

Article

# Job Crafting among Labor Union Representatives: Its Impact on Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction

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**Abstract:** Labor Union activity still lacks recognition as an ordinary work activity. However, on the one hand, labor union representatives must deal with many tasks (internal and external) that can sometimes be overwhelming. On the other hand, given its vocational nature and the possibility that it offers for the workers themselves to organize their work, the area of trade unionism can be interesting for the study of job crafting and other phenomena associated with well-being, such as burnout or work engagement. Unfortunately, to date, there are no investigations that address these phenomena, especially job crafting in the labor union environment. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to explore the existing relationships between the job crafting of the labor union representatives and their well-being and health. A sample of 78 participants engaged in labor union activity for an average of 12.62 years completed job satisfaction and work engagement measures. The results indicate that job crafting dimensions predicted participants' job satisfaction and engagement.

**Keywords:** labor unions; job crafting; engagement; job satisfaction

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## 1. Introduction

Until the decade of the 80, trade unions have been almost exclusively focused on protecting labor and socioeconomic rights of workers. To this end, unions were structured around the workplace organization at the same time as they kept vertical connections at regional, national, and international levels. Nevertheless, in the last decades, the increased competition and globalization of the working world, as well as different organizational factors such as the rise of outsourcing or the employment arrangement, have undermined their traditional agenda.

Responding to this transformation of the labor market, trade unions have been looking for new ways of securing their restructuring and growth and renewal ([Barnes and Markey 2015](#)). Although their fundamental issue remains to defend and advance the interests of the workers, unions of many industrialized economies have also focused on developing new organizational models based on more horizontal structures which go beyond the workplace to build links with other group communities ([Wills 2001](#)). That is to say, approaches more appropriate not only to deal with the problems and needs of union and nonunion workers belonging to community groups traditionally marginalized (e.g., women, ethnic minority workers, or people with disabilities) or to which it is difficult to reach through the traditional union strategies (e.g., workers concentrated in low paid works), but only to solve their issues of economic justice.

It is clear that labor union activity is not exempt from risks due to the multitude of tasks that a trade unionist should perform, which include the role as a trade unionist, management of social relations, and participation in the internal organization of the labor union ([Chun and Shin 2018](#)). Labor union members carry out their activity in direct contact with other people, either affiliated or

nonaffiliated, in contexts of injustice and job vulnerability. To deal with complex situations, where there are conflicts and discrepant interests, they should be engaged, capable, and competent workers.

Several studies have examined this activity focusing on the relationship between job demands and resources on the one hand, and personal resources on the other, which are critical elements for understanding job crafting ([Crawford et al. 2010](#); [Dufour-Poirier and Bourque 2013](#); [Middleton 2017](#)). Specifically, a study with Belgian 610 industry trade union representatives showed how job demands and resources were related to work engagement ([Liagre et al. 2012](#)).

Recent studies have also highlighted that job crafting is an antecedent of work engagement in general ([Shin et al. 2018](#)), although this relationship has not been explored in the trade union field. Labor union activity is voluntary and, therefore, seems closely related to job crafting. This is because the characteristics of the work performed by labor union officials often allow them to organize their work according to their preferences. In short, trade unionists can independently craft certain aspects of their trade union work to fit their own needs and capabilities ([Berg et al. 2011](#)).

However, the empirical evidence on job crafting in trade union activity is nearly nonexistent. Therefore, the present study aims to determine the influence of trade union representatives' job crafting in their work engagement and job satisfaction. The findings will allow us to design interventions aimed at improving the performance of trade union activity and reducing the risks associated with this activity for those who engage in it.

### 1.1. Job Crafting: Management of Demands and Resources

In 2001, [Wrzesniewski and Dutton \(2001\)](#) coined the term "job crafting" to refer to physical and cognitive changes workers carry out in the task boundaries of their job. In 2012, several authors defined job crafting as a set of initiatives of change generated by the person to make the job better fit their expectations and needs ([Tims et al. 2012](#)). In this sense, [Bakker and Demerouti \(2013\)](#) added that it is an individual and proactive action aimed at changing the job to make it more "engaging" and less tiring. This change can be to reduce or modify job demands or to increase the resources available to deal with them.

