

Can work still be crafted under authority? A study of the differential effect of employee regulatory focus on job crafting



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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, job crafting is critical. However, limited studies concern the antecedent mechanisms of job crafting in the Chinese organizational context. Accordingly, from the perspective of power distance (one important variable of organizational values in China context), this study explores the mechanisms underlying the differentiation between the regulatory focus and employees' job crafting to address this important gap. The empirical study confirms that two dimensions of regulatory focus have opposite effects on employees' job crafting. Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between regulatory focus and job crafting. In addition, power distance moderates the relationship between regulatory focus and psychological empowerment, and reflects very different utilities between promotion and prevention focus. Power distance further moderates the mediating process of this study's model. These findings fill the gap in exploring the direct and indirect mechanisms between regulatory focus and job crafting from a two-dimensional complete perspective, recognizing the role of psychological empowerment between personal preferences and job crafting, meanwhile, help organizations with a better understanding of the moderation effect of power distance and guidance for managers to inspire employees to job crafting.

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Introduction

With the development of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, society has entered a digital era of rapid change and reinvention (Grover et al., 2022, Zhang et al., 2022). Digitalization is continuously crafting organizations and individuals (Chen et al., 2023, Van Rensburg et al., 2021). Work "micro-innovation" based on the talents of employees is increasingly becoming the key to organizational sustainable success in the digital context (Yu et al., 2021), which is called "bottom-up" job crafting. Job crafting refers to the autonomous behaviors that employees adopt to reinvent and change their jobs (Bakker et al., 2012, Tims & Bakker, 2010). Previous literature argues that employees should not only be passive performers of tasks but also active designers of work (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Empirical studies show that job crafting can lead to positive outcomes (Bindl et al., 2019, Li et al., 2021). Thus, job crafting is increasingly valued by organizations.

Despite the proliferation of empirical studies on job crafting, most of them focus only on the study of the outcome and ignore

the antecedent mechanisms of job crafting in the Chinese organizational context (Chen et al., 2022). Some scholars suggest that individual characteristics may be the important antecedent mechanisms of job crafting (Bindl et al., 2019), such as regulation focus. Regulatory focus theory (RFT) proposes that individuals possess differentiated preferences that tend to avoid harm, divided into promotion and prevention focus (Higgins, 2000, Higgins & Tory, 1997). The two focuses may intersect and exist in the same individual (Cao & Xu, 2017). One study argues that individual preferences are strongly associated with job crafting (Tims & Bakker, 2010). However, the empirical research about direct and indirect mechanisms between regulatory focus and job crafting from the two-dimensional perspective of promotion and prevention is still a "black box" (Chen et al., 2022, Geng et al., 2018). With this, this study addresses this important gap from a more comprehensive study perspective in organizational behavior.

Previous studies suggest that promotion focus is positively related to job crafting (Chen et al., 2022). However, research on the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting is sparse and results are inconsistent. Some scholars suggest that prevention focus is negatively associated with behaviors such as social resources' job crafting (Tian et al., 2020), but other scholars confirm a weak correlation

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between the two (Rudolph et al., 2017). Differences outcomes may be attributed to the neglect of the interaction of boundary conditions (Haider et al., 2022, Kirkman et al., 2017), such as perceived power distance; or the result of a complex set of psychological, cultural, and behavioral processes (Chen et al., 2022, Kirkman et al., 2017), such as psychological empowerment.

However, previous studies underrate the important role of psychological empowerment between personal preferences and job crafting (Matsuo, 2019), mainly focused on the social organizational factors affecting psychological empowerment (Matsuo, 2019, Schermuly & Meyer, 2020). Promotion-focused individuals focus on future theoretical goals and organizational vision, which can easily evoke strong ideals, thus enhancing employees' psychological empowerment (Zhao et al., 2019). While prevention-focused individuals focus on security and stability and prefer "follow the beaten track", which may reduce employees' psychological empowerment (Zhao et al., 2019). Further, literature shows that employees with higher psychological empowerment tend to prefer job crafting (Kwon et al., 2021; Miller, 2015). Thus, this study proposes that psychological empowerment may mediate the relationship between regulatory focus and job crafting, responding to the scholar's previous call for further related research (Chen et al., 2022, Matsuo, 2019).

In addition, a literature review reveals that there is still a lack of research on job crafting based on Chinese cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2022, Rudolph et al., 2017). Power distance is an important variable of organizational values and is often used as a boundary condition in Chinese cultural contexts (Clugston et al., 2000, Kirkman et al., 2017). The regulatory fit theory argues that when an individual's situation is consistent with his or her regulatory focus, the individual will assign a higher sense of meaning and value to the object of choice (Avnet & Higgins, 2006), which is more likely to motivate employees to engage in job crafting. At different levels of power distance, different characteristics of individuals produce diverse psychological perceptions (Zou et al., 2020), such as the level of psychological empowerment. Thus, based on the Chinese cultural perspective, this study proposes that power distance may be a key boundary condition for regulatory focus to influence employees' job crafting through psychological empowerment, responding to scholars' previous theoretical calls for research in the Chinese organizational context (Chen et al., 2022, Rudolph et al., 2017).

In summary, this study has the following contributions. First, empirical evidence from a more comprehensive two-dimensional research perspective studies the differential relationship between the regulatory focus (promotion and prevention) and job crafting. Second, based on self-determination theory, this study explores whether psychological empowerment is a mediating variable between regulatory focus and job crafting and whether there are also differences between the two focus perspectives. Third, this study suggests that power distance may be the critical moderator between regulatory focus and psychological empowerment. Previous research shows that the Chinese power distance index is higher than that of European and American countries (Hofstede, 1980). However, with the rapid development of globalization, digitalization, and the Chinese market economy, individual perceived power distance is undergoing tremendous changes in China. Thus, it is interesting to introduce the cultural value variable of power distance into the model in the Chinese organizational context (Daniels & Greguras, 2014, Kirkman et al., 2017). Meanwhile, this study further explores whether power distance is a boundary condition for the above-mentioned mediating process. This study can provide theoretical and practical references for how organizational managers in the digital era can effectively guide employees to engage in job crafting. This is very helpful in enhancing organizational "micro-innovation" in dynamic and complex environments (Yu et al., 2021).

