

Article

When Proactivity Backfires: Subordinates' Job Crafting, Supervisory Territorial Behavior, and Implications for Sustainable Work Functioning

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Abstract

Job crafting is viewed as a bottom-up practice that supports adaptability and sustainable work design. However, changes in tasks, routines, or relationships may also create tensions for supervisors. These tensions are relevant to workplace sustainability because supervisory territorial behavior may restrict collaboration, information sharing, and sustainable productivity. Drawing on the cognitive–affective system theory of personality (CAPS), this study investigates how subordinates' job crafting is associated with supervisory territorial behavior through two psychological mechanisms with implications for sustainable work functioning, i.e., the status-related pathway through perceived control and the well-being-related pathway through psychological strain. We tested the model using two-wave, multi-source dyadic data from 81 supervisors and 399 subordinates. The results show that subordinates' job crafting is indirectly associated with higher supervisory territorial behavior through lower perceived control and greater psychological strain. In addition, the results of conditional effects indicate that subordinates' interpersonal influence weakens both indirect effects. These findings highlight the potential social costs of job crafting and offer practical implications for supporting individual initiatives while protecting collaboration, well-being, and sustainable work functioning.

Keywords: job crafting; perceived control; psychological strain; interpersonal influence; territorial behavior

1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly rely on employees' proactivity to remain adaptive under digital transformations, market uncertainties, and changing work demands. Job crafting, defined as employees' self-initiated redesigns and changes to their task boundaries, roles, and relationships [1], has therefore received growing attention in research on sustainable work design. Prior studies have shown that job crafting can promote employees' work engagement and creativity [2] and improve organizational sustainable work functioning (e.g., supportive work systems and long-term productivity) [3].

Despite these benefits, job crafting may not always function as a positive force in organizations [4]. It is often enacted within established task structures and hierarchical relationships. When employees redesign work procedures, task boundaries, or relationships, these changes may affect not only the focal employee but also other stakeholders (e.g., supervisors). Sustainable management depends on more than individual adaptability. It also requires stable coordination, mutual trust, and sustained productivity. In this case, the



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social interpretation of individual job crafting becomes significant. Moreover, supervisors hold authority over role definitions, resource allocation, and performance evaluation [5]. Their responses may shape whether the bottom-up work redesign is integrated into the work system or becomes a source of relational tensions hindering sustainable management.

One important yet underexplored response in this process is supervisory territorial behavior. It refers to actions through which supervisors mark and defend domains they perceive as their own, such as areas of expertise, responsibility, or influence [6,7]. From a sustainability perspective, this response is significant because it represents a potential barrier to organizational sustainability, as it may restrict collaboration, reduce information sharing, and weaken sustained productivity. Although prior studies have begun to explore supervisors' reactions to employees' proactivity, the mechanisms through which job crafting is associated with territorial responses remain insufficiently understood. Existing research has emphasized cognitive explanations. For example, supervisors evaluate the motives of subordinates' job crafting (i.e., prosocial motives vs. egoistic motives), judge whether such behavior violates implicit exchange expectations [8], or assess whether employees have sufficient credibility to redesign their work [9]. While informative, such studies overlook the affective foundations of territorial responses. This omission is critical because affective experiences may narrow supervisors' attention, reduce their tolerance for work changes, and increase their tendency to rely on defensive actions [10]. Therefore, territorial behavior may reflect not only a cognitive attempt to restore control, but also an affective response to the strain created by the bottom-up work changes. Further, this issue is important to sustainability research because well-being and mental health are central components of sustainable management. Ignoring supervisors' psychological strain may therefore obscure how employees' job crafting influences supervisory territoriality and sustainable management. Moreover, prior research tends to examine actors (subordinates) and reactors (supervisors) in isolation, neglecting the interaction through which job crafting is socially interpreted. To address these gaps, it is essential to develop a more integrative framework to capture supervisory cognitive and affective processes.

The cognitive–affective system theory of personality (CAPS) offers a useful framework for addressing these issues. It suggests that individuals respond to situational cues through the cognitive and affective systems [11]. When employees alter tasks or work relationships, supervisors may cognitively evaluate whether they still have sufficient control over the relevant work domain. They may also experience psychological strain when these changes create additional pressure, uncertainty, or emotional demands. These two responses reflect different sustainability concerns [12]. Reduced perceived control concerns the stability of supervisors' legitimate influence and status within changing work arrangements. Psychological strain concerns the preservation of supervisors' well-being and mental health during the bottom-up work redesign. Accordingly, we propose two pathways linking subordinates' job crafting to supervisory territorial behavior. In the pathway of status sustainability, job crafting may be associated with lower supervisory perceived control. Territorial behavior may then become a way to reassert boundaries and restore a sense of order. In the pathway of well-being sustainability, job crafting may be associated with greater supervisory psychological strain. Under such strain, they may become more likely to rely on defensive responses.

Importantly, supervisors' responses to job crafting may also depend on how employees enact their work changes. In this study, we focus on subordinates' interpersonal influence as a key moderating factor. Interpersonal influence refers to the ability to shape others' perceptions through verbal, behavioral, and relational tactics [13,14]. Employees with stronger interpersonal influence may be better able to explain the purpose of their job crafting, signal respect for supervisory authority, and frame work changes as beneficial

to the broader unit. Such behaviors may help supervisors preserve perceived control and reduce psychological strain. In contrast, when interpersonal influence is weak, job crafting may be more easily interpreted as disruptive, demanding, or challenging to supervisory authority. Thus, interpersonal influence weakens both the *status sustainability pathway* and the *well-being sustainability pathway* linking job crafting to supervisory territorial behavior, supporting the development of a socially sustainable workplace.

