristics model and the job demands-resources framework focus on how predefined job features affect outcomes, this newer approach recognizes employees as active agents capable of reshaping their work environment. Job crafting is therefore not only constrained by the structural environment but can also serve as a mechanism to change the environment over time. For example, employees who proactively seek feedback or build new collaborative relationships may transform a socially isolated role into one that is rich in support and interaction. On the other hand, low autonomy or too much workload can inhibit job crafting efforts. Parker et al. (2025) explain that job crafting and job design can influence each other in a positive cycle: well-designed jobs encourage more crafting, and crafting can improve the job even more over time. This perspective is particularly relevant in knowledge-intensive environments like academia, where work autonomy is high, but resource constraints and complex demands vary greatly across roles.

2.1.2 Types of Job Crafting

Job crafting can take different forms depending on how employees choose to reshape their work. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) identify three main types of job crafting: task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting. Each type involves different ways employees can adjust their work to make it more engaging, meaningful, and aligned with their strengths and preferences.

Task crafting involves employees changing the scope, nature, or number of tasks they do to better align with their skills, interest or career goals (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). This can include taking on additional duties that feel more engaging, reshaping existing tasks to make them more efficient, or delegating tasks that do not match their strengths.

Relational crafting focuses on reshaping workplace relationships and interactions to enhance collaborations, engagement, and job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Employees may actively seek out new professional connections, strengthen existing relationships, or adjust to how often and the depth of their interactions with colleagues, clients, or managers. By shaping their work relationships employees can create a more supportive and fulfilling work environment.

Cognitive crafting involves changing how employees perceive their jobs to find greater meaning and purpose in their work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Instead of changing actual tasks or relationships, employees adjust their mindset about their role and its impact. This is particularly valuable in jobs where tasks may feel repetitive or routine as it allows employees to see the bigger picture of how their work contributes to broader goals. By shifting their perspective, employees can find more fulfillment and motivation in their daily tasks.

2.1.3 Factors influencing Job Crafting

Job crafting is influenced by both individual and organizational factors, which determines to what extent employees proactively reshape their work. These factors shape their motivation, ability and chances to engage in job crafting, ultimately affecting their job satisfaction, engagement, and performance.

Job autonomy and work flexibility play a key role in enabling job crafting, as it provides employees with the necessary space to make meaningful changes to their work (Kim et al., 2018). In this context, job autonomy refers to the degree of independence, freedom and the ability to make own decisions at work (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2024). Likewise work flexibility refers to employees having control over when and where they do their work, such as changing their schedule or working remotely (Smit et al., 2023). High-autonomy, flexible job design allows for greater opportunity for individuals to craft their jobs, while rigid structured roles offer fewer chances to make changes (Berg et al., 2008). Research shows that autonomy is almost always necessary for job crafting to occur. When employees have enough freedom in their roles, they feel more able to make changes and improve how they do their work (Tang & Yu, 2022).

Studies have consistently found that employees are more likely to craft their jobs when they have greater freedom to make decisions. For example, Jindal et al (2023) found that job crafting was highest among workers who reported high levels of autonomy (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2024). When people have more control over their work, they are more likely to feel ownership and take steps to adjust their responsibilities to better match their needs and strengths. This sense of freedom can motivate employees to introduce new tasks, improve how they work, or start new collaborations, instead of just simply following fixed routines. Over time this proactive behavior can lead to greater motivation and engagement at work.

Work flexibility also plays an important role in supporting job crafting. In modern knowledge-based roles such as academic research, employees often have the freedom to choose when and where they work (Wessels et al, 2019). This kind of flexibility makes it easier for people to adjust their work to fit their personal routines and responsibilities. For example, Wessels et al. (2019) suggest that using flexible work options, like working from home or hybrid schedules, actually requires employees to be proactive. They must plan their own time and organize their work environment. In this sense flexibility gives the opportunity to shape one's job, but employees benefit from it only if they actively manage how and when they work. Other studies support this, showing that when people are trusted with flexible hours or remote work, they often take more responsibility for organizing their tasks and managing demands, which can reduce stress and improve satisfaction (Andrade et al., 2023). When flexibility is combined with autonomy, it creates a sense of trust and control, which helps people feel more committed and engaged in their work. On the other hand, rigid jobs with little room for change can prevent employees from taking initiative and limit innovation.

While autonomy and flexibility generally enable job crafting, research also highlights important limitations. Not all employees will craft their work effectively just because freedom is available, individual differences and support system matter. For example, a recent study demonstrated that employees with a strong growth mindset engages in significantly more proactive job crafting, but only under conditions of high autonomy, when autonomy was low, even growth-oriented individuals could not translate their mindset into crafting behavior (Yu et al., 2024).

Employees with proactive personalities, characterized by initiative-taking and a forward-thinking approach, are more likely to engage in job crafting. The big five personality traits have been particularly linked to job crafting, where extraversion and openness to experience are linked to seeking social connections and adding variety to tasks, while conscientiousness supports a structured and goal-focused approach to job crafting (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012).

Further, Bipp & Demerouti (2014) found that individuals with high approach-temperament, those driven by growth, challenge and resource-seeking behaviors, are more likely to engage in proactive job crafting. These employees actively shape their work environment by asking for feedback, seeking growth opportunities, and taking on extra tasks to improve skills and job satisfaction. Oppositely, avoidance-motivated employees focus on reducing job demands, such as simplifying tasks or minimizing workload, rather than actively seeking growth opportunities.

Intrinsic motivation also serves as a driver of job crafting. Employees who seek personal growth, skill development and meaning in their work are more likely to reshape their tasks and interactions. Self-determination theory suggests that individuals with high autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to craft their jobs to fit their personal needs (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Moreover, regulatory focus theory differentiates between promotion-focused individuals, who aim for growth and development, and prevention-focused individuals, who seek to minimize job stressors (Higgins, 1997). Promotion-focused job crafting, such as increasing challenges and seeking resources, tends to lead to higher job satisfaction and performance outcomes (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019).

Bipp & Demerouti (2014) reinforce this distinction by showing that employees with approached-oriented goals such as career advancement, learning or skill-building are more likely to actively shape their work in a positive way, whereas avoidance-motivated individuals tend to focus on mitigating job-related stressors rather than fostering professional growth.

Job autonomy, or the degree to which employees can make decisions about their tasks and work processes, strongly influences job crafting. When employees have more autonomy, they feel in control and are more likely to adjust their work to match their strengths and preferences. This sense of ownership encourages them to make proactive changes that align with their personal and career goals (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Van Wingerden et al. (2017) highlight that while autonomy plays a critical role in job crafting, its benefits are maximized when combined with adequate training, mentorship, and social support. Their findings indicate that structured job crafting interventions help employees optimize their work environment, leading to increased engagement and job satisfaction, while also mitigating potential risks such as role ambiguity and work overload (Van Wingerden et al., 2017).

Job crafting is not only influenced by individual characteristics but also by social factors, including interactions with leaders, colleagues, customers, and even family members. Previous research has primarily focused on three factors that influence job crafting: personal traits, job characteristics (e.g., autonomy, task variety), and demographics (e.g., age, work experience) (Wang, et al., 2020). However more recent studies highlight the importance of social factors in shaping job crafting (Wang et al., 2020). Social interactions provide resources,

support, and opportunities that encourage employees to adjust their job boundaries to better fit their skills and preferences.

Leadership styles strongly influence how individuals engage in job crafting, both in traditional workplaces and academia. Supportive leaders, such as transformational and empowering leaders, motivate employees, provide feedback, and encourage autonomy, making job crafting more likely (Wang, Li, & Chen, 2020). In academia, this support often comes from mentors, research supervisors, and department heads, who create an environment where faculty and PhD students feel encouraged to shape their research focus, teaching methods, and collaborations. When leaders support initiative and offer growth opportunities, individuals feel more confident in adjusting their roles and work environment to better align with their strengths and goals. On the other hand, strict or controlling leadership, rigid academic structures, or a lack of mentorship can limit flexibility and discourage job crafting, reducing opportunities for innovation and professional development.

Peer relationships also play a significant role in job crafting. Supportive colleagues provide valuable resources, such as feedback, shared knowledge, and emotional support which can enhance relational crafting and task adjustments (Tims & Parker, 2020). With strong collegial support, employees are more likely to engage in promotion-focused job crafting, seeking additional responsibilities and new challenges. Furthermore, job crafting behaviors tend to be socially contagious, employees who observe colleagues proactively shaping their roles are more likely to do the same (Demerouti & Peeters, 2018).

On the other hand, workplace conflicts or lack of support can discourage job crafting and push employees toward prevention-focused job crafting, where they seek to minimize stressors and reduce job demands.

2.1.4 Outcomes of Job Crafting

Research has examined how job crafting affects both employees and organizations. Overall, job crafting is associated with many positive outcomes such as improving well-being, attitudes, and performance. However, researchers also point out that job crafting can have negative effects on individuals if it is done in the wrong way or excessively.

Because job crafting allows employees to shape their work to better fit their preferences and strengths, it tends to increase how satisfied they are with their job. A meta-analysis by Rudolph et al (2017) found that job crafting has robust positive relationships with job satisfaction and work engagement across studies. By proactively adjusting their job, employees often make their work more enjoyable or meaningful, leading to higher satisfaction. Similarly, work engagement, when employees are deeply involved, energetic, and committed at work, is consistently linked to crafting.

The meta-analysis noted above by Rudolph et al (2017) found a positive relationship between overall job crafting and employee performance. When employees adjust their tasks and how they use resources, they may eliminate

inefficiencies and use their strengths, which helps them perform better. Crafting can also enhance performance indirectly by boosting perceived person-job fit. Employees who craft often achieve a better alignment between job requirements and their abilities, which can lead to better performance (Ebrahimi et al., 2021).

