



Title: Job Crafting and Employee Engagement Among Millennials in Retail

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

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## Abstract

Millennials, born between 1981 and 2000 (Dimock, 2019; Howe and Strauss, 2000), are rapidly becoming the largest demographic in the professional workforce. In Hong Kong's retail industry, which constitutes 5% of the city's GDP and serves as an economic pillar, there is a critical need to understand the factors shaping the engagement and motivation of Millennial frontline retail employees.

This research adopted a qualitative multiple-case approach, exploring the interrelationship between job crafting and employee engagement within this demographic group in the retail sector. The research employed a constructivist-interpretivist approach, emphasising the active role of participants in co-creating meaning. This study involved 24 semi-structured interviews drawn from three sports retail companies across Hong Kong, providing distinctive insights into the work experiences of Millennials. Guided by Social Exchange and Self Determination theories, this research applied thematic analysis to unveil the intricacies of Millennials' job crafting behaviours and organisational factors that fuelled employee engagement in the Hong Kong retail environment.

The findings revealed that Millennial frontline staff engaged more actively in their organisations when they experienced a workplace culture that fostered trust and care, encouraged team cohesion, promoted positive leadership, granted job autonomy, imbued their roles with meaning, and implemented caring human resource management (HRM) practices as the broader context shaping workplace experiences. The autonomy in task crafting, team relationships in relational crafting, and role meaningfulness in cognitive crafting operated as integral components of job crafting. These attributes collectively established a foundation that created workplace engagement among Millennials.

This study broadens the understanding of job crafting and employee engagement within a non-Western context and highlights the need to adapt these concepts to this context. It also suggests that leaders, managers, and HR practitioners in the Hong Kong retail industry should formulate customised employee engagement strategies for Millennial retail staff.

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# **Job Crafting and Employee Engagement Among Millennials in Retail**

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This chapter is organised into ten sections. Section 1.1 outlines the research background, including the changing demographics and the retail context in Hong Kong. Section 1.2 introduces the concept of employee engagement. Section 1.3 discusses job crafting and its relevance to frontline retail work. Section 1.4 delineates the objectives of the study, and Section 1.5 identifies the research gap. Section 1.6 presents the research question, followed by Section 1.7, which explains the significance of the study. Section 1.8 summarises the research design. Section 1.9 sets out the delimitations. Section 1.10 outlines the structure of the remaining chapters.

### **1.1 Research Background**

In today's fast-paced, constantly evolving landscape, the business environment faces significant transformation driven by globalisation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, shifting workplace demographics, evolving customer expectations, remote work, and an increasing focus on work-life balance and well-being. These factors challenge traditional top-down management approaches, as organisations face intense competitive pressures to adapt, survive, and sustain their market positions. Fostering motivation and cultivating an engaged workforce have become critical priorities. To address these shifts, this study examines the role of employee engagement and job crafting practices among service employees.

Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, operates under the 'one country, two systems' framework, maintaining a free-market economy that is globally recognised for low taxation, free trade, and efficient governance. As the fourth-largest global financial centre, Hong Kong is densely populated, with 7.4 million residents living in just 1,110 square kilometres. Despite its thriving economy, the region faces critical labour market challenges.

In 2021, Hong Kong's GDP reached USD 368.9 billion, accompanied by an unemployment rate of 5.2% (Macrotrends, 2004; Labour Department, 2022). However, the city's economic resilience has been repeatedly tested by external shocks, including the 2019 social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events disrupted industries reliant on

international trade, tourism, and retail, leading to significant operational and workforce challenges (Statista, 2022).

Hong Kong's labour market also contends with extreme working conditions, particularly in the service sector. According to Kisi's Global Work-Life Balance Index (2021), Hong Kong is ranked as the most overworked city globally, with 30% of employees working more than 48 hours per week (Kisi, no date). Work-life balance remains a novel concept in local working culture, with many employees still working six days a week. These conditions have exacerbated workforce shortages, intensified workloads and reduced morale, particularly in customer-facing industries such as retail.

### **1.1.1 Changing Demographics**

Gen Y, Millennials, are now a major part of the global workforce. Strauss and Howe (2000) place the start of the Millennial cohort in the early 1980s, while Dimock (2019) defines the group as born between 1981 and the late 1990s. This study adopts 1981–2000 as the working range for Millennials. In Hong Kong, the working population between ages 25-40 was around 1.36 million, accounting for 36% of the total working population in 2016 (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). Millennial employees are found to have lower organisational commitment and higher turnover intention compared to other cohorts (Twenge et al., 2010). Park and Gursoy (2012) reported that Millennials are more likely to change jobs after one year of working.

Prior studies describe Millennials as self-focused (Jenkins, 2017), capable of multitasking (Robinson and Stubberud, 2012), proactive (Yulianti and Arifien, 2019), and autonomy-oriented (Holt, Marques and Way, 2012). They also value innovation, teamwork, and knowledge sharing (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010), a drive for meaningful work (Weeks and Schaffert, 2017), and showing high expectations regarding job rewards. These traits distinguish their work values and attitudes from earlier generations (Ng and Johnson, 2015; Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). Millennials grew up in an era of rapid societal changes, with traditional career paths becoming uncertain. As a result, they seek roles that align with their values and allow them to make a positive impact. Meaningful work brings purpose and fulfilment that support their satisfaction and motivation.

The generational differences described are often explained through generational theory, which suggests that shared historical and social experiences shape each generation's values and behaviours (Strauss and Howe, 1991). Hong Kong Millennials have developed

distinctive characteristics shaped by the local education system, social and economic pressures, such as housing affordability and high cost of living (KPMG, 2019; Kwong, 2016). Together with family expectations under a Confucian social environment (Ng, Fong and Wang, 2009), these values have formed a set of unique traits and attitudes that are not fully captured in Western generational theories (Ng and Johnson, 2015). These distinctive social, cultural, and economic pressures influence how Hong Kong Millennials interpret autonomy, meaningful work, and organisational support, which differ from Western assumptions. This raises questions about whether Western job crafting and engagement theories can be applied directly in this context.

### **1.1.2 Retail in Hong Kong**

Renowned as a shopping paradise, Hong Kong's retail industry contributes significantly to the economy, accounting for 5% of GDP (KPMG, 2019). This sector includes a broad spectrum of offerings, from luxury goods in high-end malls to local products in bustling street markets. However, it faces persistent challenges, including labour shortages, high turnover rates, and demanding work environments.

Among retail segments, sports retail stands out for its balanced gender representation and unique workforce characteristics. Sports retail in Hong Kong operates mainly through three types of organisations: sports brand owners, distributors, and retailers, covering most employers. Each type offers a different spectrum of staff benefits, job requirements, HR practices, and company cultures. Since this research focused on employee engagement and job crafting in the Hong Kong retail industry, it is critical to address the context of organisational culture and practices, as these settings significantly influence employee behaviour.