Recent research ([Shin et al. 2018](#)) has used the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model) ([Demerouti et al. 2001](#)) to describe a set of specific work characteristics that employees reframe when they use job crafting behaviors. The JD-R Model categorizes job characteristics in job demands and job resources.

Job demands are determined by the physical, organizational, psychological, and social aspects of the job. All of them require a sustained effort linked to physical and psychological costs ([Demerouti et al. 2001](#)). According to [Cavanaugh et al. \(2000\)](#), demands are classified as challenging and hindering. Challenging demands are those that when met, produce benefits that exceed the generated investment. Hindering demands are those that limit the gains made by the individual and the organization, which reduces the effectiveness and the achievement of results for both ([Crawford et al. 2010](#)).

Job resources are the physical, psychological, organizational, and social aspects of the job that are crucial for goal achievement and to stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. [Tims et al. \(2012\)](#) concluded that job resources could be classified into two subdimensions: structural and social. In this regard, these authors pointed out that increasing social job resources (e.g., social support, coaching, and feedback) and structural job resources (e.g., autonomy and development opportunity) favored labor welfare and the attainment of the established goals. In this same line, more recent studies ([Van Wingerden et al. 2017](#)) show that the modification of personal resources and way of working had a positive impact on workers' engagement.

Following this research line, job crafting refers to voluntary self-initiated behaviors aimed to seek resources and challenges, as well as reducing demands ([Bakker and Demerouti 2017](#)), in order to improve job conditions or to cope with an ambiguous work environment ([Robinson and Griffiths 2005](#)). In this regard, evidence reveals that job crafting behavior (e.g., increasing resources) can predict the presence of job resources one month later ([Tims et al. 2013](#)). Similarly, various studies have also demonstrated

that both job resources and challenging job demands activate employees' development, which, in turn, empower them to gain short-term profits (Bakker and Demerouti 2008).

In summary, job crafting can be applied through actions that increase the available structural resources, the social resources, and the challenging demands or those that reduce the demands that have become obstacles for the worker, and as we will see below, impact health and variety of favorable organizational outcomes (Demerouti et al. 2001).

### 1.2. Impact of the Job Crafting on Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Research has consistently shown that job crafting behaviors (structural and social job resources and job demands) have positive effects on well-being (Tims et al. 2013; Leana et al. 2009; Petrou et al. 2012).

Personal well-being should be considered both from a hedonic and a eudemonic perspective. The first one more focused on satisfaction and pleasure and the second more oriented on social and organizational integration and performance. Hence, while job satisfaction can be considered as an indicator of hedonic well-being, work engagement can serve as an indicator of eudemonic well-being.

Work engagement is understood as a positive mood consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption in work (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resistance, desire, and willingness to invest effort, and persistence in that effort when faced with difficulties. Dedication manifests as enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride in the work. Absorption occurs when strong doses of enjoyment and concentration are perceived while performing the work (Schaufeli et al. 2002). On the one hand, the scientific literature supports the relationship between engagement and job crafting as an antecedent, whereas recent investigations seek to establish when and how this relationship occurs (Shin et al. 2018).

Job satisfaction is understood as an overall assessment of the person about his or her work (Locke 1969; Moorman 1993; Lepold et al. 2018). Several authors have pointed out that affective job satisfaction is a global and positive emotional response to one's work as a whole (Moorman 1993). Affective job satisfaction is often considered synonymous with general or overall satisfaction, and it is evaluated through items that ask people how much they like their work. The empirical evidence supports the relationship between the different dimensions of job crafting and job satisfaction. Specifically, increasing challenging job demands and decreasing hindering job demands were significantly related to job satisfaction (Kooij et al. 2017).

Most existing studies on job crafting and employee well-being have analyzed work engagement and job satisfaction as potential outcomes of job crafting. Previous research has shown that job resources are positively related to work engagement (for a review, see meta-analysis Halbesleben (2010)). For example, Bakker et al. (2012) found that employees with a proactive personality were most likely to display job crafting behaviors (increasing structural and social job resources and challenging job demands), which, in turn, stimulate their work engagement. Furthermore, a study carried out with dentist employed in the public sector has demonstrated that high job demands and high job resources facilitated work engagement (Hakanen et al. 2005). Similarly, Schaufeli et al. (2009) found that high job resources (increases in social support and autonomy) predicted work engagement in a sample of managers of a telecom company throughout one year.