This study makes several contributions. First, it advances the literature on job crafting by examining its potential social cost from a sustainability perspective, suggesting that bottom-up work redesigns may create conditions that hinder aspects of workplace sustainability via supervisory defensive responses. Second, it extends prior work on supervisors' reactions to employees' proactivity by moving beyond attribution, social exchange, and norm-based explanations. Drawing on CAPS theory, we identify perceived control and psychological strain as two mechanisms that link job crafting to supervisory territorial behavior. These mechanisms connect job crafting to status-related and well-being-related aspects of workplace sustainability. Third, we contribute to the actor–reactor perspective on proactivity by showing how subordinates' interpersonal influence may shape supervisors' interpretations of job crafting. In doing so, the study offers practical implications for organizations that seek to encourage employee initiatives while maintaining long-term work functioning. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model.

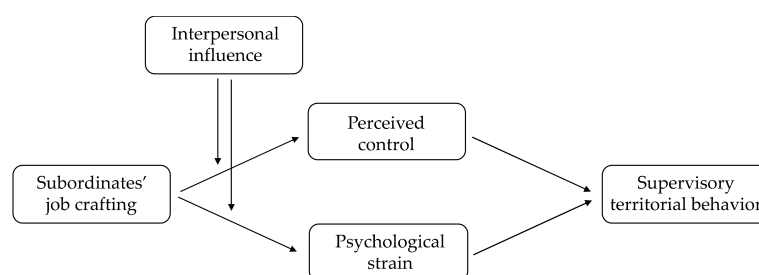


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the current research.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. Supervisory Territorial Responses to Job Crafting

Job crafting is generally portrayed as a constructive form of individual proactivity and adaptability [15]. However, from a supervisory view, subordinates' self-initiated changes to task boundaries, work procedures, or relationships may affect established work arrangements and allocations of responsibilities [5]. When employees redesign their roles, resources, or workflows through job crafting, supervisors may need to reinterpret their own authority, adjust coordination routines, and manage the broader implications of these changes for the work unit. In this sense, job crafting may be appraised not only as individual initiative but also as a work event that influences supervisory control, relational order, and sustainable work functioning. Supervisory territorial behavior may emerge in such situations as a way of marking and defending perceived domains of responsibility, expertise, or influence [7,16]. From a sustainability perspective, this response is important because it may restrict collaboration, reduce information sharing, and weaken sustained productivity [17]. Thus, supervisory territorial behavior represents a micro-level response through which the social costs of job crafting may become visible.

Following the CAPS theory, individuals respond to external stimuli through cognitive and affective processes [11]. As a salient workplace cue, subordinates' job crafting stimulates supervisors' cognitive evaluations and affective reactions, which jointly drive supervisory territorial behaviors. Cognitively, supervisors may assess whether they still have sufficient control over the changes in work initiated by subordinates. When perceived

control is reduced, territorial behavior may become a way to reassert boundaries and restore a sense of order. Affectively, supervisors may experience psychological strain when job crafting creates additional pressure, uncertainty, or emotional demands. Under such strain, they may become more likely to rely on defensive responses. These two processes connect job crafting to different sustainability concerns, i.e., the preservation of legitimate influence and status within changing work arrangements, and the maintenance of supervisors' well-being and mental health. Moreover, supervisory interpretations and reactions are influenced by the actor's tactics and characteristics. Subordinates' interpersonal influence may therefore shape how supervisors interpret and experience job crafting, thereby influencing the strength of indirect associations between job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior. Accordingly, this study proposes a moderated mediation model in which job crafting is associated with supervisory territorial behavior through perceived control and psychological strain, with interpersonal influence serving as a key boundary condition.

2.2. The Status-Related Pathway: Perceived Control

Perceived control refers to individuals' belief that they can influence work events, guide ongoing changes, and prevent undesirable outcomes in their work [18]. When subordinates engage in job crafting, they may change work procedures, task boundaries, or relationships on their own initiative. Although such changes may help employees adapt their jobs to work demands, they may also make established work arrangements less predictable for supervisors. Supervisors may feel less able to guide how the changes unfold, prevent possible disruptions, or maintain control over domains that fall within their responsibility. When this cognitive appraisal suggests that the changing work domain is difficult to monitor or direct, supervisors' perceived control is likely to be reduced [19].

Reduced perceived control may further be associated with supervisory territorial behavior. When supervisors feel that their control over work changes has been weakened, they may become more inclined to clarify authority boundaries, emphasize task ownership, and protect areas they consider their own [6]. These responses may help supervisors restore a sense of order and preserve their legitimate influence in the work. In this sense, territorial behavior can be understood as a defensive response through which supervisors seek to maintain status when their control over work domains becomes less secure. Thus, perceived control represents a status-related sustainability mechanism through which subordinates' job crafting may be associated with supervisory territorial behavior. Thus, perceived control represents a status-related psychological mechanism relevant to the social conditions of workplace sustainability, through which subordinates' job crafting may be associated with supervisory territorial behavior. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. *Subordinates' job crafting is associated with lower supervisory perceived control, which in turn is associated with higher supervisory territorial behavior.*

2.3. The Well-Being-Related Pathway: Psychological Strain

Psychological strain describes individuals' experience of mental pressure, tension, and exhaustion when work demands consume their psychological resources [20]. When subordinates engage in job crafting, such bottom-up, self-initiated changes may disrupt established work patterns and role divisions. The misalignment between the new work-flows and the leader's existing role schemas may create additional managerial demands for supervisors. Supervisors need to adjust task routines, respond to unexpected changes, or manage potential tensions within the work unit. These demands can make the bottom-up work redesign psychologically taxing for supervisors. When this affective experience sug-

gests that the changing work situation requires sustained attention and emotional effort, supervisors' psychological strain is likely to increase [21].