Unlike fashion retailers such as Uniqlo and Zara, which are mainly characterised by self-help service models, sports retail still relies heavily on direct customer service to meet the demands of knowledgeable and discerning customers. According to the Hong Kong Retail Management Association in 2022, the annual staff turnover rate in retail was 38.9% (Hong Kong Retail Management Association, 2022). Prolonged vacancies strain frontline employees, jeopardising customer service quality and Hong Kong's image as a premier shopping destination.

The retail sector's low professional status reduced long-term commitment among potential full-time staff, which increased reliance on part-time employees and weakened

workforce stability. For years, industry representatives argued that the retail sector's difficulty in attracting talent stemmed from the absence of tertiary retail-specific degrees in Hong Kong, a gap that was finally addressed in 2023 by a local university.

The retail sector in Hong Kong faces serious difficulties in retaining and engaging employees, especially as workforce expectations continue to shift. Recent studies have confirmed that Millennials differ from earlier generations in their expectations of work. They seek autonomy, meaningful contribution, and growth opportunities, while also valuing teamwork and collaboration (Kuron et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2017). Traditional management approaches, rooted in hierarchical and formalised structures, are increasingly ineffective in addressing this workforce's needs. In Hong Kong, these systems are reinforced by traditional education and social norms that emphasise respect for authority (Kwong, 2016), which limit employees' discretion and autonomy. Prolonged shifts, little work control, and low job satisfaction among employees contribute to high turnover rates, whereas job crafting emerges as a potential solution to these challenges. Job crafting refers to employees proactively redesigning work roles to fit their strengths and values by making small adjustments to how they perform or perceive their work. This can be observed in everyday task execution, such as rephrasing standard customer greetings, interacting with customers in their own sales methods, or reorganising shop display ideas to show creative effort. These examples demonstrate how job crafting happens in practice. This supports Millennials' preferences for creating more meaningful work, which provides an alternative approach to limited autonomy, creativity, and flexibility even within a rigid service sector.

In prior studies, job crafting models in Western contexts are largely developed and supported by flatter hierarchies, autonomy support, and flexible work systems (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010; Sekiguchi, Li and Hosomi, 2017; Wessels et al., 2019). These systems give employees greater discretion in shaping their work roles, which creates space for job crafting. Millennials, as described in generational studies, tend to seek autonomy and value work that is both meaningful and collaborative, and these traits closely match what job crafting requires. This shows why Western job crafting theories may not transfer directly.

However, as the Hong Kong retail sector is characterised by relatively hierarchical structures, low autonomy, lengthy working hours, rigid working practices, and a

stigmatised image (KPMG, 2019; Ng, Fong and Wang, 2009; Young, 2019), this creates an idiosyncratic gap between Western assumptions about discretion for job crafting and the realities of Hong Kong retail. This gap matters because a strict hierarchy leaves little room for role changes, unlike Western job crafting models that assume autonomy. As a result, these constraints challenge Western job crafting models that rely on employee discretion, and they also weaken the motivational process in Self Determination Theory and the reciprocity described in Social Exchange Theory. This study examines how job crafting can be applied in the Hong Kong organisational context, particularly in the sports retail sector, and explains how these Western-developed theories apply to workforce challenges in this setting.

## **1.2 Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement (EE) includes both work engagement and organisational engagement, with the former reflecting an individual's perspective and the latter emphasising the organisation's viewpoint. Sufficient work engagement often extends to broader organisational engagement (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006). In this study, employee engagement refers to employees' emotional and psychological investment, dedication, and contentment in their jobs and organisations, encompassing motivation, job satisfaction, and well-being, which sustain performance and productivity. This study adopts Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) framework that describes engagement as a positive psychological state marked by vigour, dedication, and absorption, supported by psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990). These states foster commitment and retention through positive emotions toward the organisation (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006).

Numerous studies have sought to enhance employee engagement to improve performance, productivity, and job satisfaction while cultivating a positive work environment (Alarcon and Edwards, 2011; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Halbesleben, 2010; Saks, 2006; Yeh, 2013). Many organisations rely on consultant-driven engagement surveys, often using a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement strategies. This process, driven by senior management, solidified the definition of engagement from the 'ivory tower' and frequently neglected employees' perspectives. These practices often overlook the foundation of true engagement by failing to align employees' values with organisational goals. Conventional engagement initiatives, developed from a managerial

rather than employee perspective, are detached from the realities of daily work and fail to capture how engagement is genuinely experienced. To address this issue, it is important to understand employees' values and involve them actively in designing and implementing engagement initiatives.

According to a Gallup survey (2022), 23% of employees were engaged globally in 2022, leaving 77% not engaged or actively disengaged. Of this, 59% were psychologically unattached (quiet quitting), with unmet needs hindering their investment in their roles. Fortunately, this group could still be inspired if approached effectively. The remaining 18% were actively disengaged and likely to leave their companies, and management needs to monitor this group to mitigate possible harm. Meanwhile, engaged workers were emotionally and mentally present, fully immersing themselves in their work. Yet, many corporate engagement measures focused solely on happiness and satisfaction. True engagement, however, extended beyond contentment to involve full immersion and striving for excellence.

In service industries like retail, employees' ability to provide quality service and make independent decisions was critical. Frontline staff on the retail floor reflected the brand's value and the organisation's quality through their service. Engaged employees often exceed customers' expectations and provide outstanding service. Their motivation to create positive customer experiences contributes to higher satisfaction, repeat business, and favourable word-of-mouth referrals. This dedication strengthens organisational reputation in a competitive market.

Employees are no longer positioned as passive order-takers. They proactively reshape their roles to make their work more meaningful so as to improve job satisfaction, well-being, and performance. Job crafting has been recognised as a way to enhance engagement by giving employees more flexibility in how they approach their work. It supports employees to draw on their strengths to pursue tasks that they find engaging and aligned with their preferences, while also cultivating positive relationships with colleagues and customers. In light of the serious labour shortage in the retail industry, it is necessary to examine how job crafting practices relate to employee engagement in the Hong Kong retail sports sector.

### **1.3 Job Crafting**

The meaningfulness of a job can be shaped by the job design through employees' work experience (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Unlike traditional job design, which was a top-down process directed by managers, job crafting (JC) represents a bottom-up, self-initiated change behaviour driven by employees to redesign certain aspects of the job. It is a self-motivated customisation process to better align with personal values, skills and preferences within their designated jobs (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012). This study adopts Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) framework of task, relational and cognitive crafting, as it incorporates meaning-making processes that align closely with Millennials' preference for autonomy and purpose at work.