The empirical evidence also supports the relationship between the different dimensions of job crafting and job satisfaction. Specifically, increasing challenging job demands and decreasing hindering job demands were significantly related to job satisfaction (Tims et al. 2013). Moreover, evidence has also shown that the increase in job resources is positively correlated with increased engagement and job satisfaction and decreased burnout (Tims et al. 2013). By the same token, the study conducted by Leana et al. (2009) in 62 childcare centers has demonstrated that collaborative job crafting behaviors are positively associated with performance and with higher levels of satisfaction and commitment.

### 1.3. Present Research

The present research aims to analyze whether job crafting behaviors (e.g., increasing structural and social resources and challenging demands and decreasing hindering demands) are associated with

various types of employee well-being (work engagement and job satisfaction) and workaholism using a sample of Spanish union representatives.

Irrespective of the particularities (the nonobligatory nature of the membership in a trade union or a union representation founded on free union elections), trade unions in Spain share with unions of many industrialized economies similar concerns about union renewal in order to deal with the new challenges emerged in the work environment. As in other countries, trade unions in Spain must make significant shifts both internal (highly complex and highly bureaucratized trade union organizations, declining membership, and renewal of union leaders) and external (transnational economies, job insecurity, unemployment, labor fragmentation, privatization of public entities or services, immigration, reduction and dispersion of work centers, temporary contracts, high staff turnover, and misunderstood entrepreneurship) in order to cope with this changing work environment. In our opinion, this can be done by implementing new forms of work, with the aim of improving the performance of union delegates in order to face the challenges above. Recently, studies on union revitalization and renewal (Gall and Fiorito 2011) have focused (among others) on antecedents of burnout and engagement (De Spiegelaere et al. 2012). Nevertheless, this line of research has mostly ignored the extent to which job crafting behaviors may impact on organizational outcomes within the trade unions.

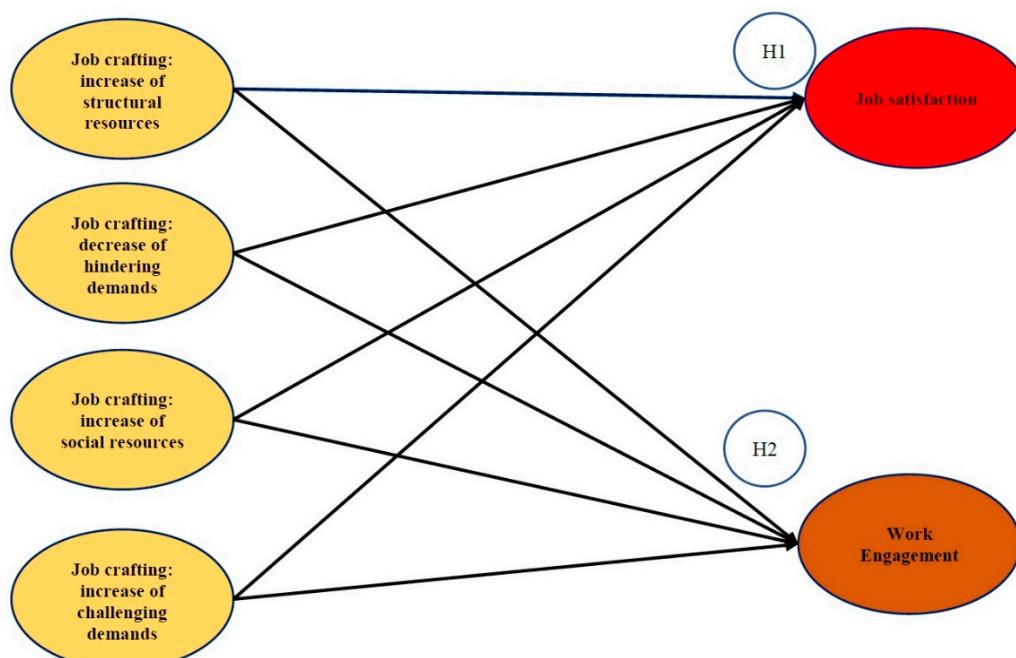
Furthermore, it must be born in mind that in trade union work delegates have to play two roles, one as a worker and the other as a representative of their coworkers. The fact of alternating their roles can have a motivating effect that increases the level of energy and vigor, impacting positively on their work engagement. This change of role, in turn, promotes personal and professional growth because representatives will use their knowledge of labor laws, which can affect their job satisfaction.