Theoretical development and research hypotheses

Literature review

In the literature on human behavior motivation, the hedonic principle of pursuing happiness and avoiding pain has always been the basic hypothesis of motivation in various fields of Psychology and has long occupied a leading position (Cao & Xu, 2017), leading the understanding of "promotion-avoidance principle", so that scholars have ignored other "promotion-avoidance principle" (Higgins & Tory, 1997). Although the hedonistic principle points out the nature of individuals to seek benefits and avoid harm and reveals the source and nature of human behavior motivation, it does not distinguish the two different orientations. The regulatory focus theory proposed by Higgins and Tory (1997) not only distinguishes between profit-seeking and harm-avoiding but also further explains how these two orientations are formed and how they are realized, which helps to further understand the principle of organizational behavior theories. Since then, the two-dimensional studies of regulatory focus have been widely focused on by scholars.

According to the regulatory focus theory, the regulatory focus comprises two tendencies, the promotion focus, and the prevention focus. The promotion focus positively regulates people's reward acquisition behavior and motivates them to focus on positive goals, while the prevention focus positively regulates people's avoidance of punishment and motivates them to focus on security and dodge goals (Tian et al., 2020). Individuals with the promotion focus tendency show concern for hopes, wishes, and aspirations, and pursue the "ideal self". In contrast, individuals with the prevention focus tendency are concerned with responsibilities and obligations, and cling to their "follow the beaten track" (Chen et al., 2022). Because individuals have different regulatory focus preferences they may exhibit large differences in how they act (Higgins & Tory, 1997), such as differences in employees' job crafting. However, previous literature lacks the exploration of the relationship between regulatory focus and job crafting from the two-dimensional perspective of promotion and prevention, and the intermediate mechanism study between the two (Chen et al., 2022, Geng et al., 2018).

Self-determination theory proposes that individual orientation influences the process of basic psychological need satisfaction (Qin & Zhang, 2020, Ryan & Deci, 2020). That is, different individual orientations will lead to differentiated psychological states (Matsuo, 2019). One review shows that regulatory focus (individual orientation) is significantly associated with psychological states such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cao & Xu, 2017), whereas only limited studies have examined the effect of individual orientation or characteristics on psychological empowerment (Matsuo, 2019). Previous studies mainly focused on the effects of social organizational factors on psychological empowerment (Matsuo, 2019, Schermuly & Meyer, 2020), while neglecting the role of individual orientation in influencing psychological empowerment. Thus, the present study concerns the relationship between the two.

Previous literature shows job crafting is important to organizations (Tims & Bakker, 2010, Tims et al., 2013). The reason is it can help improve job engagement (Zhang & Li, 2020), job meaning (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013), job satisfaction (Li et al., 2021), performance (Lee & Su, 2021), individual innovation levels (Bindl et al., 2019). However, limited empirical studies have concerned the antecedent mechanisms of job crafting in the Chinese organizational context. Job crafting is not only affected by individual characteristics (Rudolph et al., 2017), but also by social context (Harju et al., 2018). The perceived organizational context affects the individual's psychological state or behavior (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). With this, the present study identifies power distance (a perceived context) as a boundary condition, beside incorporates the above variables

including regulatory focus, psychological empowerment, and job crafting into the same empirical research framework.

Regulate focus and job crafting

Previous literature considers that employees in entrepreneurial firms with a promotion focus prefer job crafting and ultimately positive outcomes (Brenninkmeijer & Hekkert-Koning, 2015). Promotion-focused individuals seek positive outcomes and are keenly aware of whether positive outcomes are present. Because promotion-focused individuals are more focused on growth and achievement, they are constantly positively pursuing and are more likely to achieve desired outcomes (Shah et al., 1998). Studies further suggest that promotion-focused individuals tend to focus on “growth-oriented” job crafting, such as actively increasing their social work resources to achieve desired work goals (Rudolph et al., 2017). Empirical studies also support that promotion focus may be positively related to employees’ job crafting (Chen et al., 2022, Hou & Song, 2021).

Correspondingly, there are relatively few studies on the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting. Research has found that prevention-focused individuals prefer “old-fashioned” to “newer” tasks (Lieberman et al., 1999). Because prevention-focused individuals are more concerned with “negative outcomes” and prefer security and stability (Gorman et al., 2012), they tend to avoid taking initiative to meet challenges. Job crafting encompasses autonomy (Tims & Bakker, 2010), job diversity, and opportunities for growth (Tims et al., 2012), and the “conformist” preferences of prevention-focused individuals are the opposite of many of the characteristics of job crafting. Research suggests that job crafting is positively associated with the willingness to change (Lyons, 2008), whereas prevention-focused individuals focus on security and stability. In addition, a review holds that prevention focus is generally negatively related to job crafting (Tian et al., 2020). Based on the above analyses, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study.

H1a: Promotion focus has a positive relationship with job crafting.

H1b: Prevention focus has a negative relationship with job crafting.