Considering the unique attributes of Millennials, who are individualistic, multitasking, tech-savvy, team-oriented, and seeking meaningful work, their work values and attitudes differ from those of previous generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Traditional job motivation and retention strategies may no longer be effective for this group, which is projected to make up 75% of the global labour market by 2025 (Dimock, 2019). Job crafting, which emphasises proactiveness, autonomy, and self-directed job redesign for meaningful purposes, appears to be relevant to this emerging workforce. Recent studies have shown that job crafting is positively related to work engagement, job satisfaction, and job performance (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2013).

Through job crafting, employees can actively improve their work experiences and contribute to their engagement (Chen, Yen, and Tsai, 2014; Guo and Hou, 2022; Letona-Ibanez et al., 2021; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2013). Although job crafting was developed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton nearly two decades ago, the concept remains underexplored in the Hong Kong context. To engage with the Millennial workforce and adapt to the changing world, where employees seek independence, knowledge, and proactivity, job crafting can serve as an organisational strategy to help leaders and managers connect with Millennials and ensure the sustainability of the organisation.

#### **1.4 Objective of the research:**

The objective of this qualitative study is to provide insight for business leaders concerning how Millennials perceive today's workplace. Millennials' perceptions of HR practices, organisational support, and their expectations of rewards form the basis for understanding their motivation and engagement at work.

In today's unpredictable business landscape, organisations that fail to embrace and address evolving employee demands risk falling behind. This study examines how organisations can strengthen management practices and work processes to attract, motivate, and retain Millennials. Retail is a fast-paced, human-focused, and financially driven industry. As Millennials make up the largest workforce in Hong Kong, particularly in sports retail, examining their work preferences, job expectations, and relationships with supervisors and teammates is essential for effective engagement.

Extensive research shows that job crafting has a clear impact on employee engagement (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012; Christensen, 2017; Petrou et al., 2012). As employee engagement is directly linked to performance, productivity, operational efficiency, and loyalty, employers need to prioritise efforts to sustain it. (Albrecht, 2010; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002). This study explores Millennials' perceptions of HR practices and organisational support, offering business leaders a deeper understanding of the work behaviours and organisational culture Millennials value to sustain commitment and drive performance. The findings will assist retail management in refining engagement strategies tailored to Millennial retail staff.

### **1.5 Research Gap**

To the best of the researcher's understanding, there is no research carried out in the context of Hong Kong to study job crafting and employee engagement in the retail sector among Millennials in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong retail environment provides a distinctive setting for examining job crafting and engagement. Its long working hours, rigid hierarchies, and persistent labour shortages create conditions that differ distinctively from the flatter, autonomy-driven systems in most Western settings. Frontline staff often face limited discretion, repetitive tasks, and constant performance pressure under a collective cultural background. This contextual environment makes Hong Kong's service sector an ideal ground to examine how job crafting and engagement operate when structural constraints limit the autonomy and resources often assumed in Western theories.

The primary research gap is as follows:

- i. Limited research within Hong Kong's unique cultural context examining job crafting and employee engagement related to organisational factors of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and Perceived Human Resource Management (PHRM) practices through an integrated Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Self Determination Theory (SDT) lens.

ii. Scarcity of qualitative studies to explore the process of job crafting and its impact on employee engagement within Hong Kong. Existing research in Hong Kong rarely explains how job crafting shapes engagement through real-world experiences. Most studies identify correlating factors rather than examining the underlying processes in everyday practice.

iii. Lack of studies addressing how Millennials in Hong Kong engage with job crafting strategies in the retail industry and how these practices influence their engagement.

This research explores the impact of job crafting on employee engagement among millennial retail staff in Hong Kong. It investigates how organisational support and HRM practices are interpreted through an integrated SET and SDT lens to influence job crafting and engagement within this demographic and industry context.

### **1.6 Research Question**

This qualitative research explores the relationship between job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial frontline employees in Hong Kong's sports retail sector. By examining the perspectives and experiences of this specific generation, the study aims to uncover how job crafting practices shape engagement within the distinctive context of Hong Kong sports retail. Further, it investigates how POS and PHRM practices influence job crafting within this demographic. Focusing on 'perceived' perspectives highlights the study's goal to understand how employees interpret the organisational support and HRM practices they experience. This aligns with the concept of job crafting as a bottom-up approach, focusing on employees' own meanings and perceptions derived directly from their frontline experiences.

Core Question: How are employee engagement and job crafting intertwined in the context of the Hong Kong retail industry among Millennials?

RQ1: How do job crafting practices influence employee engagement within the Millennial retail workforce?

RQ2: How do perceived organisational support and perceived human resource management practices impact job crafting and employee engagement?

These two research questions guide the research objectives, and the following six areas frame the investigation.

- i. To acquire an in-depth understanding of the practices and significance of job crafting among Millennials in retail organisations in Hong Kong
- ii. To identify the challenges and the hindrances of job crafting in the work environment of the retail industry in Hong Kong
- iii. To evaluate management's perception and endorsement of job-crafting practices
- iv. To explore the impact of organisational support and HR management practices on employees' perception of job crafting and employee engagement
- v. To examine the impact of job crafting on employee engagement for individuals and organisations
- vi. To gain an understanding of millennials' reward preferences and expectations, to enhance employee engagement in the retail sector of Hong Kong

### **1.7 Significance:**

This research contributes both academically and practically to understanding job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail frontline staff in Hong Kong.

Millennials, comprising 42% of Hong Kong's labour market, represent a critical workforce demographic. Their work behaviours and engagement patterns provide insights into addressing issues such as motivation, retention, and employee development challenges in the retail sector.

This study employs a qualitative exploratory methodology, capturing rich, contextual data through 24 interviews with Millennial retail staff, shop supervisors, and line managers across three organisations. By focusing on participants' subjective experiences, it explores how Millennials actively shape their work environments to enhance engagement. The research highlights contextual factors such as job design, leadership, organisational culture, and HRM practices, which explain how these guide job crafting behaviours and engagement outcomes.

By addressing the underexplored context of Hong Kong's retail industry, this study fills a gap in the literature. While job crafting has been examined in Western and Asian contexts, its application in the retail industry and within Hong Kong's cultural context remains limited. The findings contribute to understanding how Millennials engage in job crafting and adapt their roles to meet both personal and organisational needs.

This research also makes theoretical contributions by incorporating dimensions of POS and PHRM practices into job crafting and engagement models. Social Exchange Theory explains reciprocal relationships, whereas Self Determination Theory (SDT) explains intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers. This integration broadens the understanding of how organisational factors influence Millennials' workplace behaviours.