Increased psychological strain may further be associated with supervisory territorial behavior. When supervisors feel mentally pressured or exhausted by subordinates' work changes, they may become more inclined to assert ownership over work domains and reinforce authority boundaries. These responses may help supervisors reduce further demands, regain a sense of stability, and limit additional interference in their work domain. In this sense, territorial behavior can be understood as a defensive response through which supervisors seek to protect their psychological well-being when bottom-up work changes become emotionally taxing. Thus, psychological strain represents a well-being-related psychological mechanism with implications for sustainable work functioning, through which subordinates' job crafting may be associated with supervisory territorial behavior. We thus predict that:

Hypothesis 2. *Subordinates' job crafting is associated with higher supervisory psychological strain, which in turn is associated with higher supervisory territorial behavior.*

2.4. The Moderating Effect of Interpersonal Influence

Drawing upon the CAPS theory, supervisors' cognitive responses to subordinates' job crafting may depend on the social cues that accompany such work changes. In job crafting episodes, subordinates' interpersonal influence serves as an important cue that shapes how supervisors interpret the meaning and manageability of bottom-up work redesigns. Compared with employees who have weak interpersonal influence, those with strong interpersonal influence are more capable of explaining the rationale behind their job crafting, communicating its alignment with unit goals, and involving supervisors in the change process [22,23]. These behaviors may help supervisors view the work changes as more understandable and controllable, rather than as unilateral actions that reduce their authority [13]. In this way, interpersonal influence may weaken the negative association between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' perceived control.

Because perceived control is further associated with supervisory territorial behavior, interpersonal influence may also shape the indirect relationship between job crafting and territorial responses. When subordinates have weak interpersonal influence, their job crafting may be more easily interpreted as poorly coordinated or challenging to supervisory authority. Supervisors may then feel less able to guide the changes, protect their work domain, or maintain legitimate influence. This reduced perceived control may be associated with stronger territorial behavior. In contrast, when subordinates have strong interpersonal influence, they are more likely to communicate intentions, preserve supervisory involvement, and frame their job crafting as beneficial to the broader work unit. Such relational cues may help supervisors maintain perceived control and reduce the need to defend their work domains. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 3. *Interpersonal influence weakens (a) the negative relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisory perceived control, and (b) the positive indirect effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisory territorial behavior via perceived control.*

Furthermore, supervisors' affective responses to subordinates' job crafting may vary depending on the interpersonal manner in which such work changes are enacted [14]. In job crafting episodes, subordinates' interpersonal influence can shape how supervisors experience the pressure and emotional demands created by bottom-up work redesigns. Employees with strong interpersonal influence are more likely to communicate the purpose of their job crafting, explain how the changes support work goals, and maintain

constructive interactions with supervisors. These behaviors may make the work changes less disruptive and less emotionally taxing for supervisors. They may also help supervisors feel respected, informed, and involved during the change process. As a result, job crafting enacted by employees with strong interpersonal influence is less likely to be associated with supervisory psychological strain.

Similarly, interpersonal influence may further condition the indirect relationship between job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior through psychological strain. When subordinates have weak interpersonal influence, their job crafting may be more easily experienced as demanding and burdensome. Supervisors may then feel greater psychological pressure and become more inclined to protect their work domains through territorial behavior. In contrast, when subordinates have strong interpersonal influence, they are more able to reduce misunderstanding, ease emotional tension, and frame job crafting as a cooperative adjustment rather than an additional managerial burden. These relational cues may weaken supervisors' psychological strain and, in turn, reduce the likelihood that supervisors respond territorially. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. *Interpersonal influence weakens (a) the positive relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisory psychological strain, and (b) the positive indirect effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisory territorial behavior via psychological strain.*

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

We collected data from manufacturing firms located in southeastern mainland China using a time-lagged, multi-source design. This study was reviewed and approved by the Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (IRB No. JSU-120301). The participating firms encourage employees' proactivity and participation in work design, thereby ensuring the contextual relevance for examining job crafting. Moreover, the team-based management structures, characterized by frequent interaction and regular meetings, enabled supervisors to observe and assess subordinates' crafting behaviors. With the support of the HR departments, we obtained participant rosters that included demographic information and team structure (i.e., supervisor–subordinate dyads), which allowed us to assign unique identification codes to participants while preserving anonymity and enabling dyadic and longitudinal matching. Prior to the data collection, we informed participants of the survey's purpose and procedures, assured confidentiality, and confirmed their voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any time. In total, 562 employees and 107 supervisors participated in the data collection, with an average span of control of 5.25 subordinates per supervisor (ranging from 3 to 7).

