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MANAGING YOURSELF

Turn the Job You Have into the Job You Want

by Amy Wrzesniewski, Justin M. Berg,
and Jane E. Dutton

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Turn the Job You Have into the Job You Want

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A 30-year-old midlevel manager—let’s call her Fatima—is struggling at work, but you wouldn’t know it from outward appearances. A star member of her team in the marketing division of a large multinational foods company, Fatima consistently hits her benchmarks and goals. She invests long hours and has built relationships with colleagues that she deeply values. And her senior managers think of her as one of the company’s high potentials.

But outside the office, Fatima (who asked not to be identified by her real name) would admit that she feels stagnant in her job, trapped by the tension between day-to-day demands and what she really wants to be doing: exploring how the company can use social media in its marketing efforts. Twitter, her cause-marketing blog, and mobile gadgets are her main passions. She’d like to look for another job, but given the slow recovery from the recession, sticking it out seems like her best (and perhaps only) option. “I’m still working hard,” she tells a friend. “But I’m stuck. Every week, I feel less and less motivated. I’m begin-

ning to wonder why I wanted this position in the first place.”

Sound familiar? Over the past several years, we’ve spoken with hundreds of people, in a variety of industries and occupations, who, like Fatima, are feeling stuck—that dreaded word again. According to a recent survey of 5,000 U.S. households by The Conference Board, only 45% of those polled say they are satisfied with their jobs—down from about 60% in 1987, the first year the survey was conducted.

If you’re in this situation, and changing roles or companies is unrealistic given the tough economy, what can you do? A growing body of research suggests that an exercise we call “job crafting” can be a powerful tool for reenergizing and reimagining your work life. It involves redefining your job to incorporate your motives, strengths, and passions. The exercise prompts you to visualize the job, map its elements, and reorganize them to better suit you. In this way, you can put personal touches on how you see and do your job, and you’ll gain a greater sense of control at work—which is es-

pecially critical at a time when you're probably working longer and harder and expecting to retire later. Perhaps job crafting's best feature is that it's driven by you, not your supervisor.

This exercise involves assessing and then altering one or more of the following core aspects of work.

Tasks. You can change the boundaries of your job by taking on more or fewer tasks, expanding or diminishing their scope, or changing how they are performed. A sales manager, for instance, might take on additional event planning because he likes the challenge of organizing people and logistics.

Relationships. You can change the nature or extent of your interactions with other people. A managing director, for example, might create mentoring relationships with young associates as a way to connect with and teach those who represent the future of the firm.

Perceptions. You can change how you think about the purpose of certain aspects of your job; or you can reframe the job as a whole. The director of a nonprofit institution, for instance, might choose to think of his job as two separate parts, one not particularly enjoyable (the pursuit of contributions and grants) and one very meaningful (creating opportunities for emerging artists). Or the leader of an R&D unit might come to see her work as a way of advancing the science in her field rather than simply managing projects.

Our research with a range of organizations—from *Fortune* 500 companies to small nonprofits—indicates that employees (at all levels, in all kinds of occupations) who try job crafting often end up more engaged and satisfied with their work lives, achieve higher levels of performance in their organizations, and report greater personal resilience.

For their part, organizations have a lot to gain by enabling job crafting. Most job-redesign models put the onus on managers to help employees find satisfaction in their work; in reality, leaders rarely have sufficient time to devote to this process. Job crafting lets managers turn the reins over to employees, empowering them to become “job entrepreneurs.” And when pay resources are constrained or promotions impossible, job crafting may give companies a different way to motivate and retain their most talented employees. It can even help transform poor performers.

Despite these benefits, however, job crafting

can be easy to overlook: Time pressures and other constraints may compel you to see your job as a fixed list of duties. Or you may be afraid of getting mired in office politics, stepping on other people's toes simply because you're unhappy at work. Job crafting requires—and ultimately engenders—a different mind-set, however: Your job comprises a set of building blocks that you can reconfigure to create more engaging and fulfilling experiences at work.

Diagramming Your Job

Back at the multinational foods company, Fatima is still frustrated. What would happen if she engaged in job crafting? She's already been reflecting on her dissatisfaction, albeit in no systematic way. Job crafting would give her the means to diagram a more ideal—but still realistic—version of her job, one better aligned with her motives, strengths, and passions.

First, she looks at the present makeup of her job. In her “before diagram,” Fatima uses a series of squares to represent the tasks that her job comprises, with larger squares representing time-intensive tasks, and smaller squares tasks to which she devotes less time. (See the exhibit “Fatima's Before Diagram.”)