Finally, the study also includes a cross-company comparison, examining how organisational culture and climate impact job crafting and engagement. By identifying variations across companies, the research provides practical recommendations for retail organisations to foster supportive environments. These findings provide actionable strategies to optimise job crafting, improve employee engagement, and enhance organisational performance.

In summary, this study addresses major gaps in the academic and practical understanding of Millennials' workplace behaviours, offering both theoretical contributions and meaningful insights for the Hong Kong retail sector.

### **1.8 Research Design**

This study explores the interplay between job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail frontline staff in Hong Kong. Social Exchange Theory and the Self Determination Theory are the two main theoretical lenses to guide this research. The study also examines organisational factors within the HR system, such as perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived HRM (PHRM) practices, to assess their implications for job crafting and engagement.

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of Millennial retail frontline employees working in sports retail stores across Hong Kong. Participants were selected based on their frontline roles and their willingness to participate. The study adopted a multiple-case design to compare patterns across different organisational contexts and applied within- and cross-case thematic analysis to identify themes from the interview data.

Data collection for this paper involved 24 interviews, with participants selected from three different organisations in the retail sector. It includes one multinational, one foreign-owned with localised management, and one local operator, to compare how

organisational context influences employees' role-shaping behaviours and their level of engagement.

The study followed a constructivist-interpretative approach, with emphasis on the active role of the participants in co-constructing meaning. The research approach was exploratory, which aimed to seek insights and develop propositions for further investigation. A pilot study was conducted to refine the research design and ensure the appropriateness of data collection methods and interview protocols.

### **1.9 Delimitation**

This study is delimited by several factors to define its scope and boundaries. First, since the research focuses on Millennial frontline employees in Hong Kong's sports retail sector, the findings may not apply to other generations, industries, or regions. Second, as data are drawn from three sports retail organisations with different operating scales, the findings may not be representative of all sports retail organisations in Hong Kong or include perspectives from employees in other sectors. Third, the research employs interviews and document analysis as the primary data collection methods, excluding surveys or focus groups, which could affect the data breadth and limit the depth of understanding. Finally, the study is a cross-sectional study and was conducted within a specific timeframe, so the findings may not reflect future changes or developments.

### **1. 10 Outline of this thesis**

This research paper is organised into six chapters for a comprehensive overview of the study's objectives, literature, methodology, findings, and implications. Chapter 1 introduces the study, covering the background, research problem, objectives, and significance. Chapter 2 presents a literature review, examining relevant theories, concepts, and prior research to establish the conceptual model. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the approach, participant selection, data collection, and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis, links the data to the research questions, and identifies the key themes. Chapter 5 discusses these findings, linking them to existing literature and exploring theoretical, practical, and future implications. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a summary of findings and recommendations. The paper also includes a references section, listing all cited sources in the specified citation style.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review:**

This chapter is organised into ten main sections. Section 2.1 provides an introduction and outlines the chapter structure. Section 2.2 discusses the concept of job crafting and its related theoretical foundations. Section 2.3 examines employee engagement, including its antecedents, consequences, and disengagement. Section 2.4 explores the relationship between job crafting and employee engagement and discusses the purpose of the study and the role of meaningfulness. Section 2.5 presents the theoretical frameworks of the study, namely Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Self Determination Theory (SDT), while Section 2.6 discusses other motivational theories that complement this framework. Section 2.7 reviews organisational factors, focusing on perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived human resource management (PHRM) practices. Section 2.8 delineates the conceptual framework, while Section 2.9 identifies the research gap. Section 2.10 concludes the chapter.

### **2.1 Introduction**

The retail industry accounted for 5% of Hong Kong's GDP in 2019, during a period of steady visitor growth from 2004 and 2018 (KPMG, 2019). In Hong Kong, 270,000 people were engaged in the retail workforce in 2019. A government manpower projection report estimated that the labour force supply would decline by 0.6% annually from 2022 to 2027 (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2019). Challenges such as talent shortages, high turnover, and rising rental costs were identified, with frontline customer service staff and retail salespersons being the hardest roles to fill (KPMG, 2019). Workforce shortages were mainly driven by long working hours, limited leave entitlement, and unattractive salaries. Such labour shortages reduce customer service quality, increase workload, and weaken employee morale. As the retail industry is crucial to Hong Kong's economy, retaining talent and improving engagement remain key priorities (KPMG, 2019)

#### **2.1.1 Workplace Culture and Characteristics of Millennials**

After discussing sports retail and labour market challenges in Section 1, this section reviews workplace culture and the character traits of Millennials. Hong Kong's workplace culture is deeply influenced by collectivist values, emphasising community, harmony, and collective identity over individualism. These values often lead to hierarchical organisational structures and high power distance, resulting in centralised authority and formal work environments (Hofstede, 2001). This poses challenges for the

implementation of job crafting, which thrives on proactivity and self-driven role redesign (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010). Within this cultural background, Millennials' work values further influence how job crafting and engagement are expressed in Hong Kong.

In view of the characteristics of Millennials, they are distinct from previous generations. Millennials seek meaningful work and measure success through its impact (Jenkins, 2017). In the workplace, they aim to align personal and organisational values (Montes, 2017). Although they are independent learners, they value collaborative and team support (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Millennials prioritise work-life balance over financial rewards and prefer flexible schedules (Twenge, 2010) and prefer jobs to make a difference and contribute to positive change (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons, 2010).

As the first digitally nurtured generation, Millennials work well at multitasking (Ng and Johnson, 2015). Most of them possess tertiary education, making them more self-centred and confident compared to earlier generations (Holt, Marques and Way, 2012; Jenkins, 2017). Growing up in the technology boom, they are accustomed to instant gratification and require constant feedback to maintain internal motivation (Deal and Levenson, 2016). This partly explains their desire for rapid promotion or job-hopping to achieve higher titles.

In the workplace, Millennials value individuals' capabilities over titles and hierarchy (Twenge et al., 2010). They prefer challenging work that fosters growth and potential while avoiding repetitive tasks, and value autonomy as a source of freedom and mastery (Deal and Levenson, 2016). Millennials expect strong relationships with leaders built on frequent communication (Gursoy, Maier and Chi, 2008). Their favourable leadership styles blend mentorship, growth opportunities, flexibility, constructive feedback, and personalised development, while avoiding bureaucracy (Dulin, 2008; Kultalahti, Edinger and Brandt, 2013).

## **2.2 Job Crafting**

Job crafting promotes proactivity, autonomy, socialisation, and self-driven job redesign, all of which align well with Millennials' aspirations at work. It allows them to connect their talents, preferences, and personal fulfilment with work that supports organisational engagement (Tekleab and Chiaburu, 2011). To sustain Millennial motivation, employers should adopt management practices that promote autonomy, recognition, and meaningful work, while balancing the needs of other generations.