Zhang & Liu (2021) found that job crafting enhances job performance by strengthening workplace relationships and social capital, giving employees better access to resources and support. Employees who engage in relational crafting tend to collaborate more effectively, improving efficiency.

Additionally, employees with high self-confidence and proactive personality are less dependent on social networks to improve their performance. However, excessive job crafting can lead to work overload, which highlights the need for balance.

Job crafting has been linked to greater creativity and innovative work behavior. By seeking out new challenges or learning opportunities (a form of task crafting) and by expanding one's network (relational crafting), employees can come across new ideas and perspectives which can lead to more innovation. Employees who engage in job crafting tend to be more creative in their work (Tian et al., 2021). Crafting encourages employees to experiment and go beyond the status quo, which is fundamental to innovation. Moreover, crafting often increases work engagement and positive emotions, which are known to broaden thinking and enhance creativity.

2.1.5 Challenges and Limitations of Job Crafting

While job crafting has many positive effects, Zhang & Parker (2018) argue that current models fail to fully integrate different perspectives, leading to theoretical inconsistencies. Some studies emphasize employee autonomy, while others focus on work design constraints, making it difficult to determine when and how job crafting is most effective.

Measurement of job crafting remains difficult, especially for internal cognitive changes. Additionally, not all employees have equal opportunities, for example rigid job design or unsupportive leadership can inhibit crafting efforts (Berg et al., 2010).

2.2 Academic Workplace

An Academic Workplace is described by Nooji et al. (2022) & Nooji et al. (2023) as a mixed workplace. According to the authors, research concentrated in the academic workplace has produced different outcomes, suggesting a hybrid setup between corporate field office with educational environment.

This is due to different predicted innovational capabilities and outcomes predicted by Gorgievski et al. (2010) & Parkin et al. (2011). Both articles suggest reasons for alternative methods for higher academical environments, with different agendas than most corporate companies in the private sector. Indergård & Hansen (2024) continues the same argument, suggesting that research and education in non-profit organizations is more focused on learning,

rather than making profits. This results in two-parted fields in the academic workplace, one specified for educational purposes and the other specified for research and academic purposes.

2.2.1 Structure Academic Workplace

Structures in high academical environments are often described as complex (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2023). Typical structure for a higher educational environment consists of strong vertical structure with a strong horizontal structure, forming a matrix structure. Creating a high inter-departmental coordination allows individuals to work in different functions and departments temporarily (Katzenbach & Michaels, 2013). Also, the matrix organization allows for a two-way reporting system, making it possible to have two main customers: education and research (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2023).

Katzenbach & Michaels (2013) argues that typical downsides of matrix organization is often low openness in terms of collaboration, innovation and exploration. This includes cultural exchange, teamwork and general participation in outside partnerships. In Juárez-Nájera (2015) study, similar reasons were found in higher educational institutions, suggesting that current structures allow dimensions such as political and cultural, hindering new partnerships. Duncan (1979) suggests that downsides of the matrix organization is often located in the low-vertical-, horizontal- communication between people in the same rank. Otherwise, the matrix organization has proven itself effective in two functions, which creates high information flow/high coordination effects and bypasses the potential downsides of it.

3. Methodology

According to Björkqvist (2012), the abductive research method is used when the partial subject of research is known, but the expected outcome of it is unknown. Our first estimation of potential research method was aligned with Björkqvist (2012) theory. However, the potential use of theory and empiricism is shifting when using abductive research methods, creating a mixed use of deductive and inductive research methods (Atkinson et al., 2003). This was the original idea when selecting methodology to analyze and conduct research activity. However, as time went on, changes were made, shifting towards a goal oriented, already known theory, confirming and exploring today's theory from Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001).

Therefore, the selected research method became deductive, shifting from Mantere & Ketokivi (2013) described abductive research method, a mix of deductive and inductive, shifting instead towards an already known goal in a comparative environment proposed by Fife and Gossner (2024). According to the authors, a deductive approach can be useful when concentrating an effort towards expanding known data, in accordance with a known goal. This allows our research to effectively choose and aim for a possible scenario in job crafting, in an academic setting at Chalmers University of Technology. Therefore, a deductive approach was chosen.

Bell et al. (2022) describes a deductive approach by: you gain knowledge about the specific topic, use it to find specific observations/findings, then use the same findings/observations, connect it with said theory you used in the very beginning. This may evolve towards an iterative strategy, weaving back-and-forth between theory and the sampled data. Which, in short, happened in our research project. This is also evident in grounded theory, according to Bell et al. (2022), making our approach fit with said authors' suggestion.

Due to its qualitative capabilities of the study, Goffin et al. (2019) suggests a structure consisting of: research design, data collection, data analysis, and reflection on validity & reliability. The selected research design is comparative design, niched in intercultural approaches (Bell et al., 2022). Which is to our estimation the most appropriate way to conduct our project and is also why it is selected. Confirming this, Hantrais (1996) states that comparative design is the most appropriate way to compare different groups, often based on a qualitative approach, to get an understanding of their differences and similarities. This statement aligns with our research, providing an understanding for comparative analysis at Chalmers University of Technology, studying two different groups.

3.1 Data Collection

According to Miles (1979), qualitative data analysis is the best way to collect large amounts of data. It is often collected through interviews and later matched with alternative sources. Qualitative interviews often need to be transcribed, and later coded afterwards, in a specific language, to generate a high analytical richness. This strategy was selected to fit the environment of our study, ultimately selecting interviews for our data collection in this knowledge-intensive environment at Chalmers. Which ultimately aligned with Miles (1979) theory to generate qualitative data.

To accomplish this, semi-structured interviews are a preferable source of data collection, maximizing reliability and validity according to Bell et al. (2022). This strategy was chosen to maximize reliability and validity. Pawson (1996) mentions both unstructured and structured interviews, utilizing potential and how a particular strategy may provide information to the relevant field. By conducting our semi-structured interviews, a few possible viewpoints may be aspired to in the interview, taking the aspect as a comparison in the analysis and discussion. We used to collect as much informative data as we could with this strategy motioned both by Bell et al. (2022) and Pawson (1996). By comparing common knowledge with presented data from carried out interviews, realist explanation may give the study a nuanced perspective. This method may be used later, comparing possible documents and other informational sources to provide a deeper understanding.

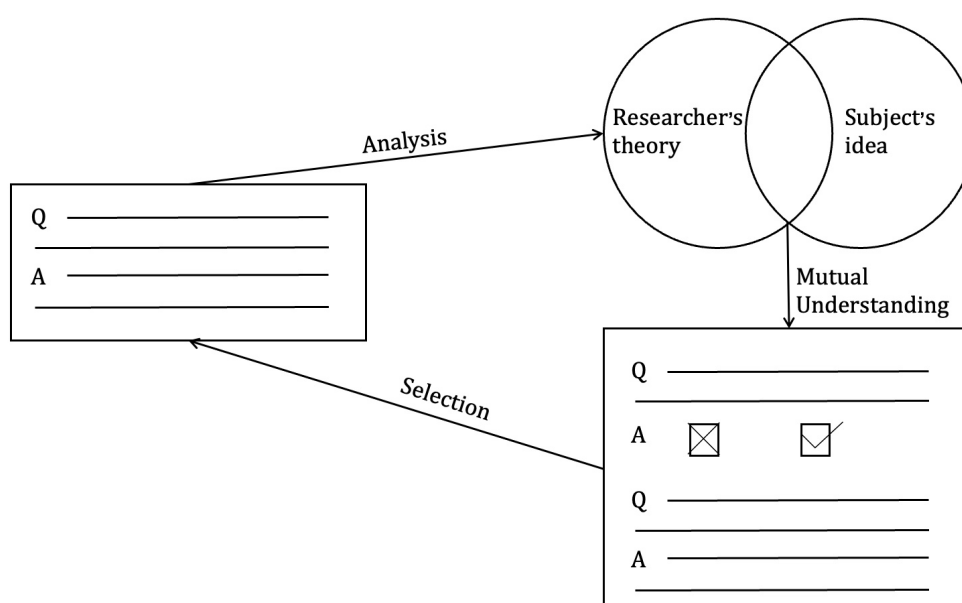


Figure 2: Pawson (1996) mixed explanation of unstructured/structured interviews.

3.1.1 Interview Data

Our interview data is mainly semi-structured, carried out with an interview guide, based on previously known knowledge based on theory and experience

(Bell et al., 2022). To carry out the interview in the best possible way, Bell et al. (2022) recommends an interview guide for semi-structured interviews. The purpose is to collect empirical data between two different groups at Chalmers University of Technology. By conducting the same type of questioning, and collecting a similar amount of data, a comparison between those groups can be carried out. This reasoning was taken into consideration, ultimately creating our strategy based on Bell et al. (2022) argument.

3.1.2 Data from Documents

Data collection, taken from documents and general information from Chalmers University of Technology, is regarded as a secondary source by us, to align information collected from the said interviews of the faculty and PhD students' groups. A similar tactic is regarded as a good strategy by Bryman & Bell (2017), arguing that a secondary source is necessary to create positive affirmation about the study. Stated by Trost (2010), collection of data from interviews may be affected by different agendas, and using different types of sources may provide an indication if the individual in this interview is telling the truth.

3.2 Analysis

This study followed a comparative qualitative design (Hantrais, 1996) to explore differences and similarities between faculty members and PhD students at Chalmers university of technology. Given the interview-based data collection a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen over alternatives such as Grounded theory or Gioia approach (Bell et al., 2022) for its clear coding structure and suitability for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns.