She notices that she's spending lots of time monitoring her team's performance, answering questions, and directing market research. She's spending a fair number of hours setting budgets, writing reports, and running meetings. And she's spending very little time on critical tasks such as professional development and designing marketing strategies. These tasks are in the smallest squares. Looking at the full sweep of her job in this way gives Fatima a clear sense—truly at a glance—of exactly where she is devoting her time and energy.

Next, she concentrates on changes that would increase her engagement at work. This “after diagram” will serve as the visual plan for her future. (See the exhibit “Fatima's After Diagram.”)

She begins by identifying her motives, strengths, and passions—three important considerations in determining which aspects of her job will keep her engaged and inspire higher performance. Each will be represented by a different shade of gray. Her main motives, for instance, are cultivating meaningful relationships and achieving personal growth. She plugs these into light gray ovals. Fatima takes stock of her core strengths: one-on-one com-

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munication and technical savvy. These appear in the medium gray ovals. And she highlights her passions: teaching others and using and learning new technology—entered in dark gray ovals.

Then, using her before diagram as a frame of reference, Fatima creates a new set of task blocks whose size represents a better allocation of her time, energy, and attention. To take advantage of how well “designing marketing strategies” suits her motives, strengths, and passions,

she not only moves it from a small to a medium block but also add “use social media” to this newly expanded task. To incorporate even more social media into her job, she adds a small task block to represent “teaching colleagues to use social media.” And for those tasks that do not fit her as well, she makes a note to adapt them (for instance, using “professional development” to “improve public speaking skills”).

She draws rectangles around groups of tasks that she thinks serve a common purpose or

Fatima’s Before Diagram

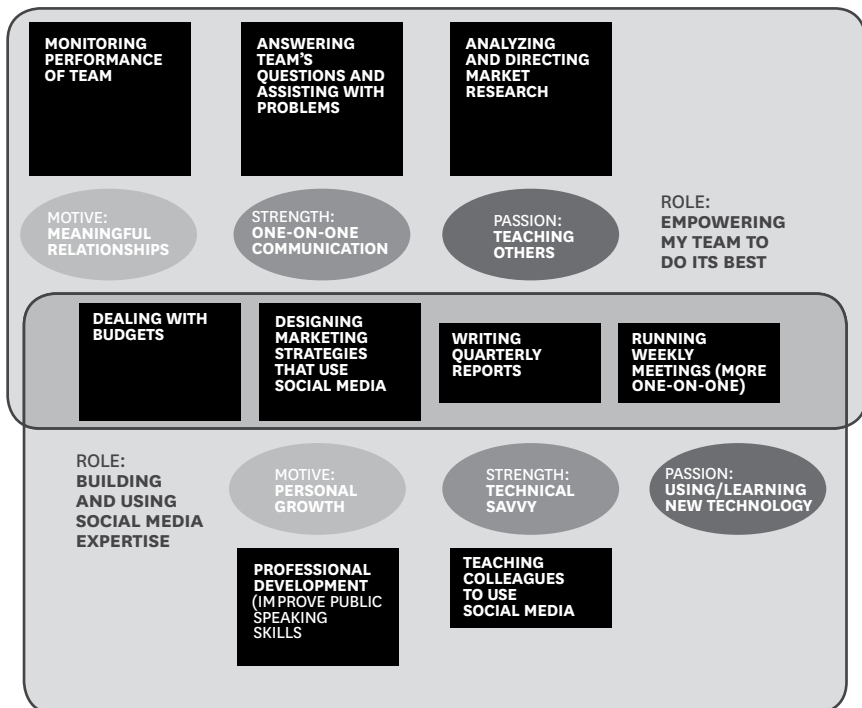
Once she has created her before diagram, this midlevel marketing manager immediately sees that she’s spending lots of time on tasks that don’t engage her passions—for instance, monitoring her team’s performance, answering questions, and directing market research—and much less on tasks that are meaningful to her.



Fatima’s After Diagram

In Fatima’s after diagram, it’s easier to see how she can connect her tasks to her motives, strengths, and passions. For instance, one of her motives is to cultivate meaningful relationships and achieve personal growth. Her strengths include her one-on-one communication skills and technical savvy. And among her passions are teaching others and using and learning about new technology.

In this after diagram, the sizes of the blocks represent a better allocation of Fatima’s time, energy, and attention. The borders around groups of tasks suggest the common purpose they serve. By rearranging the shapes on the page, Fatima gains a greater appreciation for how the different elements of her job come together.



role. For example, she identifies “building and using social media expertise” as one role. Framing her roles in this way is meaningful to her because it taps into her key strengths and passions. By rearranging the shapes, Fatima gains a greater appreciation for how the elements of her job come together.