SET and SDT provide a theoretical lens for understanding Millennials' workplace behaviours. SET emphasises reciprocal relationships, explaining that when organisations meet Millennials' aspirations, such as autonomy, relational connection, growth, meaningful work and recognition, they remain engaged and commitment increases (Gagne and Deci, 2005; Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). SDT complements this by emphasising intrinsic motivation, where the needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are fulfilled through job crafting (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2013). It explains how employees align their work roles with personal values to sustain engagement. Together, these theories clarify how reciprocity and intrinsic motivation jointly shape Millennials' job crafting and engagement.

### **2.2.1 Job Design**

There is growing recognition that jobs designed to motivate employees lead to higher satisfaction, lower turnover, and improved performance (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Job crafting originated from the concept of job design, which was initially explored to understand the efficiency of labour division in its early stages (Babbage, 1835). Early research focused on defining jobs and exploring the meaning of work, and it often overlooked the worker's role (Roberson, 1990; Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Later studies shifted attention from task allocation toward employee engagement, positioning job crafting as a complement to job design rather than a replacement (Hackman and Oldham, 1980).

### **2.2.2 Job Crafting Theory**

Managers traditionally rely on job enrichment as a means to motivate employees, assuming that a single job scope could suit everyone (Grant and Parker, 2009). However, in today's complex knowledge and service economy, job enrichment alone often falls short of addressing employees' diverse needs (Hakanen, Seppälä, and Peeters, 2017). Job crafting provides an alternative, allowing employees to reshape their roles in alignment with personal preferences while maintaining the fundamental nature of their work (Bruning and Campion, 2018). This approach has been shown to enhance job engagement and satisfaction (Bakker, Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel, 2014).

There are two primary perspectives on job crafting: i) Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) psychological orientation, and ii) Tims and Bakker's (2010) job demands and resources orientation. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) define job crafting as a process where

employees make self-directed changes to tasks, relationships, and perceptions of their work. Building on this, Tims and Bakker (2010) propose job crafting as a method of balancing job demands and resources with individual abilities and needs. These two conceptual streams have developed separately and provide complementary insights into how job crafting functions in various contexts.

Job crafting, sometimes referred to as work personalisation, involves proactive changes to the physical (task and relational) and cognitive boundaries of a role and aligns with individual values, strengths, and preferences (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). It represents an ongoing motivational process, through which employees engage in task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting to redefine their work in a meaningful and personalised manner (De Gennaro, 2019; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

In Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) model, task crafting refers to employees deliberately altering their job's scope, nature, processes of their work, as well as how they perform tasks, without fundamentally changing the job description. The aim is to make their work better reflect their values, strengths and preferences. It involves expanding or simplifying the scope of their tasks, or taking on more tasks, or finding innovative ways to accomplish tasks more efficiently or effectively (Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski, 2008). Autonomy refers to the extent to which individuals have independence and discretion in making decisions relating to their jobs, and it represents the primary condition of job crafting (Petrou et al., 2012). When employees have higher levels of autonomy, they feel empowered and more likely to engage in crafting (Grant and Ashford, 2008). This empowerment encourages individuals to engage more actively in shaping their tasks as their responsibilities expand. In task crafting, proactivity also plays an important role as it drives individuals to actively seek changes in their roles. This proactivity equips employees to anticipate and prepare for any unforeseen challenges. As such, individuals with a proactive disposition are likely to embrace additional tasks and propose innovative solutions (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012). Further, power and autonomy serve as critical indicators for both the feasibility of proactive behaviour and the availability of job crafting opportunities, as managers tend to engage more actively in task crafting (Minda and Mudło-Głagolska, 2019).

Relational crafting involves interpersonal connectedness at work for supportive relationships (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012). It includes

expanding and modifying the interactions with teams and other stakeholders to enhance work experience. These activities influence not only the employees themselves but also the organisational outcomes such as efficiency and performance (Grant and Parker, 2009). Other than interactions with co-workers, relational crafting involves establishing and maintaining good relationships with workplace partners such as suppliers, customers and other external parties (Bruning and Campion, 2018).

In the context of Hong Kong, shaped by Confucian cultural values, workplace *guanxi* represents an informal personal relationship between individuals (Chen and Chen, 2004; Chen et al., 2009). Such relationships are nurtured through work-related social interactions between supervisors and subordinates, even outside work (Zhai, Lindorff and Cooper, 2013). Employees seek to enhance *Guanxi*'s relationship with supervisors, and they expect more trust, empowerment, and work-related information from supervisors. This connectedness can be enhanced when subordinates are inclined to improve *Guanxi* with the supervisors through relational crafting (Cheung et al., 2009). Relational crafting may also have adverse effects such as increased workload, job strain, and emotional exhaustion (Strauss, Parker and O'Shea, 2017; Zacher et al., 2019).

Cognitive crafting refers to reframing employees' mindsets, changing their perceptions, and finding new ways to view their job responsibilities, which may make the job more personally meaningful (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2013). Tims, Derks and Bakker (2016) found that optimising person-job fit through job crafting enhanced employees' experience of psychological meaningfulness. Among the three crafting dimensions, cognitive crafting is the most closely aligned with attaining meaning and identity at work. It helps employees reframe their jobs without making behavioural change (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2013).

### **2.2.3 Collaborative Crafting**

Collaborative job crafting, initially coined by Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk (2009), extended job crafting from an individual activity into a team-oriented process where members jointly modify task and relational boundaries to achieve shared objectives. This collective approach, illustrated in studies such as childcare teams, showed that collaborative crafting allowed team members to align roles and strengthen cohesion through communication, cooperation, and coordinated actions. Subsequent research distinguished collaborative crafting from individual crafting, showing that each had

distinct antecedents and functioned differently depending on team interdependence. Later studies confirmed collaborative crafting's positive impact on outcomes such as team engagement and organisational performance and also demonstrated its effectiveness even in low-autonomy environments like call centres (Tims et al., 2013; McClelland et al., 2014). In collectivist cultures, collaborative crafting aligns well with collective values, and cultural context influences crafting preferences (Hofstede, 1984; Lu et al., 2014). However, task interdependence was found to hinder individual job crafting efforts (Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk, 2009). In summary, these studies established collaborative crafting as a culturally adaptable process that supports both individual and team objectives, especially in interdependent roles.

After reviewing the four forms of job crafting extended from Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) framework (task, relational, cognitive, and collaborative crafting), the review shows that this framework captures both the behavioural and psychological aspects of how employees redefine their work. Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) framework is adopted in this study as it includes cognitive crafting and represents the interpretive process. Through this self-initiated process, Millennial employees construct meaning and develop connections in their work. This approach aligns with the study's constructivist paradigm, which aims to understand how employees interpret and reshape their work experience. By integrating Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) model, this framework provides the integrative foundation for examining how individual job crafting processes interact with contextual factors explored in the following sections.

