

The Influence of Leadership on Self Determination, Work Engagement, and Job Crafting on Marginalized Workers in Health Care Environments

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This study examines how dirty workers, those in housekeeping, janitorial, and food services, are marginalized despite their contributions to patient care and hospital operations. Often stigmatized, they are viewed as disciplinary problems rather than valued team members. Using theories of Self-determination, Job Crafting, Work Engagement, and Leader-Member Exchange theory, this study reframes behavioral issues as symptoms of systemic neglect. It argues inclusive leadership and supportive environments can foster engagement, creativity, and dignity among these workers. Ultimately, the study suggests organization success depends on affirming all workers' value, not on control or punitive approaches.

Keywords: dirty workers, LMX, work engagement, job crafting, self determination

INTRODUCTION

The researchers in this study devoted inordinate amounts of time to issues involving blue-collar workers (housekeeping, janitors, and food and nutrition workers) within the human resources department of a regional healthcare system. Hospital staff in these critical roles frequently faced conflict, high turnover, and disciplinary action despite their importance to hospital function and patient safety. While their challenges were a recurring theme in HR discussions, their voices remained absent from the broader organizational discourse. The prevailing narrative reduced their struggles to personal shortcomings, charting them toward discipline or separation.

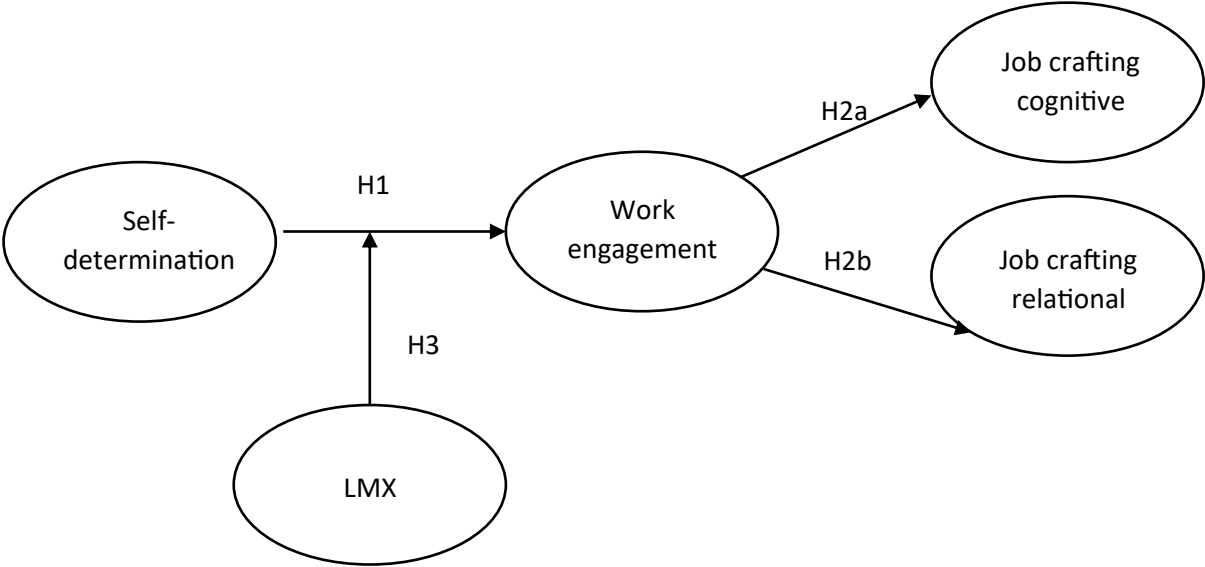
Often characterized as 'problems,' dirty workers are employees engaged in tasks that are physically, socially, or morally stigmatized (Hughes, 1951). Society frequently marginalizes these individuals, associating them with negative stereotypes due to the undesirable nature of their work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). This stigmatization affects how others perceive them and their self-concept, often leading to diminished self-esteem and a sense of social exclusion (Gray, 2002). Organizations frequently provide limited recognition and support to such workers and neglect their developmental and motivational needs, contributing to disengagement and diminished job performance. (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

Researchers and institutions rarely interrogate such divergence for its structural roots. Instead, these workers are subjected to punitive mechanisms, stripped of agency, and left to operate in often toxic environments. They are frequently written up for violations, experience adversarial relationships with supervisors and other staff, and face limited avenues for development or redress. The result is a high-cost cycle of disengagement, turnover, retraining, and, most critically, declines in patient care outcomes. This myopic focus on compliance and control obscures a more productive line of inquiry: What if these individual actors are not merely sources of disruption but indicators of deeper organizational misalignment? What if dissatisfaction or disengagement signals unmet psychological needs, poor supervisory relationships, or underutilized creative potential?

While extant literature has primarily centered on white-collar contexts, this study takes an empirical approach to address a critical gap in the literature by exploring leader-member exchange (LMX) as a moderating variable within a blue-collar setting, thereby extending the applicability of leadership theory to traditionally marginalized labor groups. Further, this study answers the call to clarify the theoretical understanding of leader-member exchange as a moderating construct while offering practical insights for organizational leadership and human resources practices.

Building on these considerations and the identified need for broader empirical focus, it is essential to further examine the specific mechanisms and contextual factors that shape employee motivation and engagement in marginalized occupational settings. While, prior studies have established robust links between self-determination, job crafting, and work engagement, most research has focused on white-collar or general employee populations, overlooking the unique psychosocial challenges faced by blue-collar hospital staff (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2022; Rooker, 2024). The moderating role of leader-member exchange (LMX) in the SDT, job crafting, work engagement pathway is also underexplored in stigmatized healthcare contexts (Breevaart et al., 2015; Kim & Beehr, 2021). Furthermore, the nuanced effects of SDT's dimensions on specific job crafting forms, especially in highly regulated environments, have not been systematically examined (Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2022). Addressing these gaps, this study investigates how leadership and psychological need satisfaction jointly shape proactive job redesign and engagement among marginalized healthcare workers.

FIGURE 1
PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL



The remainder of this study is structured as follows. The next section discusses relevant literature to establish a theoretical foundation and support the study's core hypotheses. A presentation of the research

design, empirical analyses, and key findings follows. The subsequent section discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the results, acknowledges the study's limitations, and outlines directions for future research. The final section provides a conclusion, highlighting the study's central contributions.