The mediating role of psychological empowerment

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a cognitive motivation view developed in the context of positive psychology, which believes that individuals are positive and have the need for self-realization and self-growth (Ryan et al., 2021, Van den Broeck et al., 2021). When the individual’s autonomous needs and competence needs are met, the internal motivation of the individual will be more stimulated, and the autonomous motivation will be enhanced or maintained. At this time, the behavior will be more proactive and ultimately produce more effective behavior results (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Howard et al., 2021), such as job crafting. On the contrary, when the individual’s psychological needs are blocked, employees will experience a strong sense of control in their work activities, show strong control motivation or no motivation, and have a negative effect on behavior results and work engagement (Chiu, 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2012). Self-determination theory proposes that individual motivation preference or orientation (e.g., regulatory focus) promotes the process of satisfying basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, self-efficacy, and sense of meaning (Deci et al., 2017, Van den Broeck et al., 2021), such as psychological empowerment. This will further improve individual psychological motivation and behavior preferences and then affect individual behavior (Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, 2008).

Psychological empowerment is a process or psychological state associated with work on four dimensions of meaning, self-determination, self-efficacy, and work impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Based on self-determination theory, the tendency to be autonomously

motivated is positively related to psychological well-being and job performance (Matsuo, 2019). Promotion-focused employees will be more inclined to be positive, proactive, and self-determined (Yan et al., 2021). Chen et al. (2019) proposed that promotion focus affected motivation, which in turn affected job importance, autonomy, and self-efficacy, ultimately increasing the individual’s level of psychological empowerment. Similarly, empirical studies hold that promotion focus and psychological empowerment are positively related (Chen et al., 2022).

In contrast, prevention-focused employees emphasize security and stability, avoid the “ideal self”, prefer to “stick to the rules”, prefer to give up new ambitions, have less autonomous motivation and lack initiative, and consider that job is perceived as a duty and obligation (Hou & Song, 2021), so individuals’ perceived work meaning and self-efficacy will be lower. Based on self-determination theory, the prevention-focus individuals favor lower autonomy, passively and conservatively accept work tasks, and will be mere performers of work and have lower perceived work impact (Hou & Song, 2021), which ultimately affects individuals’ psychological well-being (Matsuo, 2019). Some scholars also propose that prevention focus may be associated with psychological empowerment (Zhao et al., 2019). Thus, there may be a different correlation between the prevention focus and psychological empowerment compared to the promotion focus.

Psychological empowerment fosters a sense of impact, autonomy, competence, and meaning that can enhance employees’ intrinsic motivation and encourage them to reach their full potential by taking initiative and making positive changes in their work roles (Chen et al., 2022). Previous studies argue that psychological empowerment is strongly related to factors such as perceived job impact, meaning, and employee propensity to take initiative (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Higher psychologically empowered employees show greater engagement and creativity at work compared to lower (Macsinga et al., 2015, Yang et al., 2019). A study holds that employees with high psychological empowerment can have a better psychological experience - a certain state of pleasant active challenge (Schermuly & Meyer, 2020). In addition, employees with higher psychological empowerment show greater engagement and creativity at work (Macsinga et al., 2015, Yang et al., 2019), and show greater enthusiasm for employees’ job crafting (Hou & Song, 2021). Accordingly, there may be a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and job crafting.

Based on the above analysis and combining the hypotheses of H1a and H1a, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H2a: Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role in the relationship between promotion focus and job crafting.

H2b: Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role in the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting.

Moderating effect of power distance

Power distance refers to the extent to which individuals perceive and expect an unequal distribution of power (Clugston et al., 2000), which is an important moderating variable for differences in individual psychology, behavior, and outcomes (Clugston et al., 2000, Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001), such as affecting team engagement (Zhang & Begley, 2011), employee satisfaction (Fock et al., 2013), procedural fairness (Kirkman et al., 2009), emotional commitment (Clugston et al., 2000), and so on.

The regulatory fit theory suggests that an individual will maintain his/her motivational orientation during goal pursuit, and when the individual’s regulatory focus is consistent with the perceived situation the regulatory fit is achieved (Higgins, 2000, Higgins, 2005). Regulatory fit creates additional subjective value by making the person

“feel right”, which is reflected in a higher evaluation of the objects and activities associated with the matching experience (Cesario et al., 2004, Higgins, 2005). When certain matching effects are achieved, individual motivational intensity, satisfaction, emotional feelings, and subjective judgments are further enhanced (Higgins, 2005, Spiegel et al., 2004). A higher fit will have a stronger tendency to certain psychological and behavioral dispositions (Jin, 2011) and will also confer a higher sense of meaning and value to the object (Avnet & Higgins, 2006). When power distance does not match individual regulatory focus, it will result in resource depletion for the employee and affect the employee’s psychological empowerment.

Employees with high power distance maintain a social distance from their leaders and aim for tasks assigned by their leaders, lacking autonomy and creativity in their work (Kirkman et al., 2009, Zou et al., 2020). Conversely, the promotion-focused individual tends to be more proactive, willing to reform, and show more creativity (Geng et al., 2018, Yan et al., 2021). Obviously, the promotion-focused individuals don’t match the relationship with the high power distance. And the mismatched relationship will confer a lower sense of meaning and value to the object (Avnet & Higgins, 2006), then reduce psychological empowerment. In addition, power distance, as a typical organizational cultural characteristic, may impact individual psychological perceptions (House et al., 2002, Zou et al., 2020). When employees’ perceived power distance is lower, individuals with a promotion focus will be more proactive, tend to make autonomous decisions, and gain more perceptions of trust (Ji et al., 2015), which will make it easier to obtain desired outcomes (Shah et al., 1998), then affect employees’ psychological empowerment.

In contrast, prevention-focused individuals tend to be secure and stable, more conservative, and lack initiative (Bakker et al., 2012, Tian et al., 2020). Correspondingly, employees with high power distance will continuously increase their dependence on organizational leadership due to similar value preferences and cognitive habits, thus inhibiting their initiative (Kirkman et al., 2009, Zou et al., 2020). So, the relationship between these two factors may be matched. Furthermore, a meta-analysis shows that power distance may significantly affect individual psychology (Taras et al., 2010). At the same level of prevention focus, an employee with high power distance tends to be “leadership oriented” and lack autonomy and innovation (Geng et al., 2018, Yan et al., 2021), then reduces the employee’s job autonomy and influence, ultimately affects individual perceptions of psychological empowerment.