#### **2.2.4 Job Demands and Resources model (JD-R)**

Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model incorporated Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) work engagement construct and positioned it within a broader framework. In this model, job demands are aspects of work that require physical or psychological effort and may lead to strain. Job resources, such as autonomy, feedback, and development opportunities, have been shown to stimulate motivation and engagement. Adequate resources buffer the effects of demands and promote vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bakker, Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel, 2014). It provides a framework that links work characteristics to engagement through a motivational process, forming the foundation for later extensions to Tims and Bakker's (2010) job crafting approach.

Tims and Bakker (2010) described job crafting as employees' proactive adjustment of job demands and resources to improve person–job fit. In 2012, their framework was extended and identified four dimensions: (a) increasing structural resources (e.g. autonomy and skill variety), (b) increasing social resources (e.g. seeking support and feedback), (c) seeking challenging demands that encourage learning and innovation, and (d) reducing hindering demands that create strain (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012). Findings on the last dimension remain inconsistent, as excessive reduction of demands may adversely affect performance (Demerouti, Bakker and Halbesleben, 2015). This behavioural approach focuses on observable adjustments at work, whereas cognitive crafting involves reframing the job and cannot be measured directly.

The JD-R model links job crafting to engagement mainly by quantitative studies, which explain how employees use and modify available resources to maintain motivation and reduce strain (Bakker 2010; Petrou, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2018). It provides a framework for understanding how proactive behaviour and organisational support interact to shape engagement in different contexts.

### **2.2.5 Qualitative Studies:**

Lazazzara, Tims and De Gennaro (2020) advanced qualitative job-crafting research by systematically synthesising fragmented evidence. Their meta-synthesis developed a process model explaining when and how job crafting occurs, drawing on the approach–avoidance framework (Bruning and Campion, 2018; Zhang and Parker, 2019). It connected personal motives with contextual conditions such as autonomy, workload, and social support, while identifying cases where crafting was restricted despite strong intentions. This framework highlights the interaction between individual initiatives and environmental constraints and provides part of the theoretical foundation that this study extends from a contextual lens.

Three subsequent qualitative studies illustrated how employees in different settings reshape the meaning of their work through cognitive, relational, and task crafting.

a) Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2017). This research interviewed 16 tenured mid-career faculty to explore how they sustained engagement after promotion. Cognitive crafting involved reframing career ideals from promotion pursuit to long-term contribution; relational crafting deepened meaningful relationships with students and colleagues while

balancing family and health; and task crafting introduced new teaching methods and research risks that revived purpose.

b) Vuori, San and Kira (2012). This study interviewed 29 professionals across three fields and concluded three tactics to increase work meaning. The positive cues included emphasising positive aspects of work, developing new competencies, and influencing work content. This showed that meaning can be created even when task boundaries remain fixed.

c) Fuller and Unwin (2016). Fuller and Unwin examined 25 hospital porters and found that, despite low occupational status, they engaged in cognitive and relational crafting by aligning their personal value of 'caring' with their role, reframing themselves as healthcare contributors. Through these 'non-canonical' caring practices, they built esteem-enhancing identities and improved team cooperation.

Collectively, these qualitative studies demonstrated how professionals construct meaningful work and engage in job crafting through lived experiences. They were selected for their relevance to this thesis's focus on meaningfulness, yet their insights remain focused on individual experiences within professional settings. The present study broadens this discussion through a context-specific and theory-informed approach that integrates SET and SDT to explain how POS is expressed through HRM practices and leadership behaviours. This approach demonstrates how Millennial frontline employees experience job crafting and engagement within Hong Kong's retail sector.

### **2.2.6 Key Attributes in Job Crafting**

Job crafting is a relatively new concept, with its development and conceptualisation undergoing continuous refinement. Its progression is categorised into three distinct stages. The first stage focused primarily on theoretical development, emphasising qualitative research. The second stage, which began around 2010, introduced expanded job crafting concepts and the development of measurement scales. In the third stage, meta-analyses and significant conceptual breakthroughs integrated two previously distinct streams of thought. These stages are summarised in Table 2A.

#### **2.2.6.1 Person-Job Fit in Job Crafting**

Job crafting enhances person-job fit, the alignment between an individual's job and personal attributes (Iqbal, 2016). Person-job fit has two main aspects: demands-abilities

(DA) fit, and needs-supplies (NS) fit. Demands-abilities fit refers to the match between an individual's knowledge and capabilities and job requirements. In contrast, needs-supplies fit pertains to how well an employee's desires and ambitions align with what their role offers (Cable and DeRue, 2002). From the job crafting perspective, person-job fit allows employees to experience their work as meaningful and aligned with their personal values (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2013).

Job crafting differs from other proactive behaviours by focusing primarily on aligning the role with an individual's preferences and enhancing personal motivation, rather than emphasising organisational goals. Unlike formal role adjustments or customised work agreements, job crafting involves subtle, informal changes made independently within existing job boundaries (Hornung et al., 2010; Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2008).

#### **2.2.6.2 Work Identity and Job Crafting**

Job crafting influences work identity by shaping how employees perceive themselves and their work roles. Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) identified four organisational identities, namely virtuous, esteemed, progressive, and complementary, which employees cultivate to enhance psychological well-being and job meaningfulness. Each identity serves specific functions that shape an individual's experience of meaningful work. Aligning personal values with job roles also enhances self-identity, job satisfaction, and engagement (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kahn, 1990).

Ibarra (2003) argued that individuals strive to align their work with their preferred identities. This aligns with social identity theory, where work identity is part of perceived group membership (Hogg and Vaughan, 2002). Employees craft their jobs by altering tasks and relational boundaries to achieve their preferred identity (Ibarra, 2003).

#### **2.2.6.3 Meaningfulness and Job Crafting**

Yeoman posited that people have a fundamental need for meaningful work (Yeoman, 2014). Within organisational behaviour, job crafting is distinctive because it focuses on personal meaningfulness rather than organisational goals (Ko, 2011; Wright, 2003).

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) explained that job crafting is driven by basic human drives for meaningfulness and identity enhancement, and is reflected in the need for control, a social connection and a positive self-image. Through task, relational and

cognitive crafting, employees adjust their job and relational boundaries and redefine their work, so it aligns with their personal values.

According to Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski (2013), job crafting aims to redesign jobs in meaningful ways. They identified nine pathways to enhance work meaningfulness through task crafting (adding, emphasising, redesigning tasks), relational crafting (building, reframing, adapting relationships), and cognitive crafting (expanding, focusing, linking perceptions). These strategies help employees personalise their work and find greater meaning, enriching their overall experience.