Based on both methodological and empirical considerations, we adopted a one-month time lag between survey waves. Methodologically, relatively short intervals may be suitable for organizational reactions that unfold within ongoing work interactions [24]. In the present study, supervisors may observe subordinates' job crafting during work and subsequently form cognitive and affective reactions within a relatively short period. Prior studies on supervisors' responses to subordinates' job crafting have also used a one-month interval [8,9]. Empirically, the one-month interval was consistent with the participating firms' performance appraisal cycles, allowing supervisors to observe subordinates' job crafting during an actual work cycle and then evaluate their own reactions within the organizational timeframe.

At Time 1, employees reported their job crafting, interpersonal influence, proactive personality, and leader–member exchange (LMX), and supervisors rated subordinates' past job performance. This wave yielded matched responses from 488 employees and

91 supervisors. At Time 2, supervisors reported their perceived control, psychological strain, and territorial behavior. We obtained matched responses from 83 supervisors and 409 subordinates at this stage. After excluding ten employee questionnaires due to patterned responding, two supervisors no longer had any valid matched subordinate responses and were therefore excluded from the final sample. Accordingly, the final sample comprised 399 employees nested within 81 supervisors (response rate = 71.10%). Among employees, 52.88% were male; 45.61% were 21–30 years old, 41.60% were 31–40 years old, 7.02% were 41–50 years old, and 5.77% were in other age groups. On average, 69.92% had been working in their current job for more than 3 years, and 81.95% had a bachelor's degree or above.

3.2. Measures

Following Brislin's procedures [25], we translated and back-translated all scales in the study (see details in Appendix A). Unless otherwise noted, items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Job crafting. Subordinates' job crafting was measured using six items adapted from Leana et al. [26]. A sample item is "I introduce new approaches to improve my work" ($\alpha = 0.97$).

Perceived control. We measured supervisors' perceived control using the three-item scale from Vander Elst et al. [27]. A sample item is "I have enough control to manage the work changes initiated by this subordinate" ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Psychological strain. Supervisors' psychological strain was assessed using the five-item scale from van Gelderen et al. [28]. A sample item is "I feel exhausted when dealing with the work changes initiated by this subordinate" ($\alpha = 0.97$).

Interpersonal influence. We measured subordinates' interpersonal influence using the four-item scale from Ferris et al. [13]. A sample item is "It is easy for me to develop a good rapport with most people" ($\alpha = 0.96$).

Territorial behavior. We assessed supervisory territorial behavior using the six-item scale from Brown et al. [6]. A sample item is "I try to prevent this subordinate from taking over my responsibilities" ($\alpha = 0.98$).

Control variables. In line with prior research [8], we first controlled for employees' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, and tenure. In addition, due to the potential impact of employees' past performance and proactive personality on supervisors' evaluation of their behavior, we controlled for these variables as well. Specifically, subordinates' proactive personality was measured using the ten-item scale from Bateman & Crant [29]. A sample item is "I am always looking for better ways to do things." ($\alpha = 0.95$). Past performance was measured using the three-item scale from MacKenzie et al. [30]. A sample item is "This employee is outstanding at his/her work." ($\alpha = 0.88$). Further, the leader-member exchange can influence how leaders perceive and assess subordinates' self-initiatives. We thus included LMX as a control variable and measured it using the seven-item scale from Liden et al. [31]. A sample item is "My supervisor understands my problems and needs" ($\alpha = 0.95$).

3.3. Analytic Approach

All variables were hypothesized and analyzed at the individual employee level. However, subordinates were nested within supervisors in the sample, resulting in a hierarchical data structure. Specifically, each supervisor provided target-specific ratings of perceived control, psychological strain, and territorial behavior for each matched subordinate, violating the assumption of independent observations [32]. Therefore, the use of multilevel

analysis was intended to account for the nested data structure and supervisor-level clustering, rather than to test cross-level theoretical relationships.

To examine the extent of between-supervisor variance, we first estimated unconditional models for the focal variables. The results indicated between-supervisor variance in perceived control ($ICC(1) = 0.09, p < 0.01$), psychological strain ($ICC(1) = 0.03, p = 0.22 > 0.05$), and supervisory territorial behavior ($ICC(1) = 0.08, p < 0.05$). These results suggested that multilevel modeling was appropriate for addressing the non-independence of observations. Accordingly, we used random-intercept models to test the hypotheses. Specifically, we employed the `TWOLEVEL RANDOM` and `CLUSTER` commands in Mplus 8.0 [33], which allowed us to examine the hypothesized relationships at the individual level while accounting for potential supervisor-level clustering.

All independent variables were grand-mean centered before the analyses [34]. To test the moderating effects, we created interaction terms by multiplying the centered job crafting by the centered interpersonal influence [35]. Following Preacher and Selig [36], we used Monte Carlo simulations with 20,000 repetitions to estimate the confidence intervals for the indirect effects in the model.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations for this study.

Although our two-wave, multi-source research design provided procedural control, the mediators and dependent variable were reported by supervisors at the same time point. Thus, we conducted additional statistical checks to examine the common method bias. First, Harman's single-factor test showed that the first unrotated factor explained 27.73% of the total variance, which was below the threshold (40%). Second, confirmatory factor analyses indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model of the supervisor-reported variables fit the data significantly better than the alternative models in which factors were combined (all $ps < 0.05$ in Table 2). Finally, following Podsakoff et al. [37], we added an unmeasured latent method factor into the hypothesized five-factor model. Comparison of the two models showed no significant difference in the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df = 0.02$, $\Delta CFI = 0.00$, $\Delta TLI = 0.00$, $\Delta RMSEA = 0.00$, $\Delta SRMR = 0.01$). Taken together, these results suggest that common method bias is unlikely to fully account for the observed relationships, although they do not eliminate this concern.

