

DIY Your Job: Using Emotional Intelligence to Craft Meaningful Work

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Article Summary:

Job crafting empowers employees to actively shape their tasks, relationships, and perceptions of work, leading to greater meaning and satisfaction. This article explores how emotional intelligence, specifically self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management, fuels successful job crafting. Through task, relational, and cognitive crafting, employees can align their work more closely with their strengths, passions, and values. It also highlights how both individuals and leaders can create environments that encourage and support job crafting. As AI reshapes many roles and tasks, the ability to job craft with emotional intelligence will become even more important, helping employees adapt, redesign their work, and find greater purpose in a changing landscape.



When employees use emotional intelligence to craft jobs that align with their values, they create work that fuels their motivation, deepens engagement, and adds value to the organization. This process, like any great DIY, may take time and effort, but the result is a job that is not only more fulfilling but also contributes to a thriving, dynamic workplace.

Ask any leader about today's workplace challenges, and they'll likely mention the same buzzwords: engagement, retention, innovation, artificial intelligence. Businesses are in a constant battle to keep employees not only productive but truly invested in their work. Yet, even in organizations with the best intentions, many jobs feel rigid, uninspiring, or disconnected from individual passions.

What if the secret to fixing this isn't another top-down initiative but something much simpler, tools that employees already possess coupled with actions employees already are motivated to take? Emotional intelligence is a set of skills and competencies that allow individuals to understand and manage emotions. Job crafting is the action employees take to reshape their roles, aligning tasks and relationships with their personal strengths and passions. Together, emotional intelligence (EI) and job crafting create a powerful combination to add meaning into our work. EI provides the insight, and job crafting puts it into practice.

Imagine your job is like an IKEA bookshelf: functional, perhaps, but uninspiring. With a bit of creativity and effort, some paint, brackets, or repurposed parts, you could transform that bookshelf into something entirely your own. Emotional intelligence acts as your DIY toolbox, helping you identify what's working, what isn't, and how to approach a redesign of your job. Job crafting is the act of grabbing the tools and getting to work, reshaping your role into something more engaging and meaningful.

The result is a job that doesn't just fulfill organizational goals but sparks personal joy and productivity, too.

In this article, we'll explore how EI and job crafting go hand in hand, using research and practical insights to reveal their transformative potential. Just as a well-executed DIY project breathes new life into something familiar, emotional intelligence empowers employees to reshape their roles, infusing them with passion, creativity, and purpose.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS FOR CRAFTING

Emotional intelligence is a multifaceted set of competencies that allow individuals to understand and manage emotions, both their own and those of others. Developed by [Salovey and Mayer in 1990](#) and popularized by [Goleman in 1995](#), EI now has decades of research underscoring its value in workplace settings.

The relevance to job crafting lies in the way emotional intelligence competencies enable employees to navigate both the personal and interpersonal complexities of redesigning one's role. [Research shows](#) employees with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to adapt to change and engage in collaborative problem-solving in the face of challenges. These competencies foster a proactive approach where individuals continuously adjust their roles to better align with personal strengths and team needs.

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Several core components of EI are particularly useful in job crafting. These elements form the skillset that enables employees to reimagine their roles in a way that enhances both personal satisfaction and organizational alignment.

REFLECTION EXERCISE FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Take a few moments to reflect on each of these questions related to emotional intelligence skills. Consider your current experiences and behaviors in each area and think about opportunities for growth or areas where you feel most confident.

1. Self-Awareness: How well do you understand your emotional drivers and how they impact your performance at work?

2. Self-Regulation: How effectively do you manage your emotional responses during stressful or challenging situations at work? Consider the last time you were told no or had an idea rejected at work, how did you respond?

3. Social Awareness: How often do you actively consider the emotions and perspectives of others when making decisions about work? Stop and think about a recent work decision that impacted your team, do you know how your team feels about the decision?

4. Relationship Management: How well do you maintain positive, collaborative relationships with colleagues, especially during conflicts or moments of disagreement?

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness, often considered the cornerstone of EI, is the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. For job crafting, self-awareness is essential in identifying tasks and relationships that align with an employee's intrinsic motivations and long-term goals. Without this internal clarity, job crafting efforts risk being arbitrary or misaligned with personal and professional aspirations.

2. SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage one's emotional responses and impulses, particularly in stressful or uncertain situations. Job crafting often involves risk, altering workflows or proposing new ideas. Self-regulation helps employees approach this risk with poise and persistence, ensuring that emotional setbacks don't derail their efforts.

3. SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social awareness, which encompasses empathy and the ability to take the perspective of others, is vital for understanding how changes in one's role will be perceived by colleagues, managers, and stakeholders. Social awareness allows employees to craft roles that resonate not only with their personal ambitions but also with broader organizational needs, fostering buy-in from others.

4. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The ability to build and sustain positive relationships, known as relationship management, is another critical EI component. Job crafting often involves negotiating new responsibilities or collaborating with colleagues in novel ways. Strong relationship management skills help employees communicate their intentions effectively and maintain the trust and support of those around them, which is crucial for implementing lasting changes.

These competencies do not function in isolation; they interact dynamically to support job crafting efforts. For example, self-awareness helps an employee recognize the need for change, while social awareness ensures that the change aligns with the expectations and needs of others. Self-regulation provides the emotional resilience to navigate the uncertainty of making adjustments, and relationship management ensures that the crafting process is collaborative and constructive. Together, these EI skills lay the foundation for job crafting. In the next section, we'll explore how job crafting works in practice and how these EI competencies are key drivers in transforming a job.

JOB CRAFTING FOR MEANING

Job crafting refers to the process through which employees take the initiative to shape, modify, and redesign aspects of their roles, often to increase job satisfaction and improve their sense of meaning at work. It is a proactive behavior, allowing individuals to tailor their jobs in ways that enhance motivation, engagement, and alignment with personal strengths. Research has demonstrated that job crafting, when done effectively, can lead to increased job satisfaction, higher performance, and greater engagement. When employees actively engage in reshaping their roles to align with their personal values and passions, they develop a profound sense of purpose and fulfillment. This process creates a ripple effect, boosting not only their own engagement but also their overall contribution to the organization.

Job crafting can be categorized into three main types: task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting. Each of these job crafting types is deeply intertwined with the competencies of emotional intelligence.



1. TASK CRAFTING

Task crafting involves changing the tasks, duties, or responsibilities within one's job to better align with personal strengths, interests, or preferences. Task crafting can also help refocus and engage us with the work we are already doing, creating more excitement and less boredom. A Korn Ferry study of 5,000 people found that boredom is a leading cause of attrition in organizations. Task crafting can prevent boredom in the workplace by encouraging employees to modify tasks toward an area they find more rewarding or exciting. They aren't necessarily changing the work that needs to be completed but rather leaning in to how they approach the work.

A great example of task crafting comes from the earliest career of Steve Jobs. After dropping out of college, Jobs took a position at Atari as an electronics technician, where his role was primarily technical. Using his self-awareness of his strengths in creativity and innovation, and his relationship management skills with his boss, Jobs was able to craft his tasks at Atari to shift beyond engineering work focusing on product design and user experience, responsibilities that were not a part of his original job description.

We all know that Jobs ultimately went on to co-found Apple, a company that revolutionized computers and mobile technology, however it was some of this early task crafting at Atari that lead him into the work that fueled his passions.

Emotional intelligence supports this type of crafting through the skill of self-awareness. When employees possess strong self-awareness, they make informed decisions about which tasks to adjust. Research suggests that employees who engage in task crafting can experience greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of accomplishment. Emotional intelligence is crucial here as it helps individuals navigate the complexities of job change. EI competencies facilitate task crafting by ensuring that the adjustments employees make are not only personally fulfilling but also contribute to greater organizational success.

2. RELATIONAL CRAFTING

Relational crafting involves changing the quality or quantity of interactions with colleagues, clients, or other stakeholders.

This might involve fostering new relationships, deepening existing ones, or changing the way one interacts with others to accomplish work effectively. It is important to note here that relational crafting is not always about building strong bonds with coworkers, although that is certainly involved in some forms of relational crafting. Relational crafting is about being strategic in how you interact with others while getting work done. One might expand relationships to further work goals or limit interactions with a colleague who may derail a project. Each of these is a form of relational crafting.