Thematic research design fits the deductive approach, with matching data, placed as an alternative to inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest the same, adding that pattern is often found in qualitative interviews, and it is vital to bind reoccurring patterns with theory, creating a theme.

Braun and Clarke (2006) continue with explaining stepwise use of thematic analysis, of 1) familiarization with data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for common themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and lastly 6) producing a final report. The conclusion made by Bell et al. (2022) suggests that thematic analysis may be iterative with continuous improvement of coding, sampling methods and constant comparisons. Which was our case, ultimately readjusting some minor questions and coding's, to grant a better answer.

However, Goffin et al. (2019) state that other factors, such as inter-coder agreement, case presentation, and case interpretation, may affect the quality of the interpretation of the data in the report. To counter the first two flaws Goffin et al. (2019) suggest the use of the same tools, close collaboration, and follow-ups on the presentation of performed steps. The last factor is counted by using relevant data, which is often compared and analyzed (Eisenhardt, 1989). Those countermeasures were used by us to guarantee quality in our work and to match the answers given by our interviews.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine how faculty members and PhD students at Chalmers University of Technology within the studied department, engage in job crafting, focusing on their strategies, motivations, and challenges within an academic setting. The findings from interviews, document analysis, and theoretical insights are used to explore the differences and similarities between these two groups, highlighting how job-crafting behaviors manifest in knowledge-intensive work environments. This was conducted similar to Braun and Clarke's (2006) arguments, presented in Figure 3. By analyzing task, relational, and cognitive crafting, this study explores how job crafting contributes to job satisfaction, professional growth, and role fulfillment in an academic setting.

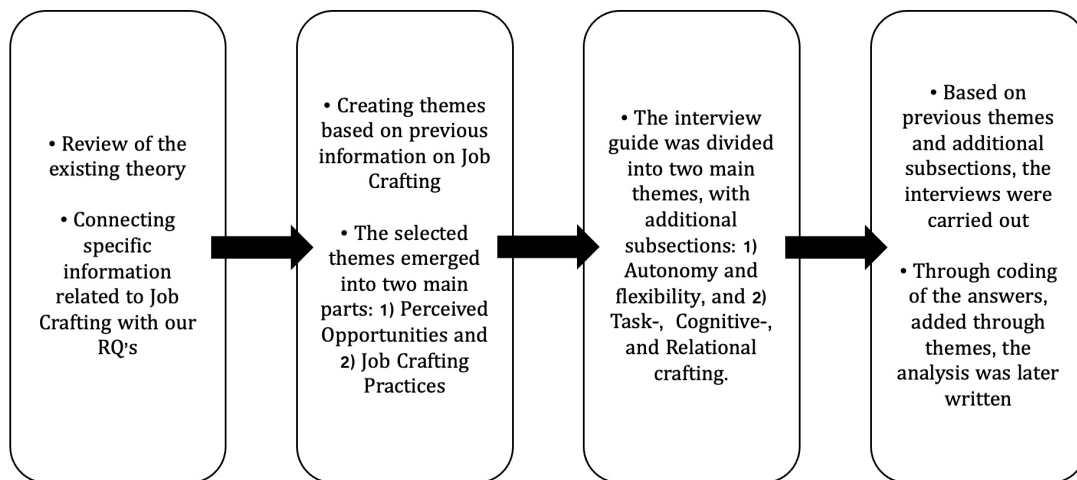


Figure 3: Explaining how the authors used the research method and created the analysis.

The analysis also considers organizational influences, such as leadership, workplace culture, and institutional support, and the role of social interactions, including mentorship and collaboration. Using Wrzesniewski & Dutton's (2001) Job Crafting Model, findings are interpreted in relation to individual experiences and structural conditions in academia.

Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of job crafting in the academic environment to provide insights into how universities can support job crafting among faculty and PhD students.

Initially, all interviews were thoroughly reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Thereafter, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments and significant quotations in each transcription. These initial codes represented recurring patterns and relevant aspects specifically related to participants' description of task, cognitive, and relational crafting behaviors. These three categories provided the foundation for the thematic structure. During further analysis additional prominent themes emerged, related to participants' perceived autonomy and flexibility. These two additional themes were identified due to their frequent occurrence and

significant influence on participant’s ability to engage in crafting behaviors, therefore becoming important parts of the final analysis.

In the reviewing phase, all the themes were checked and compared to the original data to make sure they matched what participants had actually said. For example, we grouped codes like “temporal freedom” and “personal work design” into the larger theme of flexibility.

Five major themes emerged from the coding and reviewing process: autonomy, Flexibility, Task crafting, cognitive crafting and relational crafting. The first two themes (Autonomy and Flexibility) describe the work conditions that affect how easily participants can shape their jobs. The other three themes reflect the forms of job crafting (task, cognitive and relational) identified in prior theory.

Autonomy was chosen because participants emphasized aspects of self-direction, control over tasks, and personal responsibility. The theme reflects the level of individual freedom and decision-making in the participants’ roles.

Flexibility was defined based on respondents’ opportunities to adapt when, where, and how they perform their tasks. This theme primarily addresses how structural and organizational factors influence individuals’ ability to adjust to their work.

Task crafting was selected as a central theme on both the theoretical framework by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and recurring patterns in participants’ narratives. Many described actively modifying their work tasks, for example, by adapting teaching content or initiating new projects. These examples show how individuals shaped their job tasks to better align with their skills, interests, and goals.

Cognitive crafting was included as a theme due to several interviewees expressing how they perceived their roles in different ways to make it more meaningful, for example, by focusing on how their research helps society or how they support students.

Relational crafting was identified as a key theme because many participants highlighted how social connections influenced their work experience. Where social interactions such as supportive relationships with colleagues helped them feel more connected at work.

Themes	Representative codes from coding
Autonomy	Self-direction, Personal responsibility, independence in research, project management, support for work adjustment, adaptation of teaching materials
Flexibility	Formal support for flexibility, structured support through planning, temporal freedom, personal work design, flexible research

Task Crafting	Demands vs freedom, efficiency optimization, integration of research and teaching, resource optimization, self-initiated change, personal initiative, teaching innovation
Cognitive Crafting	Meaningfulness in research, relevance through research, social contribution, industrial relevance, societal benefit, meaningfulness through student's development
Relational Crafting	Supportive work environment, shared motivation, sense of community, importance of social belonging, knowledge exchange

Figure 4: Themes and representative codes from the coding.

3.3 Reflection of ethics, validity, and reliability

Bell et al. (2022) argues that data collected by any informal source needs to take accountability for anonymity. This is to protect them from any harm or negative feedback if they are in a sensitive position. Therefore, it's vital to ask for consent on every interview, and give the participant a chance to decline the opportunity for an interview. Therefore, it is important to give the participants a clear picture of the interview process, how their information will be used, and their rights such as being able to draw back their statements anytime if that is desired. This was ultimately taken into consideration, granting each participant similar info stated by Bell et al. (2022).

Since the research is taking place in Europe, the information storage of the interview needs to be in a safe place, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). While interviewees may want to be anonymous in the report, they will not be anonymous to us when we interview them. This means all information gathered during interviews must be securely stored to protect participants' privacy and comply with legal requirements. These precautions help build trust with participants and strengthen the credibility of the research.

In addition to ethical considerations, it is important to reflect on the validity and reliability of the study in relation to the chosen qualitative methodology. Traditional measures of reliability and validity are often rooted in positivist research which emphasizes replicability, objectivity, and standardization (Bell et al., 2022). However, since this study is qualitative and explores job crafting in an academic environment, alternative quality criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are more appropriate (Bryman & Bell, 2017). These criteria align with the interpretivist epistemology that supports qualitative studies, especially those examining complex and context-specific topics like job crafting in academia. The aim of this study is not to find a universal truth that can be tested in a laboratory setting, but rather to understand and compare how different individuals in academic environments adapt their roles and what that means for innovation and knowledge management. Therefore, it is more relevant to reflect on how trustworthy the

results are, mirroring the participants' experience, and whether the results can be transferred to similar academic environments.

3.4 Support Tools and Artificial Intelligence

At the time the academic thesis was written, discussions surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) were both widespread and polarized, with arguments emerging both in favor of and against its use. Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) concluded that AI should primarily be regarded as a supportive tool, useful for stimulating inspiration, grammar and spelling, facilitating transcription, and enabling translation within academic contexts. For our case, instruments such as Spiik (Version 1.0.96) (transcription & translation) and ChatGPT (Version 3.5) (inspiration & proposal for grammar improvement). For example, we used prompts such as:

“ Give me a better word for...”

“ How can this be expressed in more formal academic English?”

“ Is this sentence grammatically, correct?”

“ Translate into English”

This was used to help us provide more qualitative-oriented text with fewer mistakes and quality errors. However, this tool was not used by the authors, and the written text is still created and written by the authors themselves.

The study conducted by Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) examined 24 academic papers focused on the application of AI in academic work. Through a series of case studies and comparative analyses, the authors illustrated how AI has contributed to enhancing the quality of academic outputs. They identified six key dimensions in which AI can improve academic reports: (1) idea development and research design, (2) content development and structuring, (3) literature review and synthesis, (4) data management and analysis, (5) editing, review, and publishing support, and (6) communication, outreach, and ethical compliance. Where we used mainly parts such as (1), (3), (4) and (5) in our project.

Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) highlight the importance of maintaining transparency when utilizing AI across the six identified dimensions. This remains crucial even when AI is employed merely as a supportive tool, to uphold quality standards and to acknowledge the potential for AI-related errors. Finally, the authors advocate for a more progressive integration of AI in academic reporting, suggesting that AI offers a more exploratory and alternative means of enhancing the quality and articulation of academic texts.