#### **2.2.6.4 Proactivity and job crafting**

Proactivity forms the foundation for job crafting, which refers to self-initiated behaviours that employees use to modify their work environments to better align with personal strengths, preferences, and values. It is considered forward-thinking, which helps employees anticipate challenges and seek improvement in meaningful ways. It also promotes adaptability in response to workplace demands and fosters autonomy and ownership over their roles (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2013; Wang, Demerouti, and Le Blanc, 2017). In customer-focused industries like retail, proactivity is essential for employees as they adapt their roles to an ever-changing environment, meet service needs and sustain engagement.

Some researchers view proactivity as a complex process rather than a fixed set of behaviours. This perspective frames proactivity as an ongoing process that emphasises anticipation and goal generation, and it applies to both in-role and extra-role activities (Fay and Frese, 2001; Grant and Ashford, 2008). Grant and Ashford (2008) identified three motivational pathways, namely 'can do' (self-belief in capability), 'reason to' (driven by purpose for change), and 'energised to' (reflecting positive affect). These combined processes explain how employees initiate and sustain proactive behaviour.

Several factors affect proactivity within job crafting. For example, autonomy refers to employees' control over their tasks. This control encourages initiative and strengthens role-breadth self-efficacy, which supports problem-solving and proactive action (Parker and Griffin, 2011; Fay and Frese, 2001; Parker, 1998). For Millennials, who prioritise meaningful work and autonomy, proactivity allows them to shape their roles actively and align their work experiences with career aspirations. However, ambiguity in the work environment plays a dual role. Moderate uncertainty and feedback seeking can motivate

proactive efforts, while excessive ambiguity may discourage them (Ashford, Blatt and Vandewalle, 2003; Dierdorff and Jensen, 2018). In addition, job complexity promotes proactivity when perceived as manageable but causes stress when it exceeds employees' capacity (LePine, Podsakoff and LePine, 2005).

Social factors also influence proactive behaviour. Interactions with customers, coworkers, and leaders empower employees to act proactively by cultivating purpose and shared accountability (Grant, 2007; Parker, Williams, and Turner, 2006). Employees who feel responsible for outcomes are more likely to act proactively (Grant and Ashford, 2008). Conversely, routinization inhibits proactivity by limiting opportunities for change (Parker, 1998).

#### **2.2.6.5 Adaptive and Reactive Behaviour in Job Crafting**

Adaptability is defined as 'the willingness and ability to change behaviours, feelings, and thoughts in response to environmental demands' (McArdle et al, 2007, p. 248). Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton (2013) described job crafting as a way for employees to actively modify task, relational, and cognitive aspects of their roles to enhance work meaningfulness. Park et al. (2020) distinguished between adaptive and reactive crafting and stated that adaptive crafting involves proactive adjustments aimed at aligning roles with future goals, promoting resilience and engagement, whereas reactive crafting responds to immediate stressors, helping employees adjust to unanticipated demands and maintain well-being.

Together, these studies demonstrate that job crafting is a flexible process, including both forward-looking and responsive behaviours. It supports employees in anticipating role adjustments when opportunities arise or in responding effectively to pressures, maintaining engagement and resilience across changing work demands.

#### **2.2.6.6 Special Characteristics of Job Crafting**

Job crafting shows a U-shaped relationship with performance effectiveness and has diverse impacts at different levels. At low levels, job crafting often goes unnoticed and has minimal impact. At moderate levels, managers view these behaviours negatively due to misaligned expectations, as the outcomes of job crafting differ from what they anticipate (Frese and Fay, 2001). At higher levels, job crafting leads to positive outcomes

as employees overcome uncertainties and align their efforts with organisational goals (Dierdorff and Jensen, 2018).

Organisational hierarchy also influences job crafting behaviours. Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2010) argued that Lower-ranking employees focus on meeting colleagues' and supervisors' expectations, using job crafting to build relationships and enhance visibility. This approach supports their career progression by fostering networks that create opportunities for task redefinition. In contrast, higher-ranking employees face challenges in balancing tasks shaped by job crafting with their broader role responsibilities.

Autonomy in higher-ranking roles often creates a paradox. While these employees have more freedom to craft their roles, they face pressure to align personal preferences with organisational goals, sometimes resulting in fragmented efforts. This highlights the complex interplay between job crafting, hierarchy, and role expectations.

## **2.2.7 Antecedents and Outcome of Job Crafting**

### **2.2.7.1 Contextual Antecedents of Job Crafting**

Job crafting behaviours are not solely influenced by personal traits; they are also deeply shaped by the work environment and organisational context (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012). Contextual factors, such as job autonomy, professional development opportunities, and social support, facilitate job crafting behaviours. For instance, autonomy encourages employees to pursue goals and solutions proactively, while role complexity, skill utilisation (Cullinane et al., 2017), and manageable job insecurity (Lu et al., 2014) drive task and relational crafting. High-commitment HR practices, such as extensive training, empowerment, and participative decision making, foster job crafting as they encourage employees to take ownership of their roles (Meijerink, Bos-Nehles, and de Leede, 2020).

Employee-oriented leadership styles, such as empowering and servant leadership, provide both autonomy and support for employees' initiatives (Bavik, Bavik and Tang, 2017; Kim and Beehr, 2018). Perceived organisational support further reinforces this effect, motivating employees to adjust their roles proactively to align with their personal strengths and goals (Kim et al., 2018).

Organisational change also stimulates crafting, as employees often use relational and task crafting to adapt to new conditions (Kira, Balkin and San, 2012). Feedback and trust are

critical antecedents. Positive feedback generates enthusiasm and motivation (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2008), while trust enhances well-being and reduces hesitation in crafting behaviours (Khan, Mubarik and Islam, 2021). Overall, supportive and resource-rich environments encourage employees to craft their jobs to align with their personal goals and competencies.

#### **2.2.7.2 The Outcome of Job Crafting**

Job crafting enhances engagement (Tims, Derks and Bakker, 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017), satisfaction (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), and well-being (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014), while strengthening person–job fit (Tims, Derks and Bakker, 2016). It also deepens work meaningfulness; for instance, hospital cleaners who reframed their duties as contributing to healing experienced greater motivation (Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). At the team level, collaborative crafting enhances coordination and shared purpose (Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk, 2009).

Misdirected crafting may create inefficiency and role conflict when personal aims diverge from organisational objectives (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2008). Such misalignment limits effectiveness (Demerouti, Bakker and Halbesleben, 2015). High workloads or role overload can intensify burnout (Hakanen, Seppälä and Peeters, 2017). When demands intensify, employees may narrow or avoid crafting to cope with strain (Solberg and Wong, 2016).

## **2.3 Employee Engagement**

### **2.3.1 Work engagement vs employee engagement**

Employee engagement has become a buzzword in the management community. Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, reported that employee engagement is the primary contributor to the core values of the organisation's innovation, effectiveness, and competitiveness (Welch, 2011).