Emotional intelligence plays a central role in relational crafting through the competencies of social awareness and relationship management. One must first understand how others impact their work, not only in their jobs and responsibilities, but also in their perceptions, personalities, and ego. This social awareness is essential for determining how best to approach interpersonal interactions that impact your work. Relationship management skills also enable individuals to navigate the complex social dynamics involved in our modern work.



Reframing the way one views their role often leading to a greater sense of meaning and connection to the organization's larger goals and vision.

It is important to acknowledge that some research on relational job crafting indicates that it does not always lead to positive outcomes for the organization and individual employees. Whenever you purposely manipulate personal interactions for the purpose of work outcomes, a negative perception of motive could damage the long-term relationship. Again, this is where emotional intelligence skills are key. One can assume that higher levels of social awareness and relationship management skills would decrease the potential for negative long-term repercussions of relational crafting. However, this hypothesis has not yet been explored in research.

3. COGNITIVE CRAFTING

Cognitive crafting refers to altering one's perception or mindset about their work. This type of job crafting involves rethinking the purpose of tasks or reframing the way one views their role often leading to a greater sense of meaning and connection to the organization's larger goals and vision. An employee might reframe routine tasks as essential contributions to a larger mission, helping to see even mundane duties as more purposeful. Imagine the barista at Starbucks asked to remake a customer's latte for the third time. Most of us would see the customer's request as frustrating or annoying, even though it is a part of the job. Cognitive crafting would help a barista reframe this interaction into an exercise in keeping customers satisfied, ultimately driving sales and store performance.

Emotional intelligence research calls this skill deep acting. Rather than surface acting (i.e. putting on the fake smile for a disingenuous customer exchange), an employee who engages deep acting (reflecting on the larger impact of customer satisfaction to fuel a genuinely positive exchange with the customer) finds deeper meaning and satisfaction in their work. Employees with greater EI skills of self-regulation and social awareness are more likely to recognize the demands of emotional labor in their roles and understand the need to display particular emotions, deep acting, to meet these expectations.

REFLECTION EXERCISE FOR JOB CRAFTING

Take a few moments to reflect on each of the job crafting types. Consider how you currently engage with your tasks, relationships, and mindset at work, and consider adjustments you could make to enhance your job satisfaction and alignment with your strengths.

1. Task-Crafting: Do you ever modify the tasks you perform to better align with your skills, interests, or goals at work? If not, are there opportunities to do this in the future?

2. Relational Crafting: How actively do you seek opportunities to build or strengthen relationships with cross-functional colleagues to enhance collaboration and achieve better work outcomes?

3. Cognitive Crafting: How frequently do you reframe your view of work to focus on the greater purpose or the meaning it brings to you personally?



CULTIVATING EI & JOB CRAFTING

It's important to acknowledge that emotional intelligence and job crafting aren't cure-alls for every workplace challenge. These strategies thrive in environments where a foundation of psychological safety, respect, and shared accountability already exists. In a toxic culture or under ineffective leadership, job crafting can be stifled, and emotional intelligence may go unrecognized. Similarly, an employee unwilling to engage constructively or adapt their mindset may find it difficult to reap the benefits. Cultivating EI and embracing job crafting are powerful tools, but only when the broader environment supports their growth. To cultivate emotional intelligence and enable job crafting, both leaders and individuals must take deliberate actions.

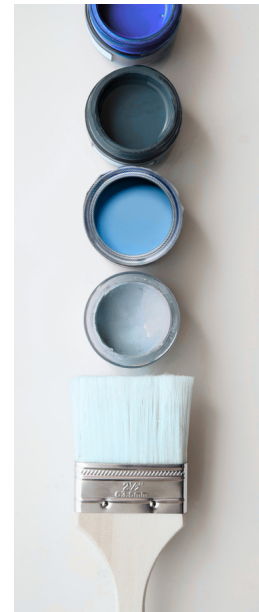
FOR LEADERS

Leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating EI for job crafting within their teams. One key best practice for leaders is to model emotional intelligence behaviors themselves, showing empathy, practicing active listening, and encouraging open communication. Leaders should also create a psychologically safe environment where employees feel empowered to make changes to their roles without fear of judgment or reprisal. This can be achieved through regular one-on-one check-ins, where leaders actively listen to employees' aspirations, challenges, and feedback. Encouraging a growth mindset, where employees see challenges as opportunities for development, also helps individuals feel more comfortable taking ownership of their job crafting. Leaders can further enable this process by providing resources for emotional intelligence training and fostering a culture that prioritizes emotional self-awareness, relationship-building, and resilience.