A New Outlook

Fatima then moves to the final step of the exercise, in which she considers the challenges she will probably face in making her new job configuration a reality. She would like to use her technical savvy to help other marketing teams and departments take advantage of social media, but she is concerned about encroaching on their work or insulting them by offering her expertise. With her after diagram in hand, Fatima takes another look at the list of projects sitting in her in-box and begins to consider how to incorporate social media into them.

Tasks. She identifies two possibilities: a new snack food aimed at teens and a cross-company initiative to improve communication between Marketing and Sales. Fatima thinks a campaign involving Facebook and Twitter could help build buzz around the snack food—and reveal to the organization the benefits and limitations of reaching out to a new demographic. And by launching a blog, Fatima and her colleagues in Marketing could track initiatives and communications from members of the Sales division.

Relationships. Fatima recognizes, of course, that she’ll need support to establish the technological presence she envisions for these two projects. She must build or refocus her ties to others in the company in order to learn about the best ways to move forward. She recalls that Steve Porter is constantly fiddling with the latest gadgets in weekly interdepartmental meetings and that he is known for the clever ways he uses social media to keep salespeople in the loop. She decides to approach him for help. Within a month, Steve’s and her own employees’ support has unleashed a wave of interest in and knowledge about how to put technology closer to the heart of the division’s work. Her initiatives have become testing grounds for using social media to accomplish other important goals. Fatima has been recognized as the driver of these programs and finds that managers from other divisions are coming to her to learn more about how they might

use her ideas in their own projects—all of which is encouraging her to be bolder in introducing new ideas and technology.

Perceptions. Rather than thinking of her work as a daily slog, she begins to see herself as an innovator at the intersection of marketing and technology. And she views herself as an entrepreneurial pioneer unafraid of experiments that could bridge those worlds. She also, to her pleasure, recognizes that rather than taking her away from her prescribed goals, her passion for deploying technology in pursuit of these objectives gives her a more fulfilling way to approach them.

Ivan’s Story

In another company, in another part of the world, Ivan Carter is caught between a rock and a hard place. But the source of angst for this 45-year-old operations manager at a global office products company is quite different from Fatima’s. He’s a solid B player with a dedicated and successful team. Ivan leads a group that serves Latin America, and he reports to both the head of global operations and the head of the Latin America group. His relationship with the latter is great, but the operations head is often nonresponsive or even hostile when Ivan needs information or support. All his efforts to strengthen the relationship have been met with silence. He likes his job, but he often leaves the office with his stomach in knots.

Ivan knows he can either accept the reality of his toxic relationship with the head of operations or change his situation. So, during his next phone meeting with the head of Latin America, he pushes a bit to explore what interests her most about the role of the operations group in that region. She sees the group as becoming more critical for cost savings as economic recovery drags on—a major focus for the CEO, as well. Ivan spots an opportunity. He can build on what is already a good relationship by directing more of his efforts to special projects that will save money in that region. Sensing a chance to craft his job, Ivan focuses more and more of his time and energy on this aspect of his work, which wins him exposure and credit as the projects he takes on create significant savings for the company. As a bonus, he spends more time interacting with the Latin America head while meeting his responsibilities to the operations head without having

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To win support for your job crafting, focus on creating value for others, building trust, and identifying the people who will accommodate you.

to interact with him as much. After several months, Ivan learns that the Latin America head has recommended him highly to others in the C-suite.

Fatima focused first on tasks and then on relationships. By centering his job crafting primarily on relationships (the ones that energized rather than depleted him), Ivan was able to figure out how to change his job for the better.

The Limits of Job Crafting

Not all job crafting is beneficial. It can be stressful if as a result you take on too much or alter tasks without understanding your manager's goals. Since job crafting is something you can do on your own, it's important to be open about the process. Your manager may even be able to help you identify opportunities for redistributing tasks in complementary ways. After all, one person's dreaded assignment may be another's favorite.

To win others' support for your job crafting, do these three things:

- Focus on deploying an individual or organizational strength that will create value for others. For instance, Fatima positioned her work to enhance what other teams were doing, while Ivan found a way to help meet the objectives of the Latin America group.

- Build trust with others (typically your supervisor). Fatima assured her supervisor that she wouldn't let tasks slide and that some of her newer tasks could become central to the organization. Ivan was careful to align his efforts with his role, building trust with the head of the Latin America group.

- Direct your job-crafting efforts toward the people who are most likely to accommodate you. Fatima reached out to Steve Porter because he was interested in her plans to bring technology into the heart of her job tasks. Ivan realized that his time would be wasted pursuing a toxic relationship and instead focused on a more promising one.

Job crafting is a simple visual framework that can help you make meaningful and lasting changes in your job—in good economies and bad. But it all has to start with taking a step back from the daily grind and realizing that you actually have the ability to reconfigure the elements of your work.

The bottom line? Make sure that you are shaping your job, not letting your job shape you.

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