Further, we assessed the convergent validity by testing composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct. According to the results in Table A1 (see details in Appendix B), all items' standardized factor loadings were greater than 0.70, and the CR value of each variable was higher than 0.80. In addition, the AVE values for each construct exceeded the threshold value (0.50), suggesting good convergent validity of all variables in the study [38].

In sum, the high reliability coefficients appear to reflect strong internal homogeneity rather than problematic item redundancy. The items capture closely related but non-identical aspects of each construct.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables in the study.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1.47	0.50	–											
2. Age	2.57	0.76	−0.02	–										
3. Education	2.94	0.62	−0.05	0.03	–									
4. Tenure	3.04	1.09	−0.02	0.08	0.01	–								
5. Subordinates' job crafting (SJC)	3.76	1.19	0.01	−0.01	0.03	−0.05	(0.97)							
6. Perceived control (PC)	2.28	1.00	0.01	−0.02	−0.03	−0.03	−0.49 **	(0.94)						
7. Psychological strain (PS)	3.64	1.04	0.07	−0.04	0.01	−0.02	0.47 **	−0.42 **	(0.97)					
8. Interpersonal influence (II)	3.27	1.12	−0.01	−0.05	0.03	−0.02	0.23 **	−0.19 **	0.44 **	(0.96)				
9. Proactive personality (PP)	3.98	0.85	0.07	0.01	0.04	−0.04	0.03	0.02	−0.01	−0.01	(0.95)			
10. Past performance (PE)	3.66	0.91	0.03	0.07	−0.03	0.04	−0.02	0.03	0.04	0.01	−0.07	(0.88)		
11. Leader–member exchange (LMX)	3.09	1.18	0.02	−0.07	−0.03	0.07	0.03	−0.05	0.00	−0.08	0.02	0.03	(0.95)	
12. Supervisory territorial behavior (STB)	3.69	1.02	0.00	−0.02	−0.02	0.04	0.46 **	−0.55 **	0.43 **	0.23 **	0.01	0.02	0.05	(0.98)

Note: $N = 399$. Internal consistency reliability values were shown in italics on the diagonal. ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 2. Model fit results for confirmatory factor analyses.

Models	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2/\Delta\text{df}$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Hypothesized five-factor model	2.33	—	0.98	0.97	0.06	0.02
Four-factor model: SJC, PC + PS, II, STB	6.77	275.33 **	0.89	0.88	0.12	0.12
Four-factor model: SJC, PC + II, PS, STB	9.90	468.13 **	0.84	0.82	0.15	0.14
Four-factor model: SJC, PS + II, PC, STB	8.84	402.85 **	0.86	0.84	0.14	0.09
Three-factor model: SJC, PC + PS + STB, II	15.93	486.07 **	0.72	0.69	0.19	0.17
Three-factor model: SJC, PC + PS + II, STB	13.16	387.44 **	0.77	0.75	0.18	0.15
Two-factor model: SJC + STB, PC + PS + II	25.28	642.25 **	0.54	0.50	0.25	0.21
Single-factor model: SJC + PC + PS + II + STB	34.36	809.37 **	0.37	0.31	0.29	0.22

Note: $N = 399$. Δ = change relative to the hypothesized model. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean-square residual. ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Results of the full model (see details in Table 3) indicated a significant negative relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' perceived control ($B_1 = -0.37$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$). Also, there was a significant positive relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' psychological strain ($B_2 = 0.33$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$). Further, results showed a significant negative relationship between perceived control and supervisory territorial behavior ($B_3 = -0.41$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$) and a significant positive association between psychological strain and supervisory territorial behavior ($B_4 = 0.17$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, the mediation analyses indicated that subordinates' job crafting has a positive indirect relationship with supervisory territorial behavior through perceived control (effect size = 0.15, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.20]), supporting H1. Also, there was a significant positive indirect effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisory territorial behavior through psychological strain (effect size = 0.06, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.09]), supporting H2. Hence, the indirect effect through perceived control was larger than that through psychological strain, suggesting that the status-related pathway played a relatively stronger role.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis.

	Perceived Control		Psychological Strain		Territorial Behavior	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Control variable						
Gender	0.02 (0.10)	0.06 (0.09)	0.14 (0.11)	0.10 (0.08)	−0.01 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)
Age	−0.02 (0.07)	−0.04 (0.07)	−0.05 (0.07)	−0.00 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.07)	−0.01 (0.07)
Education	−0.04 (0.08)	−0.05 (0.07)	0.03 (0.09)	0.05 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.08)	−0.07 (0.07)
Tenure	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)
Proactive personality	0.02 (0.06)	0.03 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.06)	−0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)
Past performance	0.04 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)	0.03 (0.06)	0.04 (0.05)
Leader–member exchange	−0.04 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.04)	−0.00 (0.05)	−0.00 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
Main effects						
Subordinates' job crafting (SJC)		−0.37 ** (0.04)		0.33 ** (0.04)		0.19 ** (0.05)
Perceived control						−0.41 ** (0.05)
Psychological strain						0.17 ** (0.05)
Interpersonal influence (II)		−0.08 (0.04)		0.36 ** (0.04)		0.05 (0.05)
Interaction (SJC * II)		0.29 ** (0.04)		−0.25 ** (0.04)		0.03 (0.04)
Residual variances	—	0.64 ** (0.05)	—	0.63 ** (0.05)	—	0.61 ** (0.05)