Based on the above analysis, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H3a: Power distance significantly moderates the relationship between promotion focus and psychological empowerment.

When the power distance is lower, the positive effect of promotion focus on psychological empowerment is stronger.

H3b: Power distance significantly moderates the relationship between prevention focus and psychological empowerment. When the power distance is higher, the negative effect of prevention focus on psychological empowerment is stronger.

Based on the mediating role hypothesis of H2 and the moderating role hypothesis of H3 above, this study proposes the following hypotheses

H4a: At different levels of power distance, psychological empowerment has different mediating effects between promotion focus and job crafting. When the power distance is lower, the positive effect of promotion focus on job crafting through psychological empowerment is stronger.

H4b: At different levels of power distance, psychological empowerment has different mediating effects between prevention focus and job crafting. When the power distance is higher, the negative effect of prevention focus on job crafting through psychological empowerment is stronger.

Summarizing the above analysis, this study proposes a conceptual model, as shown in Fig. 1.

Methodology

Sample and data collection

This study investigated the employees of two same types of Internet digitalization companies in the Yangtze River Delta region of China. This region is more economically developed and highly market-oriented, thus being representative. Meanwhile, the surveyed companies are more digitized, face more competition, and urgently need to improve their competitiveness by stimulating employees’ job crafting. This is consistent with the context of this study.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, questionnaires were distributed mainly online such as by Email or Questionnaire Star (an online questionnaire tool), and some were distributed on-site. The subjects were selected with the cooperation of alumni who are the head of human resources of the companies. They cooperated in providing the contact information of the employees. Before distributing the questionnaire, it was stated that the subjects had to read the introduction of the questionnaire carefully and ensure the confidentiality of personal information in the questionnaire.

To control for common method bias, this study collected data through a multi-temporal questionnaire divided into two phases

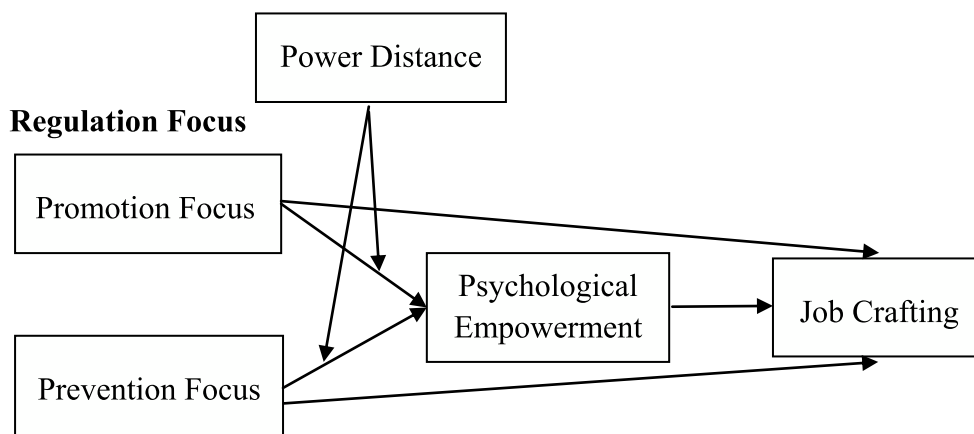


Fig. 1. Research conceptual model.

with an interval of about 4 weeks, and the subjects were coded uniformly so that the questionnaires were paired in two phases. At time 1, participating subjects reported basic personal information, promotion focus, prevention focus, and power distance questionnaires. At time 2, subjects reported psychological empowerment and job crafting.

A total of 444 questionnaires were distributed in this study, invalid questionnaires such as duplicate responses, serious missing data, or obvious errors in answers were excluded after recovery, and 354 valid questionnaires were finally matched successfully, with an effective rate of 84.09%. Among the final valid samples, 58.7% were male and 42.3% were female. In terms of age distribution, 56.21% of the subjects were under 30 years old, 33.06% were 30–35 years old, and 10.73% were over 35 years old, indicating that such companies are dominated by new-generation employees. In terms of education, 69.4% of the subjects were undergraduate and below, and 30.6% were master and above.

Measurement and variables

To investigate the variables included in the model, this study adopted mature variable scales from previous studies. This study followed the standard “translation-back translation” procedure for the original scales to ensure that the Chinese translation was accurate and the original meaning was not omitted during the translation (Brislin, 1970). The scale for this study was based on the 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

To measure regulatory focus, this study adopted the scale developed by Wallace et al. (2009). Meanwhile, we had partially revised the items according to the Chinese cultural background. The scale is divided into two dimensions with 12 items, including work promotion focus with six items (“I focus on accomplishing a lot at work”, “Getting my work done no matter what”, “Getting a lot of work finished in a short amount of time”, “I focus on activities that give me an advantage at work”, “Focus on my work accomplishments”, “Focus on how many tasks I can complete”), and work prevention focus with six items (“I focus on following the rules and regulations”, “Completing work tasks correctly”, “Doing my duty at work”, “I focus on meeting my work obligations”, “Focus on my work responsibilities”, “Focus on the details of my work”). In this study, Cronbach’s α for the two dimensions were 0.761 and 0.743, respectively.

This study adopted the scale developed by Leana et al. (2009) to measure overall job crafting, following Vogel et al. (2016), with four items, such as “The employee will introduce new methods to improve their work”. Previous research indicated that the scale had good reliability (Vogel et al., 2016). In this study, Cronbach’s α for the scale was 0.790.