In short, the objective of the present study is to empirically analyze whether job crafting through employees' changing job demands and resources has an impact on work engagement and job satisfaction, for which we propose the following hypotheses:

**H1:** The dimensions of job crafting will predict trade union representatives' engagement.

**H2:** The dimensions of job crafting will predict trade union representatives' job satisfaction.

Our hypotheses are displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A theoretical model of hypothesis for the study.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The participants were 78 labor union representatives of Spanish trade union confederations, with a mean age of 48.71 years ( $SD = 5.65$ ); 57.69% of them were men and 42.31% were women. Concerning participants' academic formation, 47.44% of them had university studies, 29.49% had secondary level studies, and 23.07% had studied vocational training.

Related to their job position, 66.67% were technical workers or administrative employees, 10.26% were unqualified workers, 20.51% were middle managers, and 2.56% were managers. Mean job tenure of participants company was 22.97 years ( $SD = 7.62$ ).

Concerning the labor union activity, participants reported that they were engaged in trade union activity for an average of 12.62 years ( $SD = 7.05$ ). As can be seen in Table 1, 35.90% belonged to trade union delegate paid 40 h per month, 25.64% were entirely dedicated to their labor union activity, 14.10% were Human resource management delegates, and 12.82% were Labor Risks Prevention delegates.

**Table 1.** Participants' Union activities and professional categories.

Labor Union Activity	n	%
Trade union delegate paid 40 h per month	28	35.90
Trade union delegate paid 100% working day	20	25.64
Trade union delegate paid 15 h per month	11	14.10
Labor Risks Prevention delegates	10	12.82
Hired for union functions	7	8.97
Union delegates with hours in charge of the company	2	2.56

### 2.2. Procedure

To disseminate this study, the research team contacted by email the leaders of the leading state trade union confederations (CCOO, UGT, and CCT) and requested their cooperation to deliver the information to the labor union representatives, including a link to the questionnaire at Google Forms. To preserve the confidentiality of the data, no connection was established between the email address data and the completed questionnaires. The anonymous and confidential treatment of the information was guaranteed. Between January and March of 2018, a total of 78 labor union representatives belonging to the general state administration and private economy correctly completed the survey. All participants who took part in the investigation did so voluntarily, in all cases, providing their informed consent.

### 2.3. Instruments

Job Crafting Scale (JCS) (Tims et al. 2012) adapted to Spanish (Ficapal-Cusí et al. 2014). The JCS evaluates job crafting through 21 four-dimension items: increase of structural resources (e.g., "I try to develop my abilities"), decrease of hindering or threatening demands (e.g., "I try to make my work less demanding mentally"), increase of social resources (e.g., "I ask my supervisor to orient me"), and increase of challenging demands (e.g., "When an interesting project appears, I actively offer to collaborate"). The levels of internal consistency of the dimensions of the JCS ranged between 0.71 and 0.89. Slightly higher than in previous studies (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability indices between 0.70 and 0.79) (Ficapal-Cusí et al. 2014).

The Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS) (Thompson and Phua 2012) adapted to Spanish (Fernández-Muñoz and Topa 2018). This index is composed of four items (e.g., "In my work, I feel full of joy" and "I feel fairly well satisfied with my job") in which the participants assess their level of pleasure towards their work. The reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85$ ), and very close to previous studies ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) (Fernández-Muñoz and Topa 2018).