Note: $N = 399$. All coefficients were unstandardized estimates of full model. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

To assess potential multicollinearity in the moderation analyses, we conducted supplementary collinearity diagnostics for the models, including the interaction terms. The results showed that all VIF values were below the threshold (<5) and all Tolerance values were over the threshold (>0.20), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the analyses. Then, the moderation analyses indicated that interpersonal influence significantly moderated the relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' perceived control ($b = 0.29, p < 0.01$). The simple slope tests shown in Figure 2 revealed that the effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisors' perceived control was significantly stronger ($b_1 = -0.66, p < 0.01$) at low levels of interpersonal influence (-1 SD) but weaker and non-significant ($b_2 = -0.08, p = 0.21 > 0.05$) at high levels of interpersonal influence ($+1$ SD), supporting H3a.

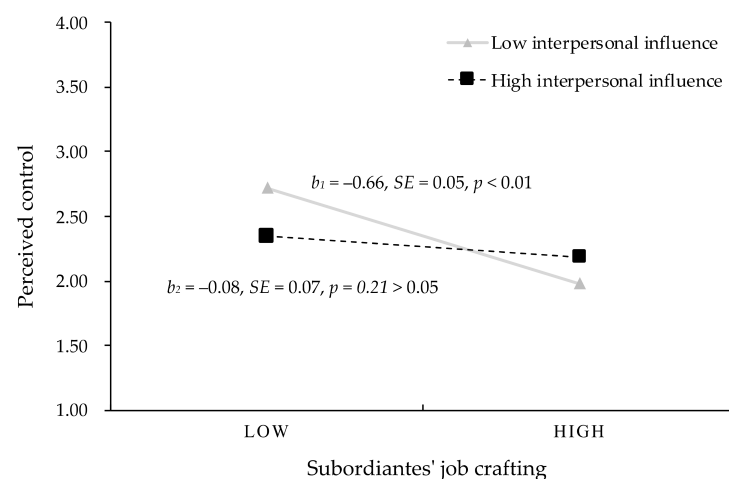


Figure 2. Moderating effect of interpersonal influence on the relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' perceived control.

Further, results indicated a significant moderating effect of interpersonal influence on the relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' psychological strain ($b = -0.25, p < 0.01$). Simple slopes analysis shown in Figure 3 revealed that the positive relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' psychological strain was stronger for those reporting lower levels of interpersonal influence (-1 SD, $b_1 = 0.57, p < 0.01$) compared to the relationship for those with higher levels of interpersonal influence ($+1$ SD, $b_2 = 0.08, p = 0.22 > 0.05$, ns). Thus, H4a was supported.

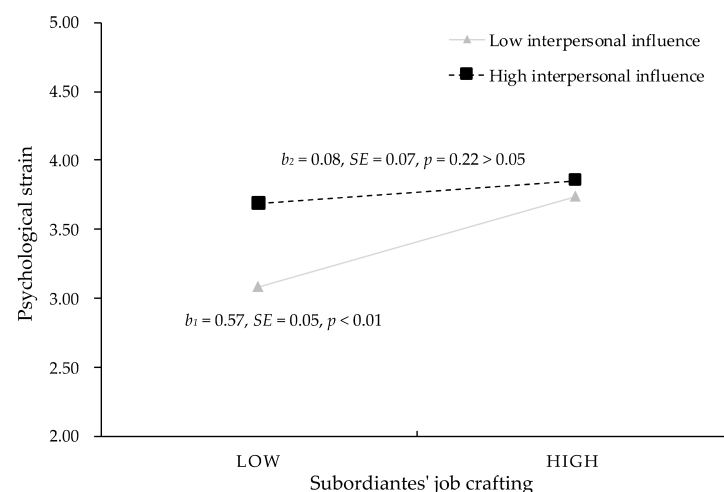


Figure 3. Moderating effect of interpersonal influence on the relationship between subordinates' job crafting and supervisors' psychological strain.

Finally, we examined the conditional effect and found that there were significant differences in the indirect effects at different levels of interpersonal influence. Specifically, at lower levels of interpersonal influence, the indirect effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisory territorial behavior through perceived control was significant and positive (effect size = 0.27, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.34]). However, at higher levels of interpersonal influence, the indirect effect above was non-significant (effect size = 0.03, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [−0.02, 0.09]). Hence, H3b was supported. Meanwhile, at lower levels of interpersonal influence, the indirect effect of subordinates' job crafting on supervisory territorial behavior through psychological strain was significant and positive (effect size = 0.10, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.15]). However, at higher levels of interpersonal influence, the indirect effect above was non-significant (effect size = 0.01, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [−0.01, 0.04]). Therefore, H4b was supported. These findings suggest that interpersonal influence may play an important role in attenuating the association between subordinates' job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior.

4.3. Supplementary Analysis

To examine the robustness of our findings, we conducted several supplementary analyses. First, the results remained substantively unchanged when the analyses were repeated, including the questionnaires that had been excluded due to patterned responding [39]. Additionally, to further address the possibility that results might vary across participating firms, we coded the manufacturing firms included in the survey and conducted additional ANOVAs. The results showed that the findings did not differ significantly across firms (all $ps > 0.05$, ns), suggesting that our results were robust.