To measure psychological empowerment, this study adopted the maturity scale developed by Spreitzer (1995), which consists of 12 items on four dimensions: job meaning (e.g., “The work I do is very meaningful to me”), autonomy (e.g., “I can make my own decisions about how to do my work”), self-efficacy (e.g., “I have the skills I need to do my job”), and job influence (e.g., “I have a strong influence on what happens in my department”). The empirical study proved that the scale had high reliability and validity (Spreitzer, 1995). In this study, Cronbach’s α for this scale was 0.951.

Based on the previous literature (Dorfman & Howell, 1988), the power distance scale consists of six items, such as “I believe it is necessary for managers to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates”. In this study, Cronbach’s α for this scale was 0.901.

Referring to previous studies, the control variables included gender, age, education, and tenure. The control variables were filled in directly by the subjects in the first phase of the study.

Data analysis and empirical results

Based on previous studies, this study adopted SPSS 23.0 for descriptive statistical tests, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis (Tortora et al., 2021). In addition, this study used AMOS 24.0 to assess the structural validity of the model (Yin et al., 2020). Meanwhile, to avoid the problem that the products of the coefficients test violated the distribution hypothesis, this study used the bootstrapping method to improve the statistical validity of the test (Yin et al., 2020). To test the moderated mediating effect, this study adopted the PROCESS macro program.

Data reliability and validity

Before testing the relationship between the variables, the reliability and validity of the data are tested. This study adopts the internal consistency Cronbach’s α coefficient to test the reliability (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022). The results show that Cronbach’s α coefficients of all variables are above 0.7, indicating that reliability greater than 0.7 is regarded satisfactory (Haider et al., 2022).

Referring to structural validity analyses (Xu et al., 2022), the five indicators of “promotion focus, prevention focus, psychological empowerment, power distance, job crafting” are introduced for the validation factor analysis. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1. Compared with the Single-factor, two-factor, three-factor, and four-factor models, the five-factor model ($\chi^2/df=2.137$, $RMSEA=0.043$, $IFI=0.910$, $TLI=0.892$, $CFI=0.908$) outperforms the other models; and $\chi^2/df<3$, $IFI>0.9$, $CFI>0.9$, and $RMSEA<0.05$, indicating that the variables involved in this study have better discriminant validity (Yin et al., 2020).

To test the issue of common method bias (CMB), Harman’s single factor test is performed after data collection (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The results show that the percentage of variance explained by the first factor without rotating the factors is 30.13%, which is less than the critical criterion of 50%. This shows that there is no serious common method bias problem in this study (Tehseen et al., 2017). Since the variance inflation factor (VIF) of the models is below 10 and the tolerance value is above 0.2, so all models are not susceptible to multicollinearity (Bowerman & O’connell, 1990; Malibari & Bajaba, 2022).

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Based on the means, SD, and correlation coefficients of the variables in Table 2, promotion focus is significantly positively correlated with psychological empowerment ($r = 0.275$, $p<0.01$), and job crafting ($r = 0.304$, $P<0.01$). Prevention focus is significantly negatively correlated with psychological empowerment ($r=-0.125$, $P<0.05$), and job crafting ($r = 0.-305$, $P<0.01$). H1a and H1b are initially verified. Psychological empowerment is significantly and positively correlated with job crafting ($r = 0.309$, $P<0.01$). The correlation analysis between the variables provides the necessary support for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 1
Differentiation validity test of different source scales.

Model	Factor	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
Single-factor	MF+VF+PE+PD+JC	405	7.209	0.101	0.493	0.411	0.487
Two-factor	MF+VF+PE+PD,JC	404	6.370	0.094	0.563	0.491	0.558
Three-factor	MF+VF,PE+PD,JC	402	5.803	0.089	0.611	0.545	0.606
Four-factor	MF+VF,PE,PD,JC	399	3.062	0.058	0.834	0.804	0.832
Five-factor	MF,VF,PE,PD,JC	395	2.137	0.043	0.910	0.892	0.908

Note: N = 354. MF=Promotion Focus, VF=Prevention Focus, PE=Psychological Empowerment, PD=Power Distance, JC=Job Crafting.
Source: Author’s calculations.

Table 2
Means, SD, correlation, and Cronbachs' α coefficients of the variables.

Variable	Meam	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	1.590	0.493	1								
2. Age	2.440	1.025	0.039	1							
3. Education	2.230	0.676	-0.041	-0.116*	1						
4. Tenure	2.280	1.234	-0.024	0.604**	-0.157**	1					
5. MF	3.890	0.503	-0.032	-0.159**	0.035	-0.075	0.761				
6. VF	2.362	0.321	0.045	-0.037	0.068	0.01	-0.034	0.743			
7. PE	3.570	0.685	-0.071	-0.079	0.088	-0.04	0.275**	-0.125*	0.951		
8. PD	3.393	0.653	0.005	-0.098	-0.101	-0.01	0.192**	-0.351**	0.208	0.901	
9. JC	3.660	0.372	-0.057	0.001	0.09	-0.005	0.304**	-0.305**	0.309**	0.176**	0.790

Note: N = 354, *, P<0.05, **, P<0.01. The bolded data are the Cronbachs' alpha coefficients of the variables. MF=Promotion Focus, VF=Prevention Focus, PE=Psychological Empowerment, PD=Power Distance, JC=Job Crafting. Source: Author's calculations.