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FOR INDIVIDUALS

To effectively cultivate emotional intelligence in job crafting, individuals need to take a proactive approach to redesign their roles with intention. Start by gaining a deep understanding of what aspects of your work bring you the most fulfillment and where you feel the most challenged. Reflect on how your day-to-day tasks align with your passions and values, then find small ways to tweak your responsibilities to better fit your strengths. For example, if you're energized by mentoring others, look for opportunities to take on a coaching role within your team, or if certain projects drain you, explore ways to delegate or adjust them. Throughout the process, stay grounded by managing stress and remaining adaptable, especially when encountering roadblocks or resistance. It's also important to keep an eye on how your changes impact the team and be open to feedback to ensure your efforts align with both personal and collective goals. In this way, job crafting becomes a dynamic, ongoing process that allows you to cultivate a role that feels both meaningful and authentic.



REFLECTION EXERCISE FOR CULTIVATING EI & JOB CRAFTING

These questions are designed to guide leaders and individuals in assessing their current approach to cultivating EI and job crafting, encouraging self-reflection on areas for improvement. Take time to thoughtfully consider each question and identify opportunities for growth in both your personal and professional practices.

FOR LEADERS:

Modeling EI Behaviors: How often do I demonstrate empathy, active listening, and open communication with my team? Can I identify a recent example where I modeled these EI behaviors?

Creating a Safe Environment: Do I actively encourage team members to share their challenges and aspirations without fear of judgment? How can I improve the psychological safety within my team to support job crafting?

Fostering Growth Mindset: How effectively do I help employees see challenges as opportunities for growth? What steps can I take to further promote a growth mindset in my team and encourage them to take ownership of their job crafting?

FOR INDIVIDUALS:

Identifying Meaningful Work: Do I have a clear understanding of which aspects of my work energize me and which ones drain me? How can I adjust my tasks to better align with my strengths and passions?

Managing Emotional Responses: How well do I manage my emotions when faced with work-related stress or challenges? What emotional regulation techniques can I use to stay focused and positive during difficult situations?

Seeking Feedback and Collaboration: How open am I to receiving feedback about the changes I make to my role? What steps can I take to ensure my job crafting efforts are aligned with team and organizational goals?

JOB CRAFTING IN THE AGE OF AI

As AI continues to reshape the workplace, the ability to job craft becomes even more vital, and emotional intelligence will be the skill that powers it. With routine tasks increasingly automated, employees have greater freedom to shape how they contribute, connect, and find meaning at work. Navigating this new landscape requires the core elements of emotional intelligence to reimagine tasks, build authentic relationships, and see fresh possibilities in evolving roles. Rather than limiting us, AI opens the door for more human-centered, purpose-driven work if we have the emotional insight to seize the opportunity.

When employees use their EI to craft jobs that align with their values, they don't just complete tasks, they create work that fuels their motivation, deepens engagement, and adds value to the organization. This process, like any great DIY, may take time and effort, but the result is a job that is not only more fulfilling but also contributes to a thriving, dynamic workplace.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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Bethany is an HR educator passionate about making workplaces better for all employees.

Bethany has more than 15 years of experience in HR and education. She began her career working in learning & development and HR in the restaurant and retail industries. She has experience in both small, privately-owned businesses and large, Fortune 500 organizations. Bethany holds a BA in Psychology, MA in Organizational Management, the SHRM-SCP certification, and is a Certified Genos International Emotional Intelligence Practitioner. Bethany has spoken at a variety of conferences throughout the country and leads corporate training on topics including emotional intelligence, leadership, and strategic HR.