5. Discussion

Drawing on the CAPS theory, this study examined how subordinates' job crafting is associated with supervisory territorial behavior through supervisors' perceived control and psychological strain. Using two-wave, multi-source dyadic data, we found that job crafting was indirectly associated with higher supervisory territorial behavior through lower perceived control and higher psychological strain. These findings suggest that job crafting may have unintended social costs when supervisors experience bottom-up work changes as difficult to control or psychologically demanding.

Importantly, the findings do not imply that job crafting is inherently harmful or that it broadly threatens workplace sustainability. Rather, they show that the implications of job crafting are conditional. When subordinates had stronger interpersonal influence, the indirect associations through perceived control and psychological strain became weaker and non-significant. This suggests that supervisors' reactions depend not only on the occurrence of job crafting but also on how employees enact their initiatives. Employees who explain the purpose of their work changes, align them with unit goals, and maintain constructive interactions with supervisors may reduce supervisors' concerns about control loss and psychological burden.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

Our study offers several contributions to research on job crafting and workplace sustainability. First, it extends the job crafting literature by shifting attention from employee-centered outcomes to the responses of supervisors as important stakeholders. Prior studies have shown that job crafting can support employees' engagement, adaptability, and sustainable work design [40]. Our study suggests that job crafting may also have social implications when employees' self-initiated work changes affect existing task arrangements and authority boundaries. By examining supervisory territorial behavior, this study high-

lights a micro-level response through which the social costs of job crafting may become visible. In doing so, it provides a more relational understanding of job crafting as a process embedded in ongoing supervisor–subordinate interactions.

Second, this study advances understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying supervisory responses to job crafting. Existing research has mainly explained supervisors' reactions through cognitive accounts, such as motive attribution, exchange expectations, and credibility [8,9]. Drawing on the CAPS theory, we develop a theoretical model that incorporates both cognitive appraisal and affective experience. These two mechanisms are relevant to the status- and well-being-related conditions that support sustainable work functioning. This approach clarifies why supervisors may respond defensively, not simply because employees are proactive, but because such proactivity may be interpreted as difficult to control or psychologically taxing in specific work contexts [41].

Third, this study contributes to the actor–reactor perspective on proactivity by identifying interpersonal influence as a key boundary condition. Job crafting does not occur in a social vacuum. Its meaning is shaped by how employees explain, communicate, and enact their work changes. Our findings suggest that employees with stronger interpersonal influence may reduce supervisors' concerns about control loss and psychological strain by framing their initiatives as understandable and respectful. As a result, interpersonal influence weakens the indirect associations between job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior through perceived control and psychological strain. This finding extends job crafting and leadership research by showing that the consequences of employees' proactivity depend not only on the behavior itself but also on the relational cues that accompany it.

5.2. Practical Implications

Our findings offer practical implications for organizations that seek to encourage job crafting while protecting sustainable work functioning. First, organizations should guide employees to enact job crafting in a goal-aligned and socially considerate manner. Formal communication channels, such as regular work-design conversations and feedback meetings [42], can help employees explain the purpose, scope, and expected outcomes of their job crafting. These practices may keep supervisors informed and involved, thereby reducing concerns about control loss. Organizations can also provide mentoring programs to help employees develop interpersonal influence skills [43]. Employees who can explain their intentions and connect their initiatives to team goals may be better able to reduce supervisors' psychological strain. This is practically meaningful because our conditional effect results showed that the indirect associations between job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior were stronger when interpersonal influence was low, but became non-significant when interpersonal influence was high. Thus, the way employees enact job crafting is important for turning the job redesign into a more sustainable form of work improvement.

Second, organizations should support supervisors in responding constructively to bottom-up work changes. To reduce defensive reactions, organizations should clarify role expectations, decision boundaries, and procedures for approving or discussing job redesign. Such role clarification can help supervisors distinguish between constructive initiatives and changes that require further coordination. Leadership training may also help supervisors develop openness to work changes, tolerance for ambiguity, and skills for assessing job redesign in a rational way [44]. At the same time, organizations should pay attention to supervisors' workload and psychological strain. If supervisors are already under pressure, they may be more likely to experience job crafting as an additional burden. By aligning employees' initiatives with team goals and supporting supervisors' well-

being, organizations can reduce unnecessary territorial responses and strengthen the social conditions required for sustainable management.

5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, although we focused on perceived control and psychological strain as two mechanisms linking subordinates' job crafting to supervisory territorial behavior, other mechanisms may also be involved. For example, supervisors' motivational states (e.g., prevention-focused motivation or the activation of defensive goals) may shape how they interpret subordinate-initiated work changes [45]. From a relational perspective, job crafting may also be associated with lower supervisory trust or stronger perceptions of psychological contract breach. Future studies could examine these motivational and relational mechanisms alongside the current pathways to provide a more complete account of supervisory territorial responses.

Second, this study examined subordinates' interpersonal influence as a boundary condition, but supervisors' characteristics and other contextual factors may also influence the observed relationships. For instance, supervisors' openness to experience may affect their willingness to accept subordinate-initiated work changes [46], whereas high workload may make the same changes more difficult to accommodate. Leadership style, regulatory focus, and organizational climate may also influence whether job crafting is interpreted as constructive or disruptive [47]. In participative climates, supervisors may be more likely to view job crafting as a contribution to team adaptation. In hierarchical contexts, they may be more likely to perceive it as a challenge to authority. Future research should therefore examine more moderators to clarify when subordinates' job crafting is associated with supervisory defensive responses and when it supports more sustainable forms of work adjustment.