This study hypothesizes that effective leadership mitigates workplace challenges by cultivating inclusive organizational cultures that promote employees' self-determination and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kahn, 1990). Such leadership facilitates supportive strategies, including job crafting, which empower workers to modify their tasks and interactions, thereby enhancing motivation and overall well-being (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013). Other researchers have hypothesized that leadership plays a key role in addressing these issues; transformational and inclusive leaders enhance employee motivation, foster a sense of belonging, and reframe stigmatized work as valuable and meaningful (cf. Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). By cultivating an environment that validates the contributions of dirty workers and addresses their psychosocial needs, leaders can help mitigate the adverse effects of societal stigma and promote workplace well-being. Furthermore, this study advances the literature by examining the impact of leadership on blue-collar workers, a population often overlooked in organizational research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Dirty Workers

The etymology of "dirty work," as introduced by Hughes (1951, 1958), refers to occupations or tasks perceived as distasteful, degrading, or socially demeaning. The term *dirty work* itself is imbued with the same stigma and social polarization as the individuals who perform such labor. Hughes (1951, 1958) contended that workers engaged in dirty work are stigmatized because society casts a negative judgment not only on the work itself but, by extension, on the workers, fusing the individual's identity with the nature of the labor (Hughes, 1951, p. 319). This conflation results in workers being socially marginalized, often isolated within organizational contexts, and perceived as having limited value beyond their stigmatized roles.

Building on Hughes's framework, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999, 2013) delineate dirty work into three distinct types of taint: physical, social, and moral. Physical taint involves occupations requiring contact with dirty or hazardous substances (e.g., sanitation workers) or laborious or dangerous conditions (Deery, Kolar, & Walsh, 2020). Social taint pertains to roles involving interaction with stigmatized populations (e.g., healthcare workers) or positions perceived as subordinate (e.g., janitors, waitstaff). Moral taint encompasses work associated with activities that violate moral or social norms (e.g., sex work) (Deery et al., 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that workers in these roles are acutely aware of the stigma attached to their occupations, and such negative societal evaluations can erode self-esteem and undermine self-confidence (Bergman & Chalkley, 2007; Gold, 1952; Henson, 1996; Kraus, 2010). Consequently, dirty workers face the formidable challenge of constructing a sense of self-worth and dignity within the confines of their stigmatized labor.

Understanding how stigmatization contributes to societal marginalization and shapes individual self-identity is essential for examining the interaction between self-determination, work engagement, job creativity (job crafting), and leadership involvement. This study situates these constructs within the context of dirty work, where occupational stigma seemingly exerts a psychosocial effect on workers. Prior research (cf. (Bergman & Chalkley, 2007; Gold, 1952; Henson, 1996; Kraus, 2010) has illuminated how societal perceptions of dirty work influence workers' self-concept and emotional well-being, highlighting a pressing need for organizational interventions which this study seeks to examine. In this regard, leadership *could* emerge as a critical mechanism for counteracting the devaluation of stigmatized roles. By affirming the dignity of such labor and fostering inclusive, empowering environments, leaders could play a pivotal role in enhancing motivation, creativity, and a sense of belonging among dirty workers. The relevance of LMX as a theoretical foundation is particularly pronounced in healthcare settings characterized by structural marginalization. High-quality LMX relationships can buffer the negative effects of occupational stigma, foster trust, and provide critical resources for job crafting and engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015; Kim &

Beehr, 2021). In contexts where blue-collar healthcare workers often experience exclusion and limited development opportunities, supportive supervisory relationships may be transformative—enhancing motivation, mitigating stress, and promoting organizational citizenship (Kim & Lee, 2023).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

High-performing employees exhibit strong self-motivation and independence even in the absence of formal leadership roles (Kelley, 1992, 2000). While effective leadership can encourage high motivation levels, it does not directly cause it; instead, employee motivation stems from the individual's drive and determination (Hughes, 1998). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) clarifies this distinction by proposing that individuals possess three innate psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that fuel intrinsic motivation. Autonomy reflects the desire to be the origin of one's actions and to influence outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; deCharms, 1968). Competence captures the need to master tasks and interact effectively with one's environment (White, 1959), and relatedness involves feeling connected to others and having meaningful social interactions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Research consistently demonstrates that fulfilling employees' basic psychological needs significantly enhances their well-being, motivation, and job performance, whereas the frustration of these needs contributes to strain and disengagement (Gagné & Vansteenkiste, 2013). Autonomously motivated employees tend to exhibit a stronger sense of psychological ownership over their work (Kiggundu, 1980), which fosters deeper engagement and a greater sense of meaning (Chua & Oluremi, 2021). When organizations cultivate environments encouraging psychological safety, employees feel more confident expressing themselves and engaging authentically with their tasks (Williams et al., 2002). Parker, Jimmieson, and Amiot (2010) further demonstrate that autonomous motivation bolsters engagement and serves as a buffer against workplace stress, reinforcing its value in building resilient and productive workforces.

Recent empirical evidence supports these conclusions. Magdaleno et al. (2022) found that when employees are granted autonomy, they develop a stronger sense of responsibility and engage in prosocial behaviors such as job crafting—proactively shaping their roles to enhance personal and organizational outcomes. Complementing this, a meta-analysis by Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, and Zacher (2017) reveals that job autonomy, social support, and other workplace resources serve as key enablers of job crafting, underscoring the importance of organizational contexts that empower individual agency.

According to SDT, autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs fosters intrinsic motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Recent research suggests that work engagement acts as a motivational bridge, translating psychological need satisfaction into proactive job crafting (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; van Wingerden et al., 2018). Engaged employees are more likely to initiate job crafting, as they possess the energy and commitment necessary to reshape their work environments.

Job Crafting

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) conceptualized job crafting as a proactive, self-initiated process wherein employees reshape and redefine their roles to align with personal values and goals. This discretionary activity occurs at the individual level, allowing employees to modify tasks, relationships, and perceptions of their work. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), job crafting serves as a strategy for fulfilling the innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) identified three forms of job crafting: cognitive, task, and relational. Cognitive crafting involves altering one's perception of work by reinterpreting specific tasks or viewing the job as a unified whole (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). This form of crafting enables employees, particularly those in roles with limited formal autonomy, to derive purpose and satisfaction, thereby enhancing motivation and engagement (Parker, Tims, & Sonnentag, 2025). Task crafting refers to modifying the number, scope, or type of job tasks, which may include correcting outdated procedures or dysfunctional role expectations (Staw & Boettger, 1990). Relational crafting involves changing the frequency, quality, or nature of interpersonal interactions within the job.