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) ([Schaufeli et al. 2006](#)). This scale is the reduced version in Spanish of the 17-item UWES. Participants assess how they feel about their work through nine items (e.g., “In my work, I feel full of joy”). The level of internal consistency of the scale was satisfactory (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.88$ ) and slightly higher than in the original study ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) ([Schaufeli et al. 2006](#)).

Participants responded to all the questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 2.4. Data Analyses

Firstly, a descriptive analysis of each of the variables included in the study was performed. Also, bivariate analyses using Pearson’s correlation coefficient were conducted to analyze how the variables were correlated. Finally, two multiple linear regression analyses have been carried out to analyze the effect of the four dimensions of job crafting (increase of structural resources, increase of social resources, increase of challenging demands, and reduction of job demands) (predictors) on job satisfaction and work engagement (dependent variables) using the stepwise method.

### 3. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics, reliability, and Pearson’s correlation matrix for study variables ( $N = 78$ ).

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Job satisfaction	3.49	0.75	0.85	1	0.727 **	0.463 **	-0.131	0.332 **	0.398 **
2 Work engagement	3.47	0.68	0.88		1	0.572 **	-0.061	0.436 **	0.559 **
3 Job crafting: increase of structural resources	3.98	0.66	0.81			1	-0.151	0.246 *	0.667 **
4 Job crafting: decrease of hindering or threatening demands	2.88	0.75	0.79				1	0.101	-0.151
5 Job crafting: increase of social resources	3.16	0.78	0.71					1	0.332 **
6 Job crafting: increase of challenging demands	3.58	0.87	0.89						1

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Stepwise multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses of the study, as can be seen in Tables 3 and 4. Regarding the first hypothesis, the results excluded the dimension of reduction of job demands ( $t = -0.002, p = 0.999$ ). The regression analysis of engagement ( $F(3, 74) = 20.149, p < 0.001$ ) showed that the best predictor model was the one with three dimensions as predictors: increase of structural job resources ( $t = 2.983, p = 0.004$ ), increase of social job resources ( $t = 2.976, p = 0.004$ ), and increase of challenging job demands ( $t = 2.002, p = 0.049$ ), with a coefficient of determination of  $R^2 = 0.45$ . Table 2 depicts the nonstandardized and standardized coefficients of the model for work engagement:

**Table 3.** Linear regression analysis on work engagement.

Predictors	<b>B</b>	Standard Error B	Beta Standardized Coefficients
Constant	0.625	0.393	
Job crafting: increase of structural resources	0.358	0.120	0.346 **
Job crafting: increase of social resources	0.238	0.080	0.272 **
Job crafting: increase of challenging demands	0.188	0.094	0.238 *

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Regarding the second hypothesis, the results excluded the dimensions of reduction of job demands ( $t = -0.957, p = 0.342$ ) and of increase in challenging demands ( $t = 0.691, p = 0.492$ ).

Multiple linear regression analysis showed that the best model to predict job satisfaction ( $F(2, 75) = 13.515, p < 0.001$ ) was a model with a coefficient of determination of  $R^2 = 0.27$  which considers as

predictors the job crafting dimensions of increase of structural job resources ( $t = 3.974, p < 0.001$ ) and increase of social job resources ( $t = 2.274, p = 0.026$ ). (See Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 4.** Linear regression analysis on job satisfaction.

Predictors	B	Standard Error B	Beta Standardized Coefficients
Constant	0.943	0.497	
Job crafting: increase of structural resources	0.463	0.117	0.406 **
Job crafting: increase of social resources	0.224	0.098	0.232 *

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

#### 4. Discussion

This study intended to provide empirical evidence of the relationship between the dimensions of trade union representatives' job crafting and their job satisfaction and engagement.

The evidence supports that the job crafting dimensions of increase of structural and social job resources predict job satisfaction, but challenging job demands is not a predictor and is excluded from the prediction model of job satisfaction. However, it should be noted that the predictive power of the model is weak because it only explains 27% of the job satisfaction variance.

Related to the second hypothesis, we found that job crafting dimensions predicted engagement. Our findings have confirmed these three variables as predictors of that criterion variable, defining a model with a moderate predictive ability, which accounts for 45% of the variance of engagement.