Hypothesis test

Multiple linear regression analysis is a method primarily used to explore the relationship between a dependent variable and multiple independent variables as a linear function. If $P < 0.05$, indicates statistical significance. The specific form of the formula is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + (\beta_1 X_{Gender} + \beta_2 X_{Age} + \beta_3 X_{Education} + \beta_4 X_{Tenure}) + \beta_5 X_5 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

In Eq. (1), β_0 represents the intercept. X in parentheses represents the four control variables (gender, age, education, and tenure). As shown in Table 3, the dependent variables (Y) are psychological empowerment or job crafting, and the independent variables ($X_{5/\dots/k}$) are the remaining variables in the first column of Table 3. $\beta_{1/\dots/k}$ is the regression coefficient. The symbol ε represents the error.

Main effects analysis

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are shown in Table 3. After controlling for the variables of gender, age, education, and tenure, model 9 shows that promotion focus is significantly positively related to job crafting ($\beta = 0.296, p < 0.01$), so hypothesis H1a holds; prevention focus is significantly negatively related to job crafting ($\beta = -0.299, p < 0.01$), so hypothesis H1b holds.

Mediation effects analysis

Based on the analysis proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test for mediating effects, model 5 in Table 3 shows that promotion focus has a significant positive relationship with psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.267, p < 0.01$). As shown by model 10, the predictive effect of psychological empowerment remains significant ($\beta = 0.202, P < 0.01$) when both promotion focus and psychological empowerment predict job crafting, indicating that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between promotion focus and job crafting. Hypothesis H2a is supported initially. Meanwhile, Bootstrapping was adopted to conduct a 5000 replicate sampling test. The results show that the direct effect of promotion focus on job crafting is 0.1817 with 95% level confidence interval CI = [0.1062, 0.2571], excluding 0. The indirect effect of promotion focus on job crafting is 0.047 with 95% level confidence interval CI = [0.019, 0.0815], excluding 0. Therefore, H2a is supported again, indicating that the result is robust. The above analysis results indicate that psychological empowerment plays a mediating role in the relationship between promotion focus and job crafting. Thus, promotion focus can not only enhance employee's job crafting directly, but also indirectly through psychological empowerment to enhance individual job crafting. Managers and employees should focus on both promotion focus and psychological empowerment.

The test procedure for H2b and H2a is similar. As shown by model 2 in Table 3, prevention focus has a significant negative relationship with psychological empowerment ($\beta = -0.132, p < 0.01$). As shown by model 10, psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting ($\beta = 0.202, P < 0.01$). Hypothesis H2b is initially supported. Meanwhile, Bootstrapping 5000 sampling test was adopted. The results show that the indirect effect of prevention focus on job crafting is -0.0407 with 95% level confidence interval CI = [-0.0731, -0.0137], excluding 0. Therefore, H2b is supported again, indicating that the result is robust. The above analysis results show that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting. Thus, managers and employees should not only pay attention to the employees' prevention focus, but also the mediator of psychological empowerment.

Control variables: gender, age, education, and tenure. Independent variables: MF=Promotion Focus, VF=Prevention Focus. Mediating variable: PE=Psychological Empowerment. Moderating variable: PD=Power Distance. Dependent variable: JC=Job Crafting. The two variables of the interaction term are centralized.

Model interpretation from M1 to M10: M1 and M8 are regression models of the four control variables on PE and JC, respectively. Other models all control these four control variables. M2 is the regression model of VF on PE. M3 is the regression model of VF and PD on PE. M4 (moderation effect) is the regression model of VF*PD (interaction) on PE after introducing both VF and PD. M5 is the regression model of MF on PE. M6 is the regression model of MF and PD on PE. M7 (moderation effect) is the regression model of MF*PD (interaction) on PE after introducing both MF and PD. M9 (main effects) is the regression model of MF and VF on JC. M10 (mediation effects) is the regression model of PE on JC after introducing both MF and VF.

Moderation effects analysis

To verify the moderating effect of power distance between promotion focus and psychological empowerment, the two variables of promotion focus and power distance are centralized first and then multiplied to obtain the interaction (Jiang et al., 2022). The results of the hierarchical regression test are shown in Model 7 in Table 3. The interaction is significantly related to psychological empowerment ($\beta = -0.305, p < 0.01$), representing the negative moderating effect of power distance holds, H3a is supported initially. In addition, draw the moderating chart according to the mean +/- 1 SD of the moderating variables (Aiken et al., 1991, Eldor, 2021). As shown in Fig. 2, when at the higher power distance the effect is weaker ($\beta = -0.0261, P > 0.05$), when at the lower power distance the effect is stronger ($\beta = 0.1422, P < 0.01$). Meanwhile, the 95% confidence interval of the difference does not include 0, which means statistically significant. Thus, H3a is supported again, indicating that the result is robust. This result shows that the perceived power distance in enterprises is

Table 3
Results of regression analysis.

Variable	Dependent variable									
	Psychological empowerment					Job crafting				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10
Gender	-0.089	-0.079	-0.086	-0.088	-0.08	-0.083	-0.083	-0.041	-0.023	-0.016
Age	-0.053	-0.059	-0.037	-0.04	-0.021	-0.008	-0.008	0.004	0.016	0.019
Education	0.08	0.09	0.106	0.113	0.075	0.095	0.11	0.049	0.058	0.049
Tenure	0.011	0.015	0.006	0.008	0.006	0.003	0.008	0.001	0.003	0.002
Independent variable										
MF					0.267**	0.235**	0.102		0.296**	0.243**
VF		-0.132**	-0.065	-0.025					-0.299**	-0.274**
Mediator										
PE										0.202**
Moderator										
PD			0.191**	0.298**		0.171**	0.083			
Interaction										
MF*PD								-0.305**		
VF*PD				-0.143*						
R ²	0.017	0.034	0.065	0.076	0.086	0.114	0.176	0.011	0.192	0.229
F	1.514	2.472*	4.039**	4.050**	6.565**	7.428**	10.529**	0.982	13.768**	14.692**

Note: N = 354. *, P<0.05, **, P<0.01.
Source: Author's calculations.

important, and it could negatively moderate the relationship between promotion focus and psychological empowerment.