While all three forms of job crafting are theoretically relevant, the feasibility of task crafting in healthcare warrants further discussion. In many healthcare settings, task crafting is constrained by rigid protocols, safety regulations, and delineated job descriptions (Kim & Lee, 2023; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). These constraints may limit the relevance of task crafting compared to cognitive or relational crafting for blue-collar hospital workers.

Recent empirical studies have expanded our understanding of job crafting's impact on work engagement and organizational outcomes. For instance, Jindal et al. (2023) found that job crafting behaviors were most prevalent when employees experienced high levels of work autonomy. Similarly, Clinton, Bindl, and Frasca (2024) demonstrated that employees who align their roles with personal interests and values through job crafting experience personal growth and increased job satisfaction. In healthcare, empowering employees to adjust their roles has been linked to higher engagement, improved teamwork, and increased patient satisfaction, illustrating the reciprocal relationship between job crafting, individual fulfillment, and organizational performance (Kim & Lee, 2023; Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2022; and van Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks, 2018). In the context of blue-collar workers, job crafting has been identified as a valuable strategy for adapting to technological changes and enhancing work engagement. Rooker (2024) conducted a qualitative study investigating job crafting behaviors among blue-collar workers in response to technological developments. The findings revealed that workers who perceived technology as supportive engaged in job crafting behaviors to adapt to changes, leading to increased engagement and job satisfaction. Conversely, those who viewed technology as constraining were less likely to engage in job crafting, highlighting the importance of organizational support in facilitating positive perceptions and proactive behaviors.

Work Engagement

Kahn (1990) conceptualized work engagement as the extent to which individuals express their preferred selves in work roles, emphasizing meaningful connections to tasks and colleagues. He identified three psychological conditions essential for engagement: psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Building upon Kahn's framework, Maslach and Leiter (1997) highlighted that engaged employees are energized and perceive their work as inherently challenging. Further refining the concept, Schaufeli et al. (2002) described work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). In this context, vigor denotes high levels of energy and mental resilience; dedication refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride; and absorption signifies deep concentration and immersion in one's work.

Recent research has expanded our understanding of work engagement by integrating concepts such as job crafting, leadership, and self-determination theory (SDT). Job crafting, the proactive behaviors employees engage in to align their jobs with personal preferences and values, has been linked to enhanced work engagement (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Olafsen et al. (2024) proposed a model of need crafting, suggesting that employees who actively modify their tasks to satisfy basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—experience higher levels of engagement. This aligns with SDT, which posits that fulfilling these innate needs fosters intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Rafiq et al. (2023) found that job crafting enhances innovation performance and career satisfaction through the mediating role of work engagement. This underscores the importance of fostering an environment that encourages job crafting to promote employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Building on the theoretical foundations of Job Crafting and Self Determination Theory, it can be hypothesized that work engagement serves as a critical mediator in the relationship between self-determination and job crafting. Specifically, the fulfillment of basic psychological needs enhances intrinsic motivation and engagement, which in turn facilitates proactive job crafting behaviors that contribute to greater creativity and performance. The operationalization of SDT as a first-order or multidimensional construct merits clarification. While SDT is often modeled as a higher-order construct, emerging evidence indicates that its dimensions—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—may differentially predict specific types of job crafting (Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2022). For example, relatedness is likely more strongly

associated with relational crafting, while autonomy may drive cognitive or task crafting). Therefore, this study focused exclusively on self-determined forms of motivation (intrinsic and identified). Thus:

Hypothesis 1a: *Work engagement mediates the relationship between self-determination and relational job crafting.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Work engagement mediates the relationship between self-determination and cognitive job crafting.*

Leader-Member Exchange

Work is inherently relational, involving dynamic interactions between employees and their leaders. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory conceptualizes leadership as a dyadic relationship wherein leaders form differentiated relationships with subordinates, resulting in in-group and out-group classifications (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) argued that leadership is enacted through individualized exchanges rather than a uniform leadership style. In-group members experience high-quality exchanges characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation, whereas out-group members encounter lower-quality exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Recent research underscores the importance of leader support in facilitating job crafting, particularly among blue-collar workers. Holman et al. (2023) found that job crafting is more effective when managers actively support employees in aligning job demands and resources with personal strengths and motivations. A study by Hu et al. (2020) found that cognitive crafting, which involves altering one's perceptions of work tasks to enhance their meaningfulness, is positively associated with increased work engagement. This form of job crafting allows employees to align their work with personal values and goals, thereby satisfying the psychological need for autonomy and promoting greater engagement in their roles. Zhang, Tims, and Parker (2024) further noted that proactive job crafting yields more favorable outcomes than reactive approaches and that supportive LMX relationships build the trust and communication necessary to empower employees. Their findings also emphasize the role of job autonomy in promoting active crafting behaviors.

Similarly, Kristiana et al. (2025) highlighted the role of effective leadership in enabling job crafting within service-oriented contexts, where fostering creativity and innovation enhances customer satisfaction. These insights apply to healthcare settings, where supportive leadership promotes employee engagement, autonomy, and presumably improved patient care.

Liu, Peng, and Wen (2023) developed a moderated mediation model to investigate how self-leadership promotes job crafting. Their study found that self-leadership positively impacts job crafting through the mediating effect of autonomous motivation. Importantly, leader-empowering behavior was identified as a significant moderator, enhancing the positive impact of self-leadership on autonomous motivation and, in turn, on job crafting. This suggests that leadership behaviors that empower employees can strengthen the internal motivational processes that lead to proactive job redesign.

Ghadi (2024) examined the role of visionary leadership in facilitating job crafting. The study proposed that visionary leadership enhances psychological meaningfulness and organizational identification, which are critical psychological conditions for engagement. These factors mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and job crafting, indicating that leaders who articulate a compelling vision can foster an environment where employees are more engaged and inclined to modify their job roles proactively.

In the context of service sector organizations, Jaleel and Sarmad (2024) explored how inclusive leadership influences job crafting. Their findings revealed that work engagement mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and job crafting dimensions. Furthermore, job autonomy was found to moderate this relationship, suggesting that inclusive leadership styles that promote autonomy can enhance employee engagement and encourage job-crafting behaviors.