Our approach has taken similar approach such as Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) suggests. However, we focused our A.I tools towards a more reserved approach, only granting use in favor of transcribing, translation, grammar and word improvement, and other approaches connected to text improvement. To clarify, this includes not writing, fact checking, and sourcing in this text.

3.5 Methodology Reflection

In the very beginning of the report, an abductive research method was selected with a Thematic analysis approach. This was selected due to the natural aspirations of the project, making it simpler for the analysis approach. However, as the time went on with our interviews and transcriptions, we couldn't use any proper program to code the data. This created a dilemma, making us code all the transcriptions by hand. The Coding part was time consuming and coded in two ways, both thematic and grounded theory, as we, the authors discussed throughout the report about research methods. Thematic theory was eventually selected. Complementary to this situation was that we started to run out of time and the coding was time consuming, making the first half of the analysis based on ½ of the coded transcription. This was later revised and improved, to improve the quality of the text produced in the analysis, making it based on the 21 participants. Ultimately, the discussion and conclusion were written based on the written methodology, even if the whole systematic approach had some minor sidesteps.

3.6 Demographic Analysis

The analysis was based on 21 interviews, divided into two primary groups: PhD students and faculty members. Participants were selected through the Department of Technology Management and Economics (TME), which is organized into five distinct sub-divisions: Entrepreneurship and Strategy (ES), Environmental Systems Analysis (ESA), Innovation and R&D Management (IRDM), Science, Technology and Society (STS), and Supply and Operations Management (SOM). Although the total sample was not evenly distributed across all sub-divisions, each was represented within the study.

The first group, comprising 11 participants, exhibited demographic similarities in terms of age, academic position, and the nature of their current tasks. This group represented the PhD student population, generally aged between 25 and 35. It included six international students and five individuals of Swedish origin. The participants were at varying stages of their PhD studies, ranging from the first to the fifth year of their PhD programs.

The second group, consisting of 10 participants, reflected greater demographic diversity with respect to age, professional role, and academic responsibilities. These individuals held faculty positions, with roles focused on research, teaching, or in one case, departmental management. Their ages ranged from the 40s to the 60s, and the group included seven Swedish nationals and three international staff members.

3.7 Job Description Faculty and PhD Students

To understand our paper better, we are going to provide a section focusing on tasks granted for Faculty, PhD students and how these groups interconnect.

3.7.1 Faculty roles and responsibilities

Faculty members at Chalmers University of Technology act as academic leaders with different responsibilities such as research, education and

institutional development (Chalmers Studieplan TME, 2022). They also take part in administrative tasks such as course planning, supervision documentation and participating in committees (Chalmers Arbetsordning, 2023). Faculty are expected to lead independent research projects, secure external funding, publish scholarly work, and engage in collaborations with different stakeholders. Faculty have a high degree of autonomy in shaping their research and course content. They are responsible for guiding junior researchers such as PhD students and play a central role in shaping the academic environment (Chalmers Styrdokument Personal, 2024).

3.7.2 PhD students' roles and responsibilities

PhD students at Chalmers are early-stage academics who take part in structured PhD programs. They are both students and employees combining research with courses and paid work at the university (Chalmers Styrdokument Personal, 2024). Their main tasks include doing research under the guidance of a supervisor, which will lead to a PhD thesis. They also take courses with about 60 credits covering both their subject and general skills (Chalmers Studieplan TME, 2022).

In addition, PhD students often spend 20% of their time helping with teaching, supervising master students or doing other departmental tasks. Their progress is followed and evaluated through an Individual Study Plan (ISP), which they update regularly together with their supervisor (Chalmers Studieplan TME, 2022). Although PhD students are expected to become more independent as they move forward, their work is highly shaped by their supervisor's guidance and the universities' structure.

3.7.3 The faculty and PhD students' relationship

The relationship between faculty and PhD students plays a big role in the PhD experience at Chalmers. Faculty members act as supervisors, helping PhD students with both academic guidance, professional mentorship and their development as future researchers.

However, it also creates a power asymmetry, PhD students rely heavily on their supervisors for access to resources and decision-making. Their ability to shape their work is often dependent on their supervisor's approval and level of support. PhD students must therefore often adapt their work, priorities and even research direction to align with their supervisor's expectations. This dynamic limit their autonomy and makes the quality of the student supervisor's relationship vital to their experience.

4. Findings

Findings chapters are divided into two separate parts, to provide clarity between the studied groups, divided into Faculty and PhD Students.

4.1 Perceived Opportunity for Job Crafting Faculty

All interviewed faculty members have an established history at Chalmers and are well integrated into the university's routines, formal regulations, and operational protocols. Several individuals referred to the "Chalmers Spirit", which reflects a sense of unity fostered through collaborative research, shared activities, and other forms of interdepartmental cooperation. This spirit contributes to the continued advancement of the university towards a more sustainable organizational future. Person 1 (from now on P1) stated that the Chalmers culture is *"it was very centered around us having a more autonomous research group that divided up undergraduate education, research and utilization and then it was very easy."* Which is a good background to understand the following statements in flexibility and Autonomy.

4.1.1 Flexibility

Flexibility and the ability to adapt to one's role appear to differ notably from individual to individual. This variation reflects a range of personal approaches, experiences, and interpretations of responsibilities.

Flexibility was found in all the interviews by the faculty, *"I can work from home several days a week for instance, I guess that's fairly flexible."* was stated by P1, indicating high freedom of operation. On the other interview with P2, arguments were made about flexibility of changing environments, based on the previous experience in research. The same person continues to explain their role in academia, spending a total of 2/3 of their time on research. Similar answers were found by other faculty members, pending their devotion from 20-50% time to education, and the rest spent on research. Many stating that their goal is often clear and concise, with a clear research strategy, co-writers and other planning activities.

The research part is often described as an *"easy part"*, generating high flexibility while structuring the foreseeable future for a research project and/or lectures. However, as P6 states *"It is absolutely central and in that, the narrowest sector, is for example getting funds to finance various projects and things like that. And so I try to find different ways to do it. I have tried to find different ways to do things because I didn't think they were different in themselves, but above all because it would provide a better life for myself and my colleagues."*, the hard part is the time and amount of energy searching for available funds. As stated by P6 the hard part is actively getting funds from stakeholders or research funds. This is often seen as a possible barrier to their flexibility, creating some hindering factors in their planning stage by adding more requirements and/or limitations to their ideas. However, as stated by many, their goals and values are often the reason why some research projects are formed in a special way, and others are not launched at all. As P1 argues *"So, you can apply for 20*

different types of funding and maybe not get any of them. So, there's a lot of work that goes to waste, as well as when you apply. And then there's a tendency that when you have a good idea and don't get funding, you adjust it more and more to fit the people who fund it, so you have to compromise on what your heart issues are and there's a risk that you might have a really interesting question, you think, but you never get funding for it, so you don't get to work on it".

The general understanding and other activities related to carrying out the research are often seen as a comprehensive part among the faculty, which often is seen as an experienced group within the academic community. However, due to complications, often related to the timeframe and attention needed in education, adjustments are made. This argument is by P3, suggesting *"Yes, research, I can decide for myself what I'm going to research, when I'm going to deliver things, what my own deadlines are, I have nothing, I have a framework that researches. You have standards that you follow, and you simply do things that you have to do. You publish, you have a PhD and you choose for yourself, you apply for money. And when it comes to teaching, I was given no choice, I was told, this is what you're going to teach."*

Other reasons were often bureaucratic barriers, forcing the faculty to carry out some of the administrative tasks which are time-consuming. As many stated in the interviews, these barriers forces interviewees to adjust their work. This results often in adjustment to meet education or research outcome, without compromising the ability to meet the expected goals and values set by the faculty individual. When both education/research outcome is in critical need, the interviewees often tend to adjust their work more dramatically, using their free time to meet the expected outcome of their expected goals and values. This statement is supported by P2 *"Teaching typically involves more other people that you need to think about and adjust to. I guess then teaching is a little bit more generally speaking a little bit less flexible with block schedules"*. Lastly, faculty's behavior is often well structured, to complete their goal and values both in education and research.

However, not all faculty members succeed in maintaining this balance. One participant shared how the fragmentation of responsibilities across administrative, educational and research tasks made it difficult to stay focused and effective. One faculty member described how taking on too many disconnected responsibilities eventually became unmanageable, which made the person set boundaries and step away from certain roles.

'When you see that it is becoming too much, you can say no. So, I have definitely done that (task crafting), when it becomes too fragmented, you have too many different tasks that are very fragmented and it becomes difficult to manage the education and research roles" (P10).

4.1.2 Autonomy

Autonomy and the ability to adjust to their job varies from individual to individual. As P1 said in the interview, *"you know how important it is to have full autonomy*

and almost no demands... It's fun, I can do what I want, both in terms of planning and I have no problems with it" The faculty's autonomy is often connected towards their work, which can place the individual, if they want, to be both alone and in group. It depends on the specific task, connected to either research or education. Sometimes neither of them, examples taken from P7, *"But still be involved and contribute to the processes where you believe you can benefit yourself and also create fun tasks for yourself"*. This suggests a high autonomy, since most of the extra curriculums/tasks are voluntary, connected in some way to their work. The faculty operates under high freedom, examples taken from P6 *"at Chalmers you have been pretty much like an entrepreneur with an office space. You have had quite a lot of freedom to come up with things that you want to run"*, which suggests a high interest in their own work, where goals and values often connect with their personal interests.

4.2 Perceived Opportunity to Job Craft PhD Students

All interviewed PhD students have some prior experience at Chalmers. However, they are generally not well integrated into the university's routines, formal regulations, or operational structures. Several individuals, particularly those from international backgrounds, expressed a sense of disconnection and isolation. This perceived lack of inclusion appears to stem from limited collaborative research opportunities, a scarcity of shared activities, and the absence of interdepartmental cooperation. Unfortunately, such conditions may contribute to a misunderstanding of Chalmers' institutional culture and may hinder the progress towards the future that the faculty aspires to create.