Testing H3b similarly to H3a, as shown in Model 4 in Table 3, after controlling for the main effects of prevention focus and power distance, the interaction of the independent and moderating variables remains significantly correlated with psychological empowerment ($\beta = -0.143$, $p < 0.05$), representing a significant moderating effect of power distance in the relationship between prevention focus and psychological empowerment. H3b is supported initially. In addition, draw the moderating chart according to the mean +/- 1 SD of the moderating variables (Aiken et al., 1991, Eldor, 2021). As shown in Fig. 3, when at the higher power distance the effect is weaker ($\beta = -0.1159$, $P < 0.05$), when at the lower power distance the effect is stronger ($\beta = 0.0877$, $P > 0.05$). Meanwhile, the 95% confidence interval of the difference does not include 0, which means statistically significant. Thus, H3b is supported again, indicating that the result is robust. Power distance significantly moderates the relationship between prevention focus and psychological empowerment. Thus enterprise managers and employees should create a good environment to reduce power distance.

To examine the moderated mediating effect when the independent variable is promotion focus, this study adopts the PROCESS macro program in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), and adopts Bootstrapping for 5000 repetitions of the sampling test. The results are shown in Table 4. When power distance is below 1 SD from the mean, the indirect effect of promotion focus on job crafting via psychological

empowerment is significant (Indirect effect is 0.0439, 95% confidence interval CI= [0.0174, 0.0969], excluding 0). When power distance is above 1 SD from the mean, the indirect effect of promotion focus on job crafting via psychological empowerment is not significant (Indirect effect is -0.008, 95% confidence interval CI= [-0.0461, 0.0206], including 0). Meanwhile, the difference between the two effects is significant (95% CI= [-0.01188, -0.0207], excluding 0). Thus, H4a is supported. This indicates that the perceived power distance of employees significantly moderates the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between promotion focus and job crafting. So the power distance is an important boundary condition in this model.

Testing H4b is similar to H4a, as shown in Table 5. When power distance is mean -1 SD, the indirect effect of prevention focus on job crafting via psychological empowerment is not significant (Indirect effect is 0.0473, 95% confidence interval CI= [-0.0535, 0.1796], including 0). When power distance is mean +1 SD, the indirect effect of prevention focus on job crafting via psychological empowerment is significant (Indirect effect is -0.0625, 95% confidence interval CI= [-0.1535, -0.0007], excluding 0). Meanwhile, the difference between the two effects is significant (95% CI= [-0.1802, -0.0723], excluding 0). Therefore, H4b is supported, indicating that power distance significantly moderates the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between prevention focus and job crafting. So, power distance is crucial to affect the employees' job crafting.

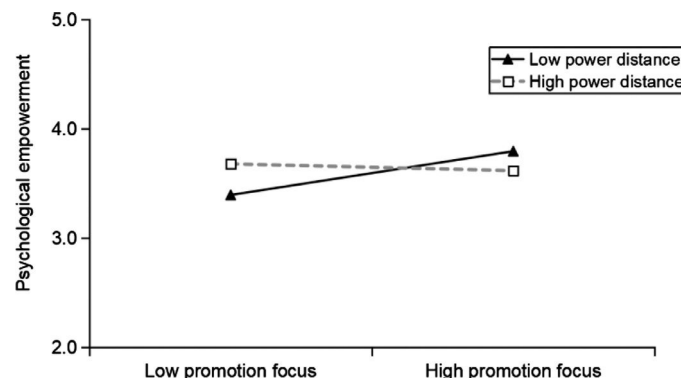


Fig. 2. Moderating effect of power distance (X = promotion focus).

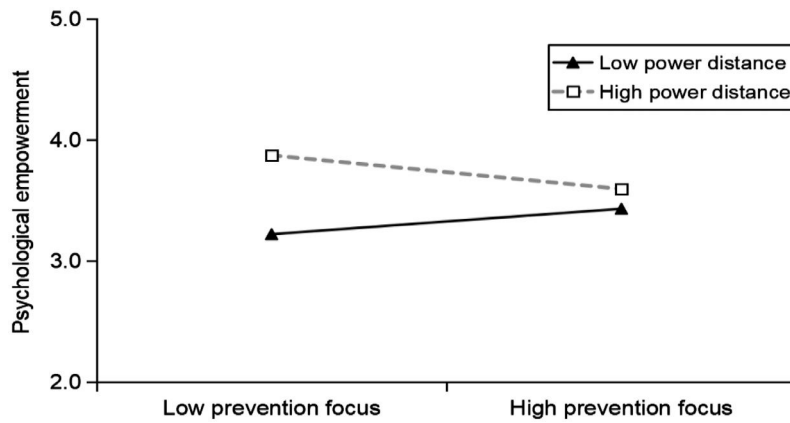


Fig. 3. Moderating effect of power distance (X = prevention focus).

Research conclusion and discussion

Conclusion

First, employees with different regulatory focuses will tend to engage in opposite job crafting. This empirical evidence confirms that individuals with a high promotion focus are more likely to inspire job crafting, whereas individuals with a high prevention focus are more reluctant to engage in job crafting. The results are consistent with previous scholarly research findings that employee traits or preferences are important factors influencing job crafting (Bakker et al., 2012).

Second, the study confirms that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between regulatory focus and employee job crafting. Specifically, individuals with a promotion focus stimulate stronger job crafting by enhancing employees' psychological empowerment. Whereas defensive-focused employees, on the other hand, are reluctant to make bottom-up changes, which negatively affects employees' job crafting through psychological empowerment.