These studies underscore leadership's pivotal role in moderating the relationship between self-determination and work engagement, leading to job crafting. Leadership styles that empower, inspire, and include employees satisfy their basic psychological needs and foster an environment conducive to proactive job redesign. By facilitating autonomous motivation and engagement, such leadership approaches enable

employees to craft their jobs in ways that align with their strengths and interests, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness. The preceding discussion suggests that the dynamic between leader and follower significantly shapes an individual's sense of self-determination and work engagement, which in turn influences the degree of job creativity demonstrated through job crafting behaviors. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: *LMX moderates the relationship between job crafting and work engagement, such that the positive relationship between job crafting and work engagement is stronger when LMX is high.*

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative, correlational field research design addressed the study's central inquiries concerning the nature and relative strength of relationships among selected organizational variables. The researchers collected data by administering a structured survey instrument to housekeepers and food and nutrition service employees at a regional hospital in the United States using a convenience sampling method. According to records provided by the hospital's human resources department, the total population for these departments consisted of 136 individuals.

Data Collection

Due to limited access to technology among the target population, the researchers designated a break room where employees could complete a paper-based survey. Managers permitted employees to take the survey during work hours to encourage participation and increase response rates, eliminating the need to use personal break time or remain after shifts. Participants could choose to complete the survey in English or Spanish. A fluent Spanish speaker ensured translation accuracy through forward and back-translation. All researchers completed NIH Human Participants training, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at affiliated institutions approved the study. A consent form at the beginning of the survey outlined the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and ethical safeguards. In total, 83 surveys were completed, resulting in a response rate of 61.0%.

Measures

Work Engagement

Work engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), a validated instrument developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The short-form version, comprising nine items, was fully employed to capture the core dimensions of engagement—vigor, dedication, and absorption. These items' responses were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*). The values of Cronbach's alphas ranged from .60 to .87 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 32). *Examples of scale items include* "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (vigor), "I am enthusiastic about my work" (dedication), and "I feel happy when I am working intensely."

Self-Determination

The Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) served as the instrument to assess self-determination. Although the WEIMS encompasses the full continuum of motivational orientations—from amotivation to intrinsic motivation—this study focused exclusively on self-determined forms of motivation. This domain was measured using nine items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alphas for the WEIMS's six subscales range from .64 to .83, suggesting adequate reliability, *and examples of scale items include* "Because I derive much pleasure from learning new things" (intrinsic motivation); "Because this is the type of work, I chose to do to attain a certain lifestyle" (identified motivation) scale ranging from "does not correspond at all" (1) to "corresponds exactly" (7).

Job Crafting

This study employed the Job Crafting Questionnaire developed by Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013). While the original instrument comprises three dimensions—task, relational, and cognitive crafting—the

researchers included only the relational and cognitive domains in the present analysis. Task crafting was excluded, as hospital cleaners must adhere strictly to standardized procedures governed by regulatory protocols, and any deviation could compromise patient safety; consequently, the adapted scale consisted of 10 items. The scale asked participants to indicate the extent to which they engage in certain behaviors on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Hardly ever*) to 6 (*Very often*). The Cronbach's alphas of the three subscales are .87 (task crafting), .89 (cognitive crafting), .83 (relational crafting), .91 (total job crafting)" (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013, p. 138). Examples of scale items include "Introduce new approaches to improve your work" and "Introduce new work tasks that you think better suit your skills or interests."

Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-member exchange was measured using the multidimensional LMX scale (LMX-MDM), which comprises twelve items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This instrument captures the multifaceted nature of leader-follower relationships, encompassing affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect.

The Cronbach's alphas are .90, .78, .60, and .92, respectively, for affect, loyalty, contributions, and professional respect in the student samples, and .90, .74, .57, and .89, respectively, for affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect for the organizational employee samples (Liden & Maslyn, 1998, p. 59). Examples of scale items include "My manager is a lot of fun to work with" (affect) and "My manager would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake" (loyalty).

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Following data cleaning procedures, the final analytic sample consisted of 83 participants employed in occupations typically categorized as "dirty work." Work tenure among respondents ranged from less than one year to over 20 years, with a mean tenure of 2.73 years ($SD = 1.93$). Gender distribution was predominantly female (79.5%), with male participants comprising 18.1% and 2.4% identifying as other.

The racial composition was as follows: 38.6% Caucasian, 34.9% Hispanic, 18.1% African American, 4.8% other, 3.6% Asian, and 0% American Indian. The age distribution of participants spanned multiple categories, with the highest proportions falling in the 25–34 (25.3%) and 55–64 (24.1%) age brackets. Full age distribution included: 18–24 (18.1%), 25–34 (25.3%), 35–44 (9.6%), 45–54 (18.1%), 55–64 (24.1%), and 65+ (4.8%).

Most participants reported full-time employment (86.8%), while 10.8% were employed part-time, and 2.4% were classified as temporary workers. Educational attainment varied: 22.9% had not completed education beyond the 12th grade, 42.2% had completed high school or an equivalent degree, 27.7% had some college experience, 1.2% held an associate degree, 4.8% had earned a bachelor's degree, and 1.2% possessed a postgraduate degree.

Descriptive statistics for the study revealed that Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) received the highest overall rating, with a mean score of 5.67 ($SD = 1.33$) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The distribution of LMX scores was negatively skewed (skewness = -1.44), indicating a general tendency among participants to report strong leader-employee relationships. Given the non-normal distribution, the median ($Mdn = 6.0$) is a more appropriate central tendency measure, reinforcing the conclusion that respondents generally perceived high-quality LMX. Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	M	STDEV.
WE	4.79	1.09
JC _{Cog}	4.57	1.32
JC _{Rel}	4.31	1.21
SD	5.19	1.42
LMX	5.67	1.33

Note. n= 83. WE=Work Engagement, JC_{Cog} = Cognitive Job Crafting, JC_{Rel} = Relational Job Crafting, SD=Self-Determination, LMX=Leader Member Exchange, M= Mean, STDEV. =Standard Deviation.

Reliability

As shown in Table 2, all scales in this study yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the conventional threshold of .70, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). To evaluate the measurement model, we examined the standardized factor loadings for all scale items. The composite reliability (CR) values surpassed the recommended minimum of .60, providing further evidence of scale reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the .50 benchmark, satisfying the criterion for convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Discriminant validity was also established, as the square roots of the AVEs for each construct were greater than the inter-construct correlations, except for the correlation between self-determination and cognitive job crafting. Table 3 presents the inter-factor correlations, AVE values, and composite reliability coefficients.