4.2.1 Flexibility

Flexibility and the ability to adapt to one's role appear to differ significantly from individual to individual. This variation reflects a range of personal approaches, experiences, and interpretations of responsibilities, depending on the given situation the individual is in.

According to the majority of the PhD students' interviews, a lot of them felt stressed out with many ongoing tasks. Their standard of time diversification is 20% institutional and 80% research. As described by PhD student 1 (from now on PhDS1) *"As in life in general, you are stressed sometimes because you have a deadline to deliver and so on, but it varies"*. The same reasoning was made by several PhD students, some delaying their research and others getting help from their supervisors (Faculty) to catch up with their work. Some PhD students, which are from abroad, had difficulties getting an understanding of how things go, describing their position "difficult". This example was made by PhDS6 *"I mean, I am not from Sweden, so I had to move to come to Sweden. So I had to adjust a lot of things, leaving my family, leaving my job, living my lifestyle"* providing insight into their difficulties.

Their initial start of research is often described as mixed, with varied difficulty, based if they are native or international. For international PhD students, not speaking Swedish and not having an idea of Swedish culture, often brings a barrier. This is described by PhDS6 *"So definitely to me that was a big change (context, moving to Sweden) and I would say that in some areas it was positive and I had to adjust to what the context here provided so that I could move on"*

with my studies.”, which highlights the difficulty before they even start with their research and education.

Some of the PhD students had uncertain goals and values, which in the long run created high underestimation of the purpose of their projects and education, bringing difficulties for them to concentrate their ability on one task at the time. This was highlighted by PhDS7 *“Yeah, I mean that I want to have my PhD. - And why do you want a PhD? Really good question. I don't know. It was something I wanted to have for a long time, so I just decided to do it.”*, while they try to figure out why they do their PhD. All this reflex negatively on their flexibility, since bad prioritization and other time-consuming activities consumes their ability to adjust tasks to fit their needs better. This was interpreted by several PhD students, disclosing previous mistakes they made.

Since they are uncertain of some tasks, often a supervisor is directing them towards a common value or goal, affecting some flexibility of the PhD students. This was stated by PhDS7 *“Yeah I mean the topic on researching then at some point your supervisor if they tell you no or you should not look into this or you do not spend time on this.”*, creating a negative trend of their thinking in matter of flexibility. This also limits them to adjust their tasks, accordingly, following advice by faculty and limits them to effectively focusing their adjustment towards one goal. This causes “an either that or that” scenario, based on several interviews indicating a limiting adjustment for several tasks at the time, and focusing all their attention on only one thing at the time. Lastly, this creates an outcome where they finalize their work with limited flexibility, built on goals and values based on their supervisor’s (faculty) opinion.

4.2.2 Autonomy

Autonomy and the ability to adjust to their job varies from individual to individual. Both the initial start and the reflection/adjustment of the tasks related to the PhDs research and education are often advised and challenged by the supervisor, creating a limiting sphere where the PhD student has limited autonomy to create a long-term vision. This is stated by PhDS7 *“I think especially when you're having this supervisor, co-supervisor, PhD student relationship, you have to adjust your work to be able to work with that particular person if you want to have a good value from that relationship.”*, creating a possibility where everything a PhD student is doing work-wise is questioned. This hinders the PhD student's ability to work totally alone, since their relationship with their supervisor is vital. This is confirmed by PhDS3 *“So, yes, there is some flexibility, but at the same time, the most important thing is this flexibility comes, this flexibility is also dependent on your supervisor's permission. So, if you can align your work with your supervisor's timeframe and timeline, then you're flexible. But if you, I mean, it depends. That's what I'm saying. Every supervisor works very differently. So, it depends on your supervisor in that sense, yes.”*, causing an understanding of the symbiotic relationship with faculty, inflicting in their autonomy at work.

4.3 Job Crafting Practices

The conducted findings of job crafting practices are based on a thematic analysis, dividing all the interviews into different themes. The selected ones are

Task Crafting, Cognitive Crafting and Relational Crafting, focusing primarily on theory based on Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001) discovery in the field of job crafting. During the interviews, similar context was found in all the interviews, presenting high flexibility reflected in time and expectations, allowing a high amount of crafting. This is reflected in each individual part of the sentence below.

Academia is often seen as a place for knowledge, deep thinking and creative freedom. At first glance it seems like the perfect environment for job crafting, with a lot of autonomy, meaningful work and intrinsic motivation. However, our interview challenges this view. Both faculty and PhD students described how research which they care about most is often pushed aside by teaching, administrative work, supervision, meetings and other duties. One faculty member reflected on how administrative overload and lack of support affect their ability to do research

“You put a lid on researchers, they're not allowed to do research anymore. There's so much stuff you have to do [...] we don't get any help [...] with applying for money, with administering the project, with the courses and very little support around our tasks. So how are we going to be able to craft our jobs if we don't have the support to free up our resources?” (P3). This quote reflects the role overload and fragmentation that many academics face. From a job crafting perspective, the problem isn't just about being busy, it's about how the structure of academic work doesn't always match its purpose. What's meant to be an environment for learning, knowledge and discovery can instead become a stressful mix of competing demands. In this setting, job crafting is not just a way to grow but it becomes a way to cope and survive, helping people protect their focus, independence and sense of identity.

4.3.1 Task Crafting Faculty

Many of the faculty generated the same type of answers regarding task crafting, connecting it to either research and/or teaching. As P3 stated *“well, my research was constantly changing, really, what I research and how I research and that's what decided me to try to get money, that was a way to push it forward. On that side, you make changes like that all the time, I think, what you do research on and with whom and how.”* And the same person stated, *“But the teaching side, I've made a change for a while, that I want to work with a real company on a real case.”* about education.

The interpreted findings disclosed a more traditional way of crafting, using their freedom to integrate their abilities and ideas into their work. However, generally, drastically changes at their work are not common, especially education. Changes presented by P3 are rare, where incremental changes are preferable, an example is presented by P5 *“it's a continuous improvement, it's never kind of you have to do changes every time you run a new course and sometimes you do more changes based on if there is a new technology or new thing which has been introduced and to update your course material because there you when you do the projects you get to know from the companies what is kind of popular or what is interesting in the companies and also that newness you try*

to bring in in your course as well.” Which is more representative of the whole population’s ideas in the matter of education.

In contrast P3, presented a noteworthy example of more transformative task crafting, the faculty member described how they gradually reshaped their teaching by introducing the real-world in collaboration with large companies, rather than following a predefined curriculum, they introduced a shift toward project-based learning focused on societal relevance and practical application. Over time, this initiative developed into a more formalized and recognized part of the course structure. What began as a self-initiated pedagogical idea evolved into course ownership and curriculum influence.

This suggests a common theme formed around task crafting, adding high freedom of operation for both education and research. However, between the two subjects, research has higher freedom which is confirmed by several people including P4 *“Within the framework that Chalmers has decided that this is what an associate professor should be doing. Within that framework, it is entirely up to me to shape my work so that I can largely do what I feel gives me what I am good at, what gives me energy.”*. This discloses a high understanding of how the workplace is operating, adding high freedom and task adjustment, forwarding a prosperous thinking towards research and education.

4.3.2 Cognitive Crafting Faculty

In terms of cognitive crafting, several individuals within the faculty group used rational thinking about their job, placing P6 quote adequate to describe their situation *“My life becomes better because I am free with time, and I am less divided, and I get to be more efficient to get greater growth with the same effort. Efficiency is just output through input, and it increases of course if I manage to do it that way. So, because in job crafting, I had, my response to the demands that are placed on me is to try to find a mechanism that makes me succeed with this.”*

Others describe the motivation at Chalmers as P7 *“Sitting and writing things and figuring out thinking simply. Getting to logical, intellectually clear contexts in different ways. But then also I like teaching and being on stage in some sense. Like the theater person in me, to get, like, and it also feels something meaningful in being able to talk about things that you yourself think are important for a young generation.”* and the same person added *“I think it also gives me something there about being involved in the media and other contexts, it also gives me a feeling that also with these various other organizations outside the core shortage in a way. And because you want what you do to feel meaningful and that it will be used in different ways”*. This concludes faculty’s thinking, with them creating a vision towards a change and impact but also satisfying their own spiritual/cognitive needs.

4.3.3 Relational Crafting Faculty

In the faculty’s setting, two sides of relational crafting were found, one side focusing primarily on relations between co-workers and research partners. One side is faculty focusing their relational abilities on students. The last scenario is

described as important by P4 adding *“a very close collaboration whereas a supervisor you have the responsibility to be a role model. You have the responsibility to learn things that you can't really read in a book, but these are advanced tasks that you learn by practicing and trying and watching and getting individual coaching almost along the way.”*, stating that *“I think that PhD student supervision and everything related to PhD students is what makes me really happy.”*. This suggests that faculty often craft their justification towards the students, allowing relational building within their job adjustments. This is also seen in their relationships with co-workers and research partners, allowing each other to criticize and challenge their own thinking, providing a more nuanced and quality orientation of their work.

4.4 Job Crafting Practices PhD Students

Across all the interviews, a common theme came through, mainly focusing on their own perceived freedom. This freedom has some restrictions, which are often troubled by tasks related to the PhD. Some PhD students developed work adjustments and workarounds to get their less favorable tasks completed faster and allow them to do more of their favorable tasks instead. This shows up in each of the areas discussed below.