Third, this study answers the question "Can work still be crafted under authority?" The empirical analysis shows that the level of power distance has a completely different moderating effect on this path when the regulatory focus influences employees' job crafting through psychological empowerment. Specifically, the lower the

employee's power distance, the positive effect of the promotion focus on psychological empowerment is stronger, and the stronger the positive effect of the promotion focus on job crafting through psychological empowerment. Interestingly, the higher the employee's power distance, the negative effect of the prevention focus on psychological empowerment is stronger, and the stronger the negative effect of prevention focus on job crafting through psychological empowerment.

Theoretical implications

First, the overall theoretical model constructed in this study further enriches the empirical research on the relationship between regulatory focus and employees' job crafting. Although there have been some previous studies on the relationship between the two, most of them have not adopted the dual perspective of promotion and prevention focus, and previous studies have mainly taken a leadership perspective, which over-intensely focuses on the role of leadership while ignoring the change process of individual employees (Cao & Xu, 2017). This study responds to the theoretical call to study how to stimulate individual job crafting from two perspectives of employees' promotion and prevention focus, respectively (Chen et al., 2022), further enriching the theoretical study of regulatory focus and the mechanisms underlying job crafting (Hou & Song, 2021).

Table 4

Results of the moderating psychological empowerment mediating role of power distance (X = promotion focus).

Independent variable	Moderate variable	Psychological empowerment			
		Indirect effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Promotion focus	Low power distance	0.0439	0.0202	0.0174	0.0969
	High power distance	-0.008	0.0167	-0.0461	0.0206

Note: N = 354. High or low power distance means mean +/- 1 SD, respectively. Source: Author's calculations.

Table 5

Results of the moderating psychological empowerment mediating role of power distance (X=prevention focus).

Independent variable	Moderate variable	Psychological empowerment			
		Indirect effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Prevention focus	Low power distance	0.0473	0.0591	-0.0535	0.1796
	High power distance	-0.0625	0.0393	-0.1535	-0.0007

Note: N = 354. High or low power distance means mean +/- 1 SD, respectively. Source: Author's calculations.

Second, this study further enriches the study on the antecedents of job crafting. Although there has been a proliferation of empirical studies on job crafting, there is a relative lack of research on its antecedents and occurrence mechanisms (Chen et al., 2022, Tian et al., 2020). Antecedent variables such as work engagement and perceived employability have been initially explored (Brenninkmeijer & Hekkert-Koning, 2015), but are still in the initial stages of exploration (Tian et al., 2020). This research studies the antecedent variables of job crafting from the regulatory focus perspective and the psychological empowerment perspective, enriching the research on the antecedent mechanisms of job crafting.

Third, this study further expands the research in this area by dissecting the mechanism of psychological empowerment mediating the effect of regulatory focus on job crafting. One study shows that the relationship between regulatory focus and psychological perceptions such as employee emotion management and subjective well-being is less studied (Cao & Xu, 2017). As called for in the introduction, further attention should be paid to the relationship between personal preferences and psychological empowerment (Matsuo, 2019), as well as research on the relationship between psychological empowerment and job crafting (Chen et al., 2022). This study addresses the gap and expands relevant theoretical research.

Finally, based on the individual cultural values-power distance in the Chinese cultural context as the boundary condition, this study examines the moderating mechanism of the model and enriches the intrinsic mechanisms of effect and boundary conditions of employees' implementation of job crafting. A literature review shows that there is still a lack of research on job crafting from a Chinese cultural perspective (Tian et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the influence of power distance is critical in organizations (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Research also suggests a possible correlation between cultural values such as power distance and job crafting (Tian et al., 2020). This empirical evidence confirms that power distance plays a significantly different moderation role in the two-dimensional research models of regulatory focus. This result provides practical guidance for organizational managers.

Management practice inspiration

First, this study examines both the promotion and prevention focus perspectives through the empirical study, which brings new insights into how organizations can inspire job crafting for different employees. The study finds that the promotion and prevention focus can affect differently on job crafting. Since the two regulatory focuses may intersect, which regulatory focus dominates the individual is induced by information such as cultural context or task (Cao & Xu, 2017). Therefore, organizational managers should establish appropriate organizational environments and task conditions for different individuals to wake up the appropriate dominant focus of employees, and fully inspire employees to engage in job crafting.

Second, psychological empowerment, as an important mediating mechanism between regulatory focus and job crafting, has an important role in employees' job crafting. Therefore, organizational managers should enhance individuals' sense of job value, self-efficacy, job autonomy, and influence through various ways (Miller, 2015), which in turn stimulate employees' job crafting.

Third, the level of individual power distance in the Chinese organizational context has a significant impact on employees' job crafting. According to the above-mentioned empirical study, high power distance will further hinder employees from engaging in job crafting for both promotion-focused and prevention-focused members. Cultural values such as power distance are important boundary conditions for employee behavior (Kirkman et al., 2017). Thus, organizational managers should actively create a favorable organizational climate (Zou et al., 2020) to effectively reduce employees' sense of power distance

and support individuals to engage in "micro-innovation" and "bottom-up" job crafting.

Limitations and future research

This study has the following limitations. First, the sample of this study is small in scope, focusing on the economically developed Yangtze River Delta region of China. Future research could be conducted in a wider area to further increase the representativeness of the sample.

Second, this study may have some common method bias issues. Although this study collects data related to company employees at two-time points and the empirical analysis shows that there is no serious common method bias, the methodology could still be improved. E.g., a more precise longitudinal research design could be adopted.

Third, this study only collects data from individual employees and doesn't collect research data from the leaders' perspective or introduce team-level variables. Future research could let leaders fill out the employee job crafting questionnaire, or could include leadership or team-related variables, such as paternalistic leadership or collectivism, to further study the mechanisms of affect and boundary conditions that influence employees' job crafting.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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