TABLE 2
RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Reliability Statistics		
Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
WE	.911	9
JC _{COG}	.938	5
JC _{REL}	.805	5
SD	.927	9
LMX	.955	12

Note. n=83. WE=Work Engagement, JC_{Cog}= Cognitive Job Crafting, JC_{Rel}= Relational Job Crafting, SD=Self-Determination, LMX=Leader Member Exchange.

TABLE 3
IMPLIED CORRELATIONS, AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED, AND
COMPOSITE RELIABILITY

Variable	SD	JC _{COG}	JC _{REL}	WE
SD	.70			
JC _{COG}	.79***	.74		
JC _{REL}	.58***	.54***	.72	
WE	.65***	.62***	.45**	.71
CR	.87	.71	.72	.71
AVE	.50	.54	.51	.51

Note: SD=Self-Determination, JC_{Cog}= Cognitive Job Crafting, JC_{Rel}=Relational Job Crafting, WE=Work Engagement, CR=Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted

Hypothesis Testing

Mediation Analysis for Relational Job Crafting

A mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether work engagement mediates the relationship between self-determination and relational job crafting. The path from the independent variable, self-determination, to the mediator, work engagement (path a), was statistically significant, $b = 0.4974$, $SE = 0.0653$, $t = 7.6205$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.3675, 0.6272]. These results indicate that higher levels of self-determination are associated with higher levels of work engagement. The total effect of self-determination on relational job crafting was significant, $b = 0.4904$, $SE = 0.0776$, $t(81) = 6.32$, $p < .001$, with a standardized coefficient of .5746. When work engagement was added as a mediator, the direct effect remained significant, $b = 0.4173$, $SE = 0.1016$, $t(80) = 4.11$, $p < .001$, however, the indirect effect through work engagement was not statistically significant, $b = 0.0732$, $BootSE = 0.0687$, 95% CI [-0.0599, 0.2142], and the standardized indirect effect was similarly nonsignificant, $b = 0.0857$, $BootSE = 0.0811$, 95% CI [-0.0723, 0.2521]. These findings suggest that work engagement does not mediate the relationship between self-determination and relational job crafting. Therefore, no support was found for Hypothesis 1a.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF MEDIATION ANALYSES FOR JOB CRAFTING OUTCOMES

Analysis	Path	b	SE	t	p	95% CI	Std. b
Mediation: JC _{Rel}	Total Effect (SD → JC _{Rel})	0.4904	0.0776	6.32	< .001	—	0.5746
	Direct Effect (SD JC _{Rel} WE)	0.4173	0.1016	4.11	< .001	—	—
	Indirect Effect (SD → WE → JC _{Rel})	0.0732	0.0687†	—	—	[-0.0599, 0.2142]	0.0857
Mediation: JC _{Cog}	Total Effect (SD → JC _{Cog})	0.7404	0.0631	11.74	< .001	—	0.7936
	Direct Effect (SD → JC _{Cog} WE)	0.5548	0.0767	7.23	< .001	—	—
	Indirect Effect (SD → WE → JC _{Cog})	0.1856	0.0594†	—	—	[0.0744, 0.3077]	0.1989†

Note. SD = Self-Determination; WE = Work Engagement; JC_{Rel} = Relational Job Crafting; JC_{Cog} = Cognitive Job Crafting; LMX = Leader–Member Exchange; Std. b = Completely standardized coefficient. † = Bootstrapped standard error. All indirect effects based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. SD=Self-Determination, JC_{Cog}= Cognitive Job Crafting, JC_{Rel}=Relational Job Crafting

Mediation Analysis for Cognitive Job Crafting

A second mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether work engagement mediates the relationship between self-determination and cognitive job crafting. The path from the independent variable, self-determination, to the mediator, work engagement (path a), was statistically significant, $b = 0.4974$, $SE = 0.0653$, $t = 7.6205$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.3675, 0.6272]. The total effect of self-determination on cognitive job crafting was significant, $b = 0.7404$, $SE = 0.0631$, $t(81) = 11.74$, $p < .001$, with a standardized coefficient of .7936. The direct effect remained significant after including work engagement as a mediator, $b = 0.5548$, $SE = 0.0767$, $t(80) = 7.23$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect via work engagement was also significant, $b = 0.1856$, $BootSE = 0.0594$, 95% CI [0.0744, 0.3077], as was the standardized indirect effect, $b = 0.1989$, $BootSE = 0.0611$, 95% CI [0.0814, 0.3233]. These results support the hypothesized mediation, indicating that work engagement partially explains the relationship between self-determination and cognitive job crafting. Therefore, Hypothesis 1B is partially supported.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF MEDIATION ANALYSES FOR JOB CRAFTING OUTCOMES

Analysis	Path	b	SE	t	p	95% CI	Std. b
Mediation: JC _{Rel}	Total Effect (SD → JC _{Rel})	0.4904	0.0776	6.32	< .001	—	0.5746
	Direct Effect (SD JC _{Rel} WE)	0.4173	0.1016	4.11	< .001	—	—
	Indirect Effect (SD → WE → JC _{Rel})	0.0732	0.0687†	—	—	[-0.0599, 0.2142]	0.0857
Mediation: JC _{Cog}	Total Effect (SD → JC _{Cog})	0.7404	0.0631	11.74	< .001	—	0.7936
	Direct Effect (SD → JC _{Cog} WE)	0.5548	0.0767	7.23	< .001	—	—
	Indirect Effect (SD → WE → JC _{Cog})	0.1856	0.0594†	—	—	[0.0744, 0.3077]	0.1989†

Note. SD = Self-Determination; WE = Work Engagement; JC_{Rel} = Relational Job Crafting; CJC = Cognitive Job Crafting; LMX = Leader–Member Exchange; Std. b = Completely standardized coefficient. † = Bootstrapped standard error. All indirect effects based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. SD=Self-Determination, JC_{Cog}= Cognitive Job Crafting, JC_{Rel}=Relational Job Crafting

Moderated Mediation

PROCESS Model 7 was used to test whether the relationship between self-determination and work engagement is moderated by leader-member exchange (LMX). The interaction between self-determination and LMX was not significant, $b = -0.0570$, $SE = 0.0448$, $t(79) = -1.27$, $p = .207$, 95% CI [-0.1461, 0.0322]. The change in R-squared attributed to the interaction term was also nonsignificant, $\Delta R^2 = .0114$, $F(1, 79) = 1.62$, $p = .207$, indicating no moderation effect of LMX on the self-determination–engagement relationship.

TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF MODERATED MEDIATION ANALYSES FOR JOB CRAFTING OUTCOMES

Analysis	Path	b	E	t	p	95% CI	Std. b
Moderation: LMX on SD → WE	Interaction (SD × LMX)	−0.0570	0.0448	−1.27	.207	[−0.1461, 0.0322]	—
	ΔR ²	—	—	—	.207	—	.0114
Moderated Mediation: Indirect SD → JC _{Rel} & JC _{Cog} via WE, by LMX	Indirect at Low LMX (−1.33 SD)	0.0749	0.0681†	—	—	[−0.0528, 0.2195]	—
	Indirect at Mean LMX	0.0637	0.0585†	—	—	[−0.0459, 0.1882]	—
	Indirect at High LMX (+1.32 SD)	0.0526	0.0511†	—	—	[−0.0373, 0.1668]	—
	Index of Moderated Mediation	−0.0084	0.0107†	—	—	[−0.0330, 0.0098]	—

Note. SD = Self-Determination; WE = Work Engagement; JC_{Rel} = Relational Job Crafting; JC_{Cog} = Cognitive Job Crafting; LMX = Leader–Member Exchange; Std. b = Completely standardized coefficient. † = Bootstrapped standard error. All indirect effects based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

A moderated mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether LMX moderates the indirect effect of self-determination on cognitive job crafting via work engagement. Conditional indirect effects were estimated at low (−1.33 SD), mean, and high (+1.32 SD) levels of LMX. The indirect effect of self-determination on cognitive job crafting via work engagement reveals that the strength of the indirect effect diminished as LMX increased.

The index of moderated mediation is −0.0192 (BootSE = 0.0096, 95% CI [−0.0391, −0.0024]), indicating a significant moderation effect. This suggests that the indirect effect of self-determination on cognitive job crafting via work engagement diminishes as the quality of LMX increases. These findings imply that in environments with lower-quality leader–member exchanges, employees’ self-determination more strongly influences cognitive job crafting through enhanced work engagement. Conversely, in high-quality LMX contexts, this indirect pathway is less pronounced, possibly due to the direct support and resources leaders provide, which may reduce the necessity for self-initiated job crafting behaviors.

TABLE 6
CONDITIONAL INDIRECT EFFECTS FOR MODERATED MEDIATION OF SELF DETERMINATION ON COGNITIVE JOB CRAFTING VIA WORK ENGAGEMENT BY LMX

Condition (LMX Level)	b	BootSE	95% CI
Low LMX (−1.33 SD)	0.2175	0.0610	[0.1043, 0.3538]
Mean LMX	0.1856	0.0594	[0.0744, 0.3077]
High LMX (+1.32 SD)	0.1537	0.0580	[0.0467, 0.2805]
Index of Moderated Mediation	−0.0192	0.0096	[−0.0391, −0.0024]

Note. SD = Self-Determination; WE = Work Engagement; JC_{Cog} = Cognitive Job Crafting; LMX = Leader–Member Exchange. All indirect effects based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. BootSE = Bootstrapped standard error.

A follow-up moderated mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether LMX moderates the indirect effect of self-determination on relational job crafting via work engagement. Conditional indirect effects were estimated at low (−1.33 SD), mean, and high (+1.32 SD) levels of LMX. The indirect effect of self-determination on relational job crafting via work engagement was not significant at any level of LMX... The index of moderated mediation was not significant, [$b = -0.0084$, $\text{BootSE} = 0.0107$, 95% CI $[-0.0330, 0.0098]$], providing no support for moderated mediation. Thus, LMX does not significantly influence the indirect relationship between self-determination and relational job crafting through work engagement. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

TABLE 7
CONDITIONAL INDIRECT EFFECTS FOR MODERATED MEDIATION OF SELF-DETERMINATION ON RELATIONAL JOB CRAFTING VIA WORK ENGAGEMENT BY LMX

Condition (LMX Level)	b	BootSE	95% CI
Low LMX (−1.33 SD)	0.0749	0.0681	[−0.0528, 0.2195]
Mean LMX	0.0637	0.0585	[−0.0459, 0.1882]
High LMX (+1.32 SD)	0.0526	0.0511	[−0.0373, 0.1668]
Index of Moderated Mediation	−0.0084	0.0107	[−0.0330, 0.0098]

Note. SD = Self-Determination; WE = Work Engagement; JC_{Rel} = Relational Job Crafting; LMX = Leader–Member Exchange. All indirect effects based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. BootSE = Bootstrapped standard error.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationships linking self-determination to job crafting, focusing on the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of leader-member exchange (LMX). The findings offer important contributions to job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and the self-determination framework (Deci & Ryan, 2000), while also offering insights relevant to emerging literature on dirty work and stigmatized occupational roles (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2020; Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2024).

Our research found that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between self-determination and cognitive job crafting, supporting Hypothesis 1b. This aligns with job crafting and self-determination theories, which emphasize that intrinsic motivation fosters proactive job behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tims & Bakker, 2010). Highly self-determined employees tend to engage more deeply at work, which facilitates the cognitive reframing of their roles—a behavior shown to be particularly crucial for workers in socially stigmatized roles or “dirty jobs” (Ashforth et al., 2014; Horton, 2024).

However, no mediating effect of work engagement was observed between self-determination and relational job crafting (Hypothesis 1a). While self-determined employees reported higher levels of relational crafting overall, work engagement did not explain this behavior. These results suggest that relational crafting may be driven more by social or contextual variables, such as coworker receptiveness or team climate, than by internal motivation alone (Bakker et al., 2020; Luu, 2020).

Further, Hypothesis 2—predicting a moderating effect of LMX—was not supported. Neither the interaction of self-determination and LMX nor the moderated mediation pathways were significant. This contrasts with prior studies suggesting that high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships amplify motivation-to-performance pathways (Lee, 2020). These findings suggest that self-determination operates consistently across supervisory contexts, potentially reflecting its intrinsic orientation toward autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Theoretical Contributions

These findings offer important contributions to job crafting theory by showing how distinct motivational and contextual factors shape different types of crafting. Cognitive crafting appears to be largely driven by intrinsic motivation, such as the desire for meaning and personal growth at work

(Demerouti, 2023). In contrast, relational crafting is more strongly influenced by the social environment and interpersonal cues (Wang, Demerouti, & Le Blanc, 2017). Interestingly, the lack of a moderating effect from leader-member exchange (LMX) challenges the assumption that high-quality supervisory relationships always enhance proactive behavior (Bruning & Campion, 2018). This suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of how leadership influences job crafting across different settings.