4.4.1 Task Crafting PhD students

According to the interviewed population, plenty of PhD students assumed that their freedom was restricted by the educational requirements of the faculty. An example was given by PhDS6 *“So I have experienced that I have had quite a bit of time for my research and have had more commitments around education, lecturing, courses, supervision and other internal departmental things.”*.

According to the PhDS3, they often couldn't get autonomy through teaching, stating that they couldn't re-do the course by *“in teaching since I am NOT the main examiner I'm more like a lecturer or like a course assistant so autonomy from my perspective is not to a great extent that's feasible for me because the course is designed by last two courses”* and explaining it with *“So of course autonomy is there, but it's done through teamwork. I would say it's not an individual decision.”*.

In contrast to faculty, many PhD students seemed stuck in the early stages of job crafting. Even if some had ideas or motivation, their roles were often more rigid or dependent on others to allow for proactive change. As one student explained *“In teaching since I am not the main examiner I'm more like a lecturer or like a course assistant so autonomy from my perspective is not to a great extent that's feasible for me because the course is designed by last two courses those were designed by my supervisor and if I'm assisting another supervisor or another professor here so the course is designed by them so my autonomy I mean autonomy for me in those cases it's not very much there yet as I mentioned it's not very flexible for me.”* (PhDS9).

Something that all the interviewees indicated is that they often waited for the examiner to state the changes, before they started adjusting the tasks around teaching. Continuing, this allowed them to be more flexible with other task, such

as research, which were clearly stated by several, such as PhDS6 *“In research, I do what I want and what I’m interested in. And I think I could have controlled and directed much more than I do. Because I’ve never done research before, I’m also quite dependent on my supervisor and stuff like that. But I still feel like I have an influence on the way we discuss and what’s the right way to go forward and is this a good question to ask, is this a good case company, is this like that.”*.

However, adjusting their tasks in research segment is often concentrated around time planning, argued by PhDS3 with *“But I think the PhD students who are working in this department, they all face this similar issue because we continuously work on different projects and different papers at the same. So it actually depends on us how we prioritize our work. So, if I’m working on project A, for example, this week, then I need to prioritize project B on the next week because this week I couldn’t focus on project B. So it’s more like time management and project management skills”*.

Lastly, as many of the respondents argued, research was found to be more joyful because of the freedom, many indicated and/or stated that they didn’t focus so much time on teaching, wanting to spend more time on research. This created task crafting, in particular manner of “a little time as possible spent” on teaching, readjusting their focus and effort research, which granted them more joy due to operational freedom.

4.4.2 Cognitive Crafting PhD students

Many of the PhD students stated that their role is mixed, but many had the same statement as PhDS4 *“I try to think about the contribution of my research, what it can actually be used for. It’s very difficult because we’ve had very small contributions to research. But that’s how it is in academia. So I try to think that my role as a researcher is not necessarily that I come as a PhD student. I’m not going to make any Nobel Prize discoveries, but this small contribution is actually what I’m going to do.”*. They thought that their contributions were not revolutionaries, but as stated, gave them motivation to confirm or conclude different theories, granting long-term changes.

This was also mirrored into a collective thinking across all PhD students, where they implicitly stated that a lot of their work takes a lot of time, as suggested by PhDS6 *“One thing is that the information you get from outside is much more concrete. So they’re easier to grasp than sitting for two, three, four hours and thinking about something. So it’s a personal responsibility to set aside that time for it. And that’s part of it, I think quite a few PhD students are stressed that that time might feel unproductive.”* Creating a motivation for them to continue through their work, even if they felt that it was time-consuming and not-giving in the short term.

4.4.3 Relational Crafting PhD students

Through the interviews, similar answers were given through their relationships at Chalmers. Many stated that their relationship with their supervisor was extremely important, others indicated that PhD students often worked individually. This was forwarded by PhDS6 *“there’s no one who really knows*

what everyone's doing. But everything is very individual and individualized. And that means that one person asks me if I can do something and one person asks me if I can do something, but this person doesn't know that person A doesn't know that person B has also asked. So it's up to me to steer things away, and what makes me frustrated is perhaps more when I try to take that responsibility, to say to myself that I won't have time to do this."

But PhDS6 also found it equally important to keep in contact, arguing with *"Honestly, it's probably mostly me who needs help, or what I help with is more things that fall within my job. But I think a lot of that is so informal. So you have lunch together or meet at the coffee machine and then you start talking about something. I was supposed to write an article and I have no idea how to do this. And so I just said it to someone like this in passing. And then just, yes but I have an article. Or I've done it before. Or that person has done it before."*

This phenomena of help or knowledge exchange was also found in PhD students which had close relationships with their supervisor, often had close ties to overcome obstacles with the need of faculty expertise. This was stated by PhDS3 expressing their feeling for their supervisor *"I mean, even with my supervisor, I'm very close to her. And I have not seen any other PhD students getting this close to their supervisor. They also maintain a formal relationship. I mean, I also maintain a formal relationship, but at the same time, I am very close to her. I share a lot of things with her and take her advice, even for personal issues as well."*

5. Discussion

Our findings reveal a clear distinction in how teaching faculty and PhD students at Chalmers University of Technology engage in job crafting. Faculty members often show a higher degree of task crafting, often taking initiative in shaping their research agendas, customizing teaching content, and initiating interdisciplinary collaborations. These practices exemplify approach-oriented behavioral crafting, a category described by Zhang and Parker (2019) as being driven by high autonomy, proactive tendencies, and the pursuit of positive job resources.

This aligns closely with Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) original model of job crafting, which identifies task, relational, and cognitive crafting as core dimensions through which employees actively redefine their job boundaries. Faculty primarily engage in task and relational crafting, adjusting both what they do and with whom they collaborate, often to better align their work with personal strengths, interests, and values.

An interesting pattern in our study was how faculty often actively integrate various components of their roles, teaching, research, supervision and administrative work, into a structure that fits together and supports each other. Rather than treating each responsibility as a separate workload, some faculty described strategically "bundling" their tasks to minimize fragmentation and maximize meaning. E. g. one faculty member explained: *"Then we have combined the funding with the research and the education and get it to work together. [...] My life becomes better because I am free with time, and I am less divided and I get to be more efficient to get greater growth with the same effort."* (P7).

This is a clear example of task crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), where individuals not only modify what task they do but how those tasks relate to one another. Zhang & Parker (2018) would classify this as approach-oriented, resource-enriching crafting, because it enhances both efficiency and psychological engagement.

Instead of avoiding tasks or trying to reduce their workload, these faculty members organize their work in a way that makes their different responsibilities support each other. This helps create a more balanced and meaningful work life, which is especially important in academia, where people often juggle many roles at once, and feeling scattered can be a big source of stress.

This shows how the strategic alignment of task and relational crafting can create synergies that reduce the psychological burden of juggling disconnected responsibilities. This means that faculty are not just performing multiple roles, they are actively shaping how these roles relate to each other, which can turn a heavy workload into something more meaningful and motivating.

While many faculty members managed to align and integrate their various responsibilities through proactive job crafting, our findings also show that this balance is not always sustainable. As described in the findings (see P10), when the fragmentation becomes too great, some individuals engage in a different

form of job crafting by actively setting boundaries and reducing their involvement in certain roles.

This reflects a common challenge in academic work. When roles are not aligned or balanced, the result is often cognitive overload and stress. In this case, the faculty member didn't try to take on more but instead made a conscious decision to step back and say no to certain responsibilities. This can be understood as a form of avoidance crafting, as described by Zhang & Parker (2018), where employees reduce or stop completely with certain aspects of their job to manage. Instead of proactively expanding the role, the goal becomes avoiding burnout and maintaining a manageable workload. This highlights that job crafting is not always about improvement; sometimes it is a defensive strategy used to regain control and protect well-being in demanding work environments.

Our findings challenge the idealized image of academia as a space for intellectual freedom, creativity, and meaningful work. While the academic environment may seem well suited for job crafting by offering autonomy and flexibility, both faculty and PhD students described how their most meaningful task, research is often pushed aside by teaching, administrative duties, and supervision.

This seems to be even more challenging for PhD students. Despite being part of a highly knowledge-intensive environment, PhD students often feel stuck doing other tasks instead of the work they value. Their experience highlights how structural constraints, hierarchical dependency, and role ambiguity limit access to proactive job crafting. In many cases their crafting becomes reactive or avoidance-focused (Zhang & Parker, 2018), focused on minimizing overload rather than seeking growth.

As Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton (2010) point out, building on the earlier model by Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), hierarchical structure often impacts an individual's ability to engage in job crafting. Higher-ranked employees tend to have more formal control over their roles but also face increased institutional visibility and accountability. This dynamic is clearly present in our study, while faculty often guide their own work and decisions, PhD students are frequently expected to follow the direction set by their supervisors and contribute to predefined research agendas. This top-down structure limits their ability to craft roles freely and shapes their dependence on relational crafting and negotiated autonomy.

We interpret this as a reflection of structural and psychological empowerment, where faculty members are not only formally authorized but also psychologically enabled to craft their roles in ways that foster engagement, purpose, and performance. Their institutional status gives them autonomy, access to resources and sense of ownership over their work, all of which align with the conditions of self-determination theory (SDT). Where autonomy is one of three basic psychological needs (alongside competence and relatedness) that drive intrinsic motivation and well-being.

Building on SDT, Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013) empirically demonstrated that job crafting can serve as a mechanism for satisfying these intrinsic needs, thereby enhancing both subjective and psychological well-being. In our study, we see this clearly reflected in faculty members' behaviors, as they engage in what Zhang and Parker (2019) define as behavioral approach crafting, particularly resource-enriching activities such as initiating new projects, building collaborations and adapting teaching content. These are not just performance strategies, they are also acts of self-determination theory that allow faculty to maintain control over their work (autonomy), demonstrate their expertise (competence), and build meaningful professional relationships (relatedness).