This study is in line with an increasing amount of empirical research showing the positive effects of job crafting on employees' desirable outcomes, such as satisfaction and well-being. These relationships between overall job crafting and positive outcomes have been recently summarized in a meta-analysis into the broader work and organizational psychology field. Job crafting is shown to be positively related to work engagement and negatively associated with job strain, job satisfaction, and self-rated and others-rated contextual performance (Rudolph et al. 2017).

The present study contributes to the current debate about the potential relationships between the constructs (Gómez-Salgado et al. 2019). As some authors stated, work engagement can be considered a modulating psychosocial variable that could exert influence on job satisfaction, as well as affect employee's performance. Given that job crafting can be considered both as an antecedent of work engagement as well as a consequent, future studies should explore the potential mutual influences between the constructs.

This study has some limitations that should be considered, such as the participant's selection procedure and the sample size. With larger samples, we could have carried out a more detailed analysis, and we would have obtained a more representative distribution of the target population. Moreover, as the majority (99.87%) of the Spanish firms are SME's (Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry, and Competitiveness 2018), where usually there are not union delegates, recruiting a more significant sample was difficult. Even though our data have been provided by a convenience sample, we have no reason to believe that this sample is necessarily different from the population of interest. Despite these facts, our study can be considered a first step in the advancement of knowledge about exploring the implications of changing employment conditions for the role of unions and labor union representatives (Chun and Shin 2018). According to Price and Murnan (2004), the analysis of the existing studies constitutes the main activity of the literature review and helps to create the foundations for understanding the research problem. Both nationally and internationally, there are few studies of the construct job crafting related to trade labor union activity. Perhaps the reason for the fact that research in this area has been so scarce is that trade union activity is not usually considered a work activity. However, this consideration is wrong. As some authors note (Di Fabio and Blustein 2016), work activity includes all situations or elements somehow linked to work. Therefore, trade union activity must no doubt be considered a work activity (Gibney et al. 2018). Finally, another limitation is

the lack of a more detailed profile of the participants who made up the sample because some aspects are unknown to us and, in this area, it is essential to know which trade union organization they belong to (because each one performs their trade union activity differently) or to know how much time of their workday is spent on union activity (Martens et al. 2018).

The present study is a small contribution to the opening of new lines of research in the field of organizational psychology. Despite the lack of empirical studies on job crafting among union representatives, recent trends in work and organizational psychology highlighted the relevance of proactive behaviors in all the professional fields. They have been gradually considered as potentially beneficial both for employees and organizations (Molero Jurado et al. 2018), not only in industrial settings but also in educational (Cansino et al. 2018) or environmental fields (Junquera and Barba-Sánchez 2018). It seems that the concept of understanding the trade union organizations as entities that defend workers' health and rights has ignored the fact that situations like burnout might also occur within these organizations (Cho and Kim 2018). Trade unions face rising competitiveness due to the changes in workers' rights and deregulation of labor markets associated with globalization. Hence, they need to assure their dexterity in a rapidly changing context, and consequently, there is an urgent need for proactive individuals also as union representatives (Alińska et al. 2018).

In the next few years, technological innovation will also introduce necessary changes in working environments and, therefore, in trade union activity. Therefore, we think that there is a need for research that analyzes in depth the interactions occurring in the trade union area so that these organizations can better cope with the new challenges that will arise. No doubt, new studies will produce benefits for the considerable population of Spain's trade union agents.

## 5. Conclusions

Although the evidence of the present study is limited, the dimensions of increase of structural and social job resources can help to predict the job satisfaction of the workers' trade union representatives. Secondly, the dimensions of the increase of structural and social job resources and the growing demand for job challenges can help predict the engagement of the workers' trade union representatives.

Ultimately, the representatives of the union confederation workers carry out a process of job crafting understood as the ability of the people who engage in union activity to transform, change, and adapt the activities and the working environment, from the viewpoint of autonomy and commitment to the organization.

However, despite this, trade union activity linked to job crafting barely receives academic and social attention, perhaps because, as mentioned in the first conclusion, union activity still lacks recognition as a regular work activity.

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