A key contribution of this study is its focus on blue-collar workers, a group largely overlooked in job crafting research. Most existing studies have focused on white-collar or professional roles, which often offer greater autonomy and flexibility (Zhang & Parker, 2019). By examining job crafting in a blue-collar context, this research fills an important gap and shows how job crafting can operate under different structural and social conditions.

Finally, the study adds theoretical depth by analyzing the facets of job crafting (cognitive and relational) separately rather than treating them as a single combined behavior. This approach reveals that each form of crafting may have its own unique drivers and should be studied individually, especially in work settings that differ from the traditional white-collar environments where job crafting theory has typically been developed.

Implications for Practice

Organizations that want to support cognitive job crafting should create conditions that promote autonomy, competence, and meaningfulness, which are core elements of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These psychological needs help fuel intrinsic motivation and are closely linked to higher levels of work engagement. This is especially important in blue-collar jobs, which often involve routine tasks, limited decision-making power, and rigid schedules. Employers can offer small choices in how tasks are completed or scheduled to support autonomy. Competence can be enhanced through training, feedback, and recognition of workers' skills. Creating a sense of meaningfulness is particularly valuable in blue-collar roles that may be socially undervalued or stigmatized, such as waste collection, cleaning, or assembly line work. In these cases, cognitive crafting (such as reframing the job to focus on its importance to the community or family) can help employees align their work with personal values and find greater purpose (Björk et al., 2021).

On the other hand, encouraging relational crafting in blue-collar settings often requires focusing on the social environment. These workplaces may have strong peer connections, but communication with supervisors may be limited, and organizational structures can be highly hierarchical. Therefore, building a culture of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas and expressing themselves without fear of negative consequences, is key to supporting relational crafting. An inclusive team climate, where all workers feel respected and valued regardless of their role or background, further supports these behaviors (Luu, 2020). Organizations can promote this by investing in team-based work structures, offering leadership training for supervisors, and creating space for informal social interaction. Because the nature of blue-collar work differs from white-collar settings, interventions need to be tailored to the specific challenges and strengths of these environments when fostering different types of job crafting.

The practical implications of these relationships are particularly salient for healthcare organizations. By fostering environments that support SDT needs, cultivate high-quality LMX relationships, and encourage job crafting, healthcare institutions can enhance engagement, reduce turnover, and improve patient care outcomes (Kim & Lee, 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Interventions such as leadership development, participatory decision-making, and job redesign are especially critical in marginalized settings.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationships linking self-determination, work engagement, and job crafting, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to infer causal relationships among the variables. Although theoretical

reasoning supports the proposed directional paths, longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to establish causality (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p. 888).

Second, all data were collected through self-report measures, which may introduce common method variance and social desirability bias. Participants may have responded in ways that reflect favorable self-perceptions rather than objective behavior. This bias could lead to an underestimation of workplace challenges or an overstatement of engagement and job crafting behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future studies could incorporate multi-source data, such as peer or supervisor ratings of job crafting behavior and engagement levels.

Third, the sample was limited in size and scope, potentially restricting the generalizability of the findings. The generalizability of these findings may be limited, as the study was conducted within a specific regional healthcare system. Organizational structures, cultural norms, and the societal perception of “dirty work” can vary widely across settings, potentially influencing the applicability of results to other contexts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Llorente-Alonso & Topa, 2022). The study did not account for individual differences such as personality traits, resilience, or prior experiences, which may shape how employees respond to leadership and engage in job crafting (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). With a sample size of 83, the study may have been underpowered to detect smaller interaction or moderated mediation effects, particularly regarding LMX. Replication with larger, more diverse samples across industries and cultural contexts would strengthen external validity.

Fourth, the operationalization of LMX as a moderator may not fully capture the complexity of leader-follower dynamics. The lack of significant findings regarding LMX could reflect measurement limitations or the need to explore more nuanced aspects of leadership, such as autonomy support or transformational leadership styles.

Future research should examine alternative or additional moderators that may shape the interaction of the studied variables, such as autonomy support, team cohesion, or psychological safety. Longitudinal studies would be instrumental in assessing the reciprocal nature of job crafting and engagement over time.

Beyond the variables examined in this study, several other factors may moderate these relationships. For instance, organizational climate, perceived organizational support, and individual differences such as resilience could shape the effectiveness of SDT and LMX in promoting engagement and job crafting (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Supportive climates may amplify positive effects, while unsupportive environments may diminish them. Also, this research focuses on formal leader-member exchange, yet informal leadership and peer influence may also significantly affect engagement and job crafting, particularly among marginalized worker groups (Breevaart et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study advances the understanding of job crafting by revealing distinct pathways through which self-determination theory shapes proactive work behavior. Specifically, it demonstrates that cognitive crafting is primarily driven by individual engagement and intrinsic motivation, whereas relational crafting is more dependent on supportive social environments and interpersonal dynamics. These differentiated patterns challenge universal approaches to job design and underscore the importance of aligning intervention strategies with the specific form of job crafting being addressed. By extending job crafting theory to blue-collar and stigmatized occupations, contexts often overlooked in existing research, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature and provides actionable guidance for organizations aiming to foster motivation and resilience in diverse, dynamic workforces. These findings emphasize the strategic importance of aligning structural job features and social workplace dynamics with employees' psychological needs to cultivate meaningful and enduring engagement across all workforce levels.