In contrast, PhD Students task crafting tends to be more constrained, reactive and shaped by external expectations rather than self-directed intentions. While they do possess some degree of agency, particularly in shaping their research focus. This autonomy is often conditional and negotiated. Several participants described how their research ideas required approval before being pursued, and how this dynamic limited their ability to dependently define tasks, take initiative or experiment with new approaches. Similarly, their teaching responsibilities were often described as predefined with little opportunity for adjustments or adapted content. These roles were sometimes seen as obligations or time-consuming detours from their research trajectory.

This reflects a low-autonomy work environment, where PhD students experience limited control over key aspects of their academic roles, a condition that according to self-determination theory (SDT) (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014), can significantly inhibit intrinsic motivation. SDT emphasizes that the psychological need for autonomy and the feeling of ownership over one's work and actions are essential for well-being, motivation, and engagement.

We think that this illustrates how formal role structure and perceived competence together shape the conditions for job crafting by either enabling or constraining job crafting. Where faculty often "own" their job space in the sense that they have recognized expertise, institutional trust and decision-making power in what they, and how they do teaching, research and collaborations. This ownership gives them psychological safety to take initiative and engage in approach-oriented crafting without fear of overstepping boundaries (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2024; Zhang & Parker, 2018).

In contrast, PhD students are more dependent on their academic roles where they don't have full control over their academic roles. This dynamic is not only structural but also psychological, as it limits their ability to experience autonomy and competence, two of the basic psychological needs outlined in SDT. According to Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013), when individuals are unable to craft their work in environments that satisfy this intrinsic need, their motivation and well-being are likely to suffer. In our findings this is reflected in how many PhD students' express frustration, hesitation and self-doubt, suggesting that psychological space for job crafting is constrained for PhD students.

One interesting insight from this study is how autonomy in teaching isn't just a fixed structural feature for faculty members, but rather it's something that

seems to evolve over time through individual actions. Parker et al. (2025) argue that job crafting and formal job design are part of a dynamic, two-way process. This really was clear in the interviews with the faculty. Some faculty did not only receive autonomy, but they also seemed to build it over time by actively shaping their environment.

Our findings suggest that teaching autonomy among faculty is not simply assigned through formal structures, but often develops through ongoing, proactive engagement. As seen in the example of P3 (Section 4.3), autonomy can emerge when individuals take initiative, such as introducing new teaching approaches.

This is an example of what Parker et al. (2025) describe as the dynamic interplay between bottom-up job crafting and top-down job design. The faculty members didn't passively receive autonomy, they created it through sustained engagement and alignment with institutional goals. Their proactive behavior by redesigning content, reaching out to external partners and showing impact, likely built trust and contributed to more formal control over the course. Parker et al. (2025) would suggest that this reflects an upward spiral, where individual initiative leads to structural change, which in turn supports autonomy and further enables crafting.

The contrast between faculty and PhD students becomes particularly clear when looking at their opportunities for autonomy in teaching. While faculty were often able to shape and expand their roles over time, many PhD students appeared limited by rigid structures and a lack of decision-making autonomy. As highlighted in the findings, their teaching responsibilities were largely predefined by existing course designs, leaving little room for individual initiative.

This illustrates what Parker et al. (2025) explain that some jobs are designed in ways that make it hard for individuals to shape their own work, especially when they lack autonomy or support. For employees to effectively craft their jobs, a degree of freedom and control is essential, thus the PhD students' lack of control over teaching indicates a deficiency in this critical job resource, likely hindering their ability to engage in proactive job crafting. This interpretation aligns with prior research showing that insufficient flexibility or autonomy in one's role can hinder job crafting efforts (Kim et al., 2018; Wessels et al., 2019). This also supports the idea from Yu et al. (2024) that growth mindset alone is not enough, it must be paired with autonomy and structural flexibility to enable real behavioral change.

What stood out to us is that job crafting is not just about being proactive or motivated, it also depends on whether the environment allows for it. Parker et al. (2025) also point out that it is harder when people are in low-status positions or when the job is too fixed from the start. For many PhD students in our study, that was exactly the case.

This made us reflect on the limits of personal initiative. We often celebrate job crafting as a form of agency, but what if the environment denies the space to

exercise it? In our data, PhD students did not lack motivation or ideas but rather permission, flexibility, autonomy, and professional recognition to do so. Faculty by contrast often described being able to reshape their teaching freely, precisely because they had already “earned” that freedom through status and trust. In many ways this suggests that job crafting is not just about personal behavior, but also a relational and institutional process, shaped by culture, hierarchy, and support. These constrained conditions exemplify how low perceived freedom, and control can hinder proactive job crafting (Yu et al., 2024; Wessels et al., 2019).

Another thing we realized is how much the relationships with the supervisor matter. Faculty members are often confident and trusted enough to reshape their roles, while PhD students usually must follow the structure that is already in place. In some cases, their ability to craft their work depended almost entirely on how flexible or supportive their supervisors were.

This became especially clear in the interviews where PhD students described different supervision styles. One participant explained that they felt they had great control over their research direction because their supervisor was very open to their ideas. Others described how they had to follow predefined structures, limiting their ability to shape even the smaller aspects of their academic work. This aligns with Parker et al (2025), who argue that job crafting is more likely to emerge in contexts where employees feel a sense of freedom to make choices and feel supported. Both of which often depend on how leaders act in hierarchical settings.

What stood out to us was that PhD students don't just receive a role, they in some way also inherit a “crafting culture” from their supervisors. If that culture encourages autonomy and experimentation, job crafting can become a natural part of the experience. But when supervisors are rigid or overly directive, even highly motivated students may hesitate to take the initiative.

This made us reflect on how job crafting is in this case, a matter of individual drive isn't just the only factor. It's also a very relational dependent factor for an individual to develop its colleagues and supervisors. How much someone can shape their role often depends not just on rules or structure, but on the attitude, expectations and behavior of their supervisors.

This also made us think about how much untapped potential may exist in PhD students. If institutions encourage more early job crafting, like co-designing teaching assignments or being freer within research, they might see more engaged and motivated PhD students. As Wessels et al. (2019) and Andrade et al. (2023) argue, flexibility becomes powerful when employees are proactive and supported by structure. In Parker's terms fostering even small amounts of early autonomy could trigger a positive feedback loop, where more crafting leads to better job fit, more engagement and then also stronger performance, which in turn can justify even more autonomy and flexibility.

On the other hand, we also noticed that job crafting can sometimes reinforce poor job design, especially when it takes a more defensive form. Some PhD

students and even a few faculty members described engaging in what Zhang & Parker (2018) define as avoidance crafting, where they dropped responsibilities if possible, minimizing time spent on low-value work and emotionally detaching from certain tasks. While this can help individuals cope, it does not improve their role and in some cases, it may reinforce isolation or stress. Parker et al's model made us realize that not all crafting leads to better design, the direction and intention behind the crafting also matters. In that sense we also thought about job crafting not just as something individuals do but something that can have a collective structural consequence, if several PhD students in a department stop caring about teaching because they feel they can't influence it, this can slowly create a culture where no one takes initiative. Teaching becomes something people avoid or just "get through". Over time this lack of ownership can make the whole environment feel rigid and uninspiring. But if even one person starts taking the initiative, maybe by suggesting new teaching ideas or asking for more say in course design, others may notice and feel more encouraged to do the same. When we see others taking the initiative, we're more likely to do the same. As Tims & Parker. (2020) and Demerouti & Peeters (2018) suggest job crafting to be socially contagious. That's why even small actions can have a bigger impact, they help create a culture where shaping your job is seen as normal or even expected.

"In my office we have a new colleague, and I think she inspires me a lot because she takes a lot of initiative, she's always passionate about this kind of new idea. So, I think I get energy from that. So, I feel like okay, maybe I can do this also. Yeah, I start trying more in that sense" (P6).

This clearly shows how social interaction with a proactive colleague influences the PhD student's own behavior, encouraging her to take more initiative. It illustrates what Wang et al (2020) describe a social factor that shape job crafting, such as interactions with peers who set an example of being proactive.

Our findings show that the factors driving job crafting in academia are shaped by an interaction between personal motivation, role expectations, structural freedom, and social influence. Interestingly, these drivers differ not only between faculty and PhD students but also depending on whether the work is focused on teaching or research.

Among education-focused faculty, the most common driver was a strong sense of personal meaning and fulfillment. Teaching was not just a task; it was seen as a place for impact and emotional rewards. One participant described how investing more in lectures not only enhanced students' outcomes but also enhanced their own development.

"In teaching, I see it a lot and this is what I enjoy about teaching because I feel like the more effort I put into my lectures and my seminars, the better is the quality and the better is what the students get out of it. And I just think my work in that sense, as I mentioned earlier, with the development personally affects me as a human being" (P6).

This reflects that Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) describe job crafting to enhance work meaning, by aligning tasks with one's personal values and sense of purpose, in this case, improving education.

By contrast, research-focused faculty described being driven more by intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and strategic autonomy. Their job crafting often involved shaping research directions, building collaboration and choosing projects that aligned with their values. This aligns with Bipp & Demerouti (2014), who showed that people with approach-oriented goals, such as learning, growth and mastery are more likely to engage in practice crafting.

"I have a lot of collaboration with others outside Chalmers as well, very good colleagues around that I really enjoy working with. I have worked with people at RISE and at companies and at other universities, both for research and writing" (P3), illustrating relational crafting aimed at building meaningful professional relationships to enhance both efficiency and access to intellectual resources. Zhang & Liu (2021) emphasize that such crafting strengthens social capital and contributes to higher performance and a greater sense of purpose.