Finally, several design and contextual limitations should be acknowledged. Whereas the research design provided temporal separation, the mediators and dependent variable were reported by supervisors at the same time point. Although additional statistical tests suggested that common method bias was not a serious concern, potential same-source bias cannot be completely ruled out. Future research could measure supervisors' appraisals, affective experiences, and territorial behavior at different time points or obtain behavioral assessments from additional sources. In addition, the findings are based on manufacturing firms in southeastern China, where clear task boundaries and coordination routines may make supervisors more sensitive to subordinate-initiated work changes. Future studies should examine whether the model applies to other industries, regions, and cultural contexts. Finally, job crafting and supervisory responses may unfold dynamically across specific work episodes. Event-based designs or experience sampling methods could capture how supervisors interpret job crafting in real time and how their perceived control, psychological strain, and territorial behavior change over time [48].

6. Conclusions

This study advances our understanding of job crafting by examining its social implications for supervisors and sustainable work functioning. Drawing on the CAPS theory, we developed and tested a moderated mediation model in which subordinates' job crafting is associated with supervisory territorial behavior through lower perceived control and higher psychological strain. The findings suggest that bottom-up work changes may create unintended tensions when supervisors experience them as difficult to manage or psychologically demanding. Furthermore, its implications depend on the way in which it is enacted. In particular, subordinates' interpersonal influence weakens the indirect

associations between job crafting and supervisory territorial behavior, suggesting that effective communication and relational sensitivity may help reduce defensive supervisory responses. Overall, this study offers a more comprehensive view of job crafting as a socially embedded process and highlights the importance of supporting employees' initiatives while protecting supervisory status, well-being, and sustainable work functioning.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Items for each measured variable

(* Reverse-coded items were properly reverse-coded before analysis)

1. *Job crafting*

- (1) I introduce new approaches to improve my work.
- (2) On my own, I change minor work procedures that I think are not productive.
- (3) On my own, I change the way I perform my job to make the work easier.
- (4) I rearrange equipment or furniture in the work areas on my own.
- (5) I organize informal activities in the workplace to improve interactions with others.
- (6) On my own, I bring in additional resources for the workplace to help me complete the work more effectively.

2. *Perceived control*

- (1) I have enough control to manage the work changes initiated by this subordinate.
- (2) I can prevent these work changes from negatively affecting my responsibilities.
- (3) I understand these work changes well enough to control their impact on my work.

3. *Psychological strain*

- (1) I feel tired when dealing with the work changes initiated by this subordinate.
- (2) I feel exhausted when dealing with the work changes initiated by this subordinate.
- (3) These work changes do not affect me at all (R)*.
- (4) I find it difficult to stay fully engaged when handling these work changes.
- (5) I sometimes question whether I can effectively deal with these work changes.

4. *Interpersonal influence*

- (1) It is easy for me to develop a good rapport with most people.
- (2) I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me.
- (3) I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others.

(4) I am good at getting people to like me.

5. Territorial behavior

Given this subordinate's behavior over the past month,

(1) I make it clear to others what decisions or areas fall under my responsibility.

(2) I emphasize which tasks or issues belong to me.

(3) I clarify the boundaries of my work domain so that others know what is and is not under my authority.

(4) I discourage this subordinate from interfering in areas that are part of my role.

(5) I try to prevent this subordinate from taking over my responsibilities.

(6) I protect the information or authority that I consider part of my position.

6. Proactive personality

(1) I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life.

(2) Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change.

(3) Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality.

(4) If I see something I don't like, I fix it.

(5) No matter what the odds, if I believe in something, I will make it happen.

(6) I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition.

(7) I excel at identifying opportunities.

(8) I am always looking for better ways to do things.

(9) If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen.

(10) I can spot a good opportunity long before others can.

7. Leader-member exchange (LMX)

(1) Regardless of how much power he/she has built into his/her position, my supervisor would be personally inclined to use his/her power to help me solve problems in my work.

(2) I can count on my supervisor to "bail me out," even at his or her own expense, when I really need it.

(3) My supervisor understands my problems and needs.

(4) My supervisor recognizes my potential.

(5) My supervisor has enough confidence in me that he/she would defend and justify my decisions if I were not present to do so.

(6) I usually know where I stand with my supervisor.

(7) I have an effective working relationship with my supervisor.

8. Past performance

(1) All things considered, this employee performs his/her job the way I like to see it performed.

(2) This employee is outstanding at his/her work.

(3) This employee is one of the best members of my unit.

Appendix B

Table A1. Factor loading and convergent validity.

Variables	Item	Loading	CR	AVE	Variables	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Subordinate's job crafting (SJC)	SJC1	0.94	0.97	0.86	Perceived control (PC)	PC1	0.91	0.95	0.85
	SJC2	0.94				PC2	0.91		
	SJC3	0.94				PC3	0.95		
	SJC4	0.92			Interpersonal influence (II)	II1	0.94		
	SJC5	0.91				II2	0.94		
	SJC6	0.92				II3	0.92		
						II4	0.91	0.96	0.86

Table A1. Cont.

Variables	Item	Loading	CR	AVE	Variables	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Psychological strain (PS)	PS1	0.93	0.97	0.87	Supervisory territorial behavior (STB)	STB1	0.93	0.98	0.88
	PS2	0.94				STB2	0.94		
	PS3	0.94				STB3	0.95		
	PS4	0.95				STB4	0.94		
	PS5	0.91				STB5	0.94		
						STB6	0.92		

Note: N = 399. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extraction.

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