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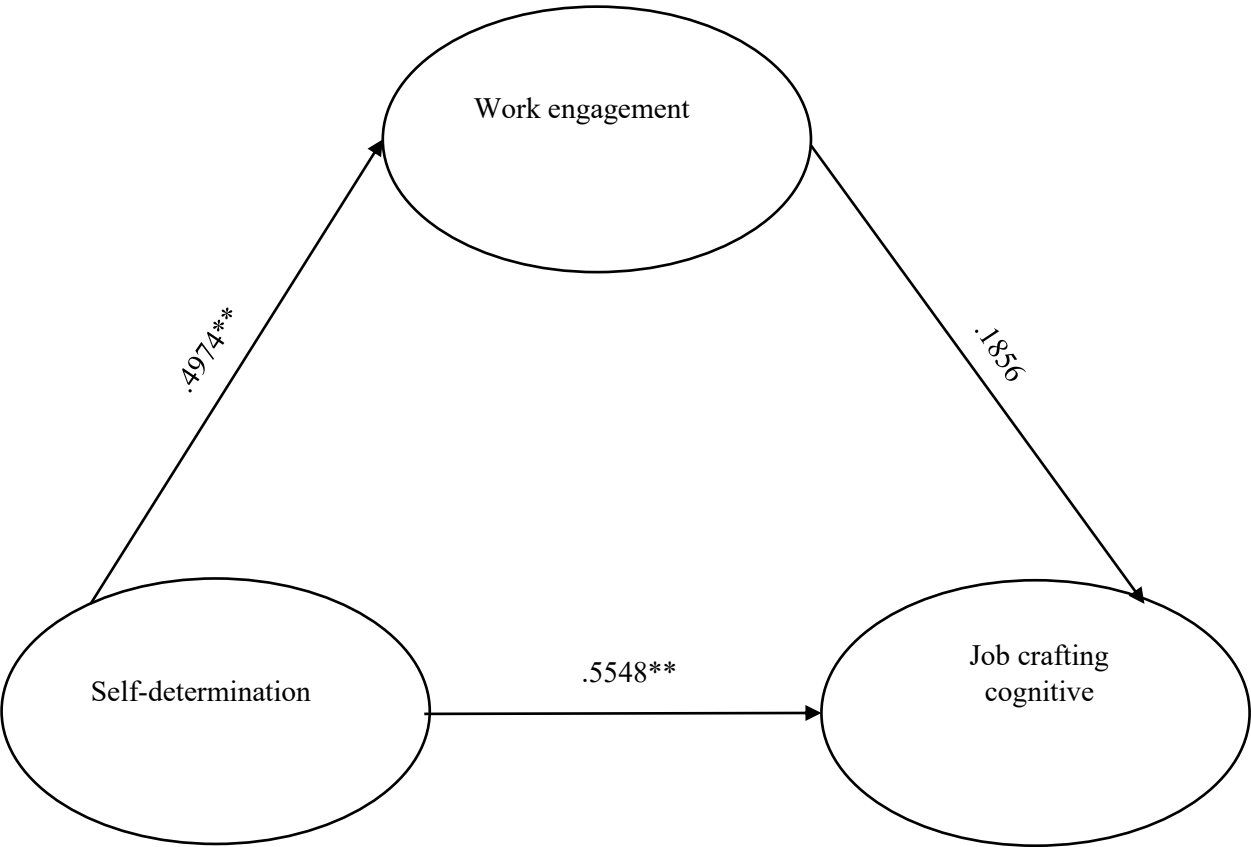
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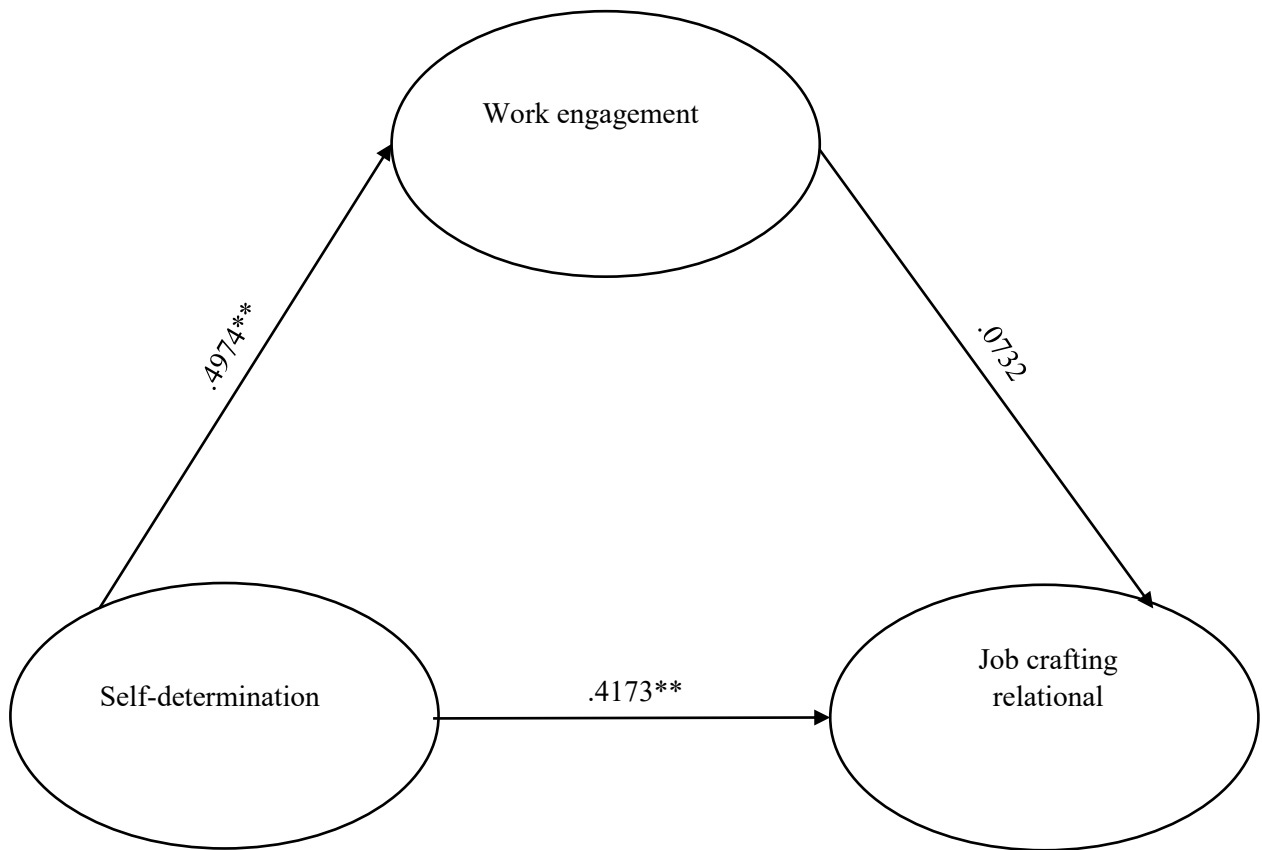
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FIGURE 2
PATH ANALYSES OF MEDATION EFFECTS (COGNITIVE JOB CRAFTING)



Note: coefficients are unstandardized. * $p < .05$., ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

FIGURE 3
PATH ANALYSES OF MEDIATION EFFECTS (RELATIONAL JOB CRAFTING)



Note: coefficients are unstandardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.