For PhD students, the drivers were more mixed, and often more constrained. Many students expressed a desire to grow professionally, have autonomy, and explore their academic identity. But whether this translated into job crafting depended a lot on the relationship with their supervisor. As one PhDS6 explained:

"So in that sense, I had great control, but also the second factor is that my supervisor was very open to my ideas. So even if the position was just half, if with another supervisor it might have been in the case that the supervisor will just take another project and doesn't consider your interests"

This quote highlights the social dependency of job crafting in early career roles, confirming what Wang et al. (2020) argue, that job crafting is shaped not just by individual factors like motivation or personality, but by relational context like leadership style and peer norms.

While a few PhD students described adjusting their teaching tasks, the majority reported limited ability to craft their education-focused roles. Most PhD students explained that their teaching responsibilities were predefined by course coordinators or supervisors, leaving little room to change content. Structure or methods. As PhDS9 noted *"No, I don't think so. I don't think I have control over my teaching. Because I don't get to decide what I want, what I get to teach"*.

Here, we saw not a lack of motivation but a lack of perceived permission, a recurring theme that led us to reflect on the role of institutional culture and power dynamics in crafting. Faculty members often had the freedom, confidence and status to suggest changes and reshape their roles, while PhD students felt they needed approval before adjusting. This reflects the idea from regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997). Faculty often had a promotion focus, pursuing new opportunities, while PhD students were more prevention focused, managing stress or avoiding overstepping boundaries.

One thing that was clear from the interviews was how disengagement sometimes came from a lack of meaning, not a lack of motivation. In several interviews PhD students talked about wanting to contribute more, but they struggled to see the value or impact of their input. They were not sure if their efforts mattered, or if their contributions would be taken seriously. This often led to a kind of quiet disengagement. Students weren't necessarily passive by nature, but when their roles felt predefined or disconnected from larger goals, it became harder to feel invested.

This also made us realize that initiative alone is not enough in hierarchical settings like academia. Job crafting is not just about having the drive to reshape your role, it's about being given the opportunity and support to do so. And often, that support is cultural, relational and contextual. When no one tells you to take ownership or suggests that change is possible, it can feel risky or inappropriate to even try.

Considering this, we believe it's important that supervisors become more aware of these dynamics. Many PhD students may be disengaged not because they lack ideas or motivation, but because they don't feel their input is valued. By actively encouraging dialogue, creating psychological safety and involving PhD students in shaping parts of their role, supervisors can help open the door to more meaningful job crafting. This, in turn, may foster a stronger sense of purpose, belonging, and contribution.

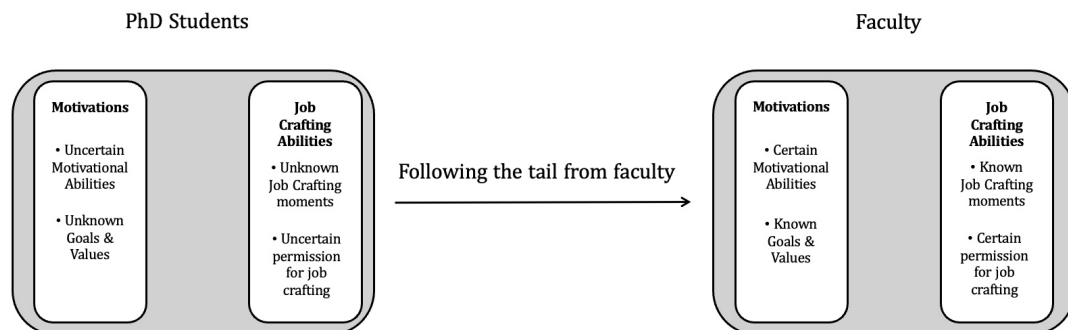


Figure 5: Explaining the “following the tail” phenomenon, taken inspiration from figure 1.

This study extends job crafting theory by exploring how the concept plays out in an academic setting, where power dynamics, role ambiguity and long-term mentorship play a unique role. By applying Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) framework, it is shown that both faculty and PhD students engage in task, relational and cognitive crafting, but with significant differences shaped by hierarchal position.

6. Conclusion

This thesis explored how job crafting practices differ between teaching faculty and PhD students in an academic setting, focusing on their perceived levels of autonomy, flexibility, and the factors that drive job crafting behaviors. Faculty's higher degree of autonomy enables them to proactively adjust their work to align with personal goals and institutional expectations. In contrast, PhD students show more limited opportunities from job crafting as their roles are shaped by supervisory relationships and institutional structures. PhD students are dependent on their supervisors both for guidance and for approval of their work direction, reflecting a phenomenon we describe as "Follow the tail Job crafting", where PhD students adapt within predefined boundaries rather than fully shaping their own roles.

Breaking free from these limitations requires efforts to enhance PhD students work experience which may involve expanding opportunities for task crafting, such as giving PhD students more chances to adjust their research or teaching tasks so that these better matches their skills, interest and goals. For example, allowing PhD students to take part in designing their research projects or choosing teaching activities they are passionate about can increase their motivation and sense of ownership. Universities could also promote cognitive crafting by helping PhD students reflect on why their research matters, what impact it could have, and how it connects to their personal values. By seeing the bigger picture, PhD students may feel more motivated and engaged, even when facing challenges.

One of our most important contributions is highlighting how the relationship between PhD students and their supervisors strongly shapes the space for job crafting. In many cases the supervisor is the one who decides, directly or indirectly, whether the PhD students' perceived permission to reshape their role. Our findings suggest that supportive and flexible supervisors increase the likelihood of meaningful job crafting, while rigid or distant supervision tends to reinforce role passivity and disengagement. This makes job crafting in academia not just a matter of individual initiative, but a relationally enabled or blocked process.

Finally, building stronger relationships is key. Supervisors are in a unique position to support PhD students not only by guiding their research but also by actively creating space for them to take more ownership and initiative in their work. If supervisors are aware of the concept of job crafting, they can intentionally allow for more flexibility and autonomy in their supervision. Therefore, raising awareness among supervisors about the potential of job crafting can be a key step in improving PhD students' autonomy, motivation, and well-being.

While our study was limited to a single university department, we believe the findings provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for academic institutions seeking to create more engaging and empowering environments for

PhD students. This study highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the structural and relational limits that shape job crafting in academia, by creating conditions that allow greater freedom and support for PhD students. Institutions can not only improve well-being and engagement but also prepare the next generation of proactive and empowered researchers.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview for Job-Crafting Practices in Academia

Introduction

- Greet the participant(s) and thank them for their time.
- Explain the purpose of the study: "*We want to understand how people in academic roles can shape and adjust their work, as well as how much freedom they have to do so.*"
- Ensure informed consent, reiterating confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation.

Part 1: Understanding the Participant's Work Role

- What are your main job responsibilities? Kan du beskriva vad som ingår i ditt jobb
 - Do you have any extra projects or side tasks outside of your primary work?
- How much of your job is focused on teaching versus doing research?
- To what extent do you feel you have control over the type of work you focus on in your academic career?
- Do you perceive your role as flexible or rigid? Can you provide examples of when you've been able (or unable) to shape your work?
- What aspects of your work do you find most meaningful or fulfilling? Why?

Task Crafting

- Have you ever intentionally changed aspects of your work, such as taking on new tasks, adjusting how you approach your responsibilities, or reducing certain activities?
 - Can you give a specific example? (e.g., modifying teaching methods, shifting research focus, or choosing which administrative tasks to take on)
 - What motivated you to do this change? Was it a personal choice, institutional need, or external influence?
 - Did these changes affect how you see your job or how meaningful it feels to you? Did they make you more or less motivated or engaged in your work?
 - Are there any tasks you would like to do more of? Why haven't you been able to?
 - Are there any tasks you wish you could do less of or stop doing altogether? What makes that difficult?

Relational Crafting

- How do you approach collaboration and relationships at work? (Denna är lite svår)
- How important is it for you to feel connected to colleagues in your work? Do you actively do things to strengthen your relationships or sense of belonging at work? If so, can you give an example?
 - Have you ever actively shaped or adjusted how you work with colleagues to feel more connected to your professional community? if so how?
 - How do these relationships influence your work experience?
 - Do you deliberately seek out or limit specific interactions or collaborations? Why?
 - What motivated these decisions, and how did they affect your feeling of connectedness within the academic setting?
 - How do your interactions with colleagues and students impact your experience of being part of the academic community?

 - Can you share an example where a particular relationship enhanced your sense of belonging?

Cognitive Crafting

- Have you ever changed the way you think of or perceive your job in order to make it more meaningful? If yes, how? An example from an article some hospital cleaners changed how they viewed their jobs to make them more meaningful. Instead of seeing their work as just cleaning, they saw themselves as part of the patient care team, helping patients get better. This change in thinking made their work feel more important and fulfilling.
 - For instance, how do you frame your teaching or research in a way that feels personally fulfilling?
 - How do you personally define **the purpose and impact** of your work (e.g., in teaching, research, or service roles)?
 - Have you done anything to make your work feel more meaningful?
 - How has this affected your motivation and engagement?
 - Have you changed your perspective on yourself as a teacher or researcher? How do you view your role today compared to when you first started, and in what ways has it evolved over time?

Part 4: Motivations and Barriers

- What motivates you to engage in change of your tasks? (What usually drives you to make changes in your work tasks? Can you give an example?)
 - Are there specific personal or professional goals driving these efforts?
- Have you faced any problems or obstacles when changing your job to fit your needs better?
 - How have you managed these challenges?

Conclusion

- *Thank the participants again for their insights.*
- *Ask if they would like to add anything else about their experiences with job crafting (influence/impact your job) or autonomy in their role.*

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