The concept of employee engagement originates from work engagement, and they are sometimes used interchangeably. Kahn was one of the first scholars to introduce the idea of work engagement. Engaged employees are motivated and committed to contributing positively to their team and organisation by enthusiastically performing their job responsibilities (Bakker et al., 2008; Macey and Schneider, 2008).

The term 'employee engagement' was first used by the Gallup organisation in the 1990s (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002). It can also be considered an employee's emotional involvement in their job, reflecting passion and commitment toward their role. Employee engagement differs from work engagement in scope and focus. Work engagement refers to an individual's relationship with the work tasks, namely the level of energy, absorption, and dedication that one brings to their job. Employee engagement, on the other hand, encompasses a broader scope. It includes factors that influence employees themselves as well as their connection to the organisation, such as their relationships with leaders and colleagues, their alignment with organisational values, and their overall well-being within the context of the company. While the two concepts overlap significantly, employee engagement is often seen as the broader concept that includes work engagement as one of its components (Albrecht, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Engagement versus other concepts**

Since there is no universal definition of engagement or a commonly aligned measurement tool to assess engagement, the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement vary (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Truss, 2014). Some scholars believe that employee engagement is just a repackaging of concepts such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, yet important differences remain (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Job satisfaction is defined as 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state that arises from one's appraisal of their job' (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). In contrast, work engagement is

characterised by activation states such as enthusiasm, energy, and absorption. While job satisfaction is a more passive state, contributing to contentment and employee retention, work engagement represents an active and fulfilling condition more directly linked to passion, energy, resilience, and deep immersion in the job. Engagement not only motivates employees but also inspires them to exceed expectations and take on responsibilities beyond their regular duties (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Organisational commitment generally refers to an employee's emotional or psychological attachment to an organisation. With commitment, employees tend to stay and contribute to the organisation (Porter et al., 1974). Meyer and Allen (2001) developed a model to categorise commitment into affective (emotional attachment), continuance (cost of leaving), and normative (sense of obligation). Engagement is more than an emotional attachment; it is explained by levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

### **2.3.3 Conceptual Foundations of Employee Engagement**

#### **Kahn's Concept and the Needs-Satisfying Model (1990)**

The concept of engagement was introduced by William Kahn in 1990. He was inspired by Goffman's idea that 'people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances' (Goffman, 1961, p. 694). His article focused on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement. He claimed that personal engagement is a motivational state that '... harnesses organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance...' (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Kahn (1992) posited that the level of personal engagement at work is influenced by three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. When people are psychologically present, they are attentive, connected and integrated into the job.

Psychological meaningfulness relates to the significance employees place on their work and personal aspirations. Kahn (1990) described it as a prerequisite of work engagement. Employees experience meaningfulness when their work offers discretion, clear expectations, task variety, and constructive feedback, which signal that their efforts have value. When employees perceive this connection between effort and value, they devote greater physical, cognitive, and emotional energy to their roles. Later studies confirmed that meaningfulness remains the strongest of the three engagement conditions (May,

Gilson and Harter, 2004) and develops through both task features and supportive relationships and identity at work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). This conceptualisation provides the theoretical base for analysing antecedents of engagement discussed in Section 2.3.8.

Psychological safety refers to the freedom to express oneself authentically and to utilise one's skills without fear of negative feedback. It incorporates trust and support from supervisors and teams. This psychological condition is vital for nurturing innovation and healthy employer-employee relationships. Factors such as leader-member exchange, organisational justice, and job security are crucial for fostering a safe work environment (Crawford et al., 2013). Psychological safety forms the relational foundation of engagement, linking this condition to the social and leadership factors discussed later in this study's conceptual framework.

Psychological availability pertains to an employee's readiness and capacity to invest cognitively, emotionally, and physically into work roles (Kahn, 1990). When employees are full of resources such as energy and focus, they are fully present at work. Personal resources such as self-efficacy, organisation-based self-esteem, optimism, and dispositions like conscientiousness and positive affectivity help maintain resource availability. Conversely, when resources are depleted, employees encounter distractions such as work overload, work-family conflict, and time urgency (Crawford et al., 2013; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

Apart from Kahn's work, several other key studies on employee engagement have been widely recognised for providing valuable insight into how the engagement construct has evolved. Schaufeli's definition of engagement is used as the key concept for this study. A summary of the major studies is provided in Appendix 2.1.

#### **2.3.4 The Utrecht Work Engagement Model (Schaufeli et al., 2002)**

The most widely recognised and preferred definition of work engagement is 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Vigour refers to employees' willingness to invest energy and to display mental resilience and stamina during challenges (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It is often associated with enjoyment of work, which indicates an employee's energy and readiness to exert effort in their work (Wefald, Reichard and Serrano, 2011). Shirom (2007) described vigour as an emotional reaction to one's job, encompassing three

affective states: physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness. Dedication, as described by Schaufeli et al. (2002), includes elements such as enthusiasm, inspiration, challenge, pride, and significance. It signifies high involvement in their work, accompanied by feelings of significance, enthusiasm, and inspiration. Dedication also aligns with intrinsic motivation in Self Determination Theory (SDT), which involves psychological drivers like meaningfulness, goal alignment, passion, and pride. Experiencing inspiration and embracing challenges suggests that employees are motivated to push their boundaries, reflecting proactive behaviour and engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Absorption is the state of deep concentration in one's work activities (Demerouti, 2006). When employees feel that time flies and find it difficult to detach from work, they experience a certain level of absorption.

Engagement is characterised as a persistent and pervasive state of mind that shapes an individual's perception of their job rather than a temporary feeling. Engaged employees demonstrate vigour, dedication, and absorption in their work. In this research, employee engagement is defined as a positive state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption, as conceptualised by Schaufeli (Schaufeli et al, 2002).

### **2.3.5 Definition of Employee Engagement from Consultancy Agencies**

Consultancy firms, such as Hewitt, Towers Perrin, and Mercer, also define employee engagement based on their own frameworks. These definitions emphasise organisational commitment and discretionary behaviour that support organisational performance. For example, Gallup defines employee engagement as 'an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work' (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002, p. 269). However, these definitions align more closely with job satisfaction and job involvement (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010).

### **2.3.6 Measurement Scale**

Employee engagement has been measured using various instruments. The earliest widely used scale was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker and is based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2003). While widely used, UWES has been criticised for overlapping with burnout, job satisfaction, and commitment measures, undermining its construct validity (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011). May, Gilson and Harter introduced a scale based on Kahn's model, focusing on emotional, physical, and cognitive engagement, but it lacked

strong construct validity (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004). Rich et al. then developed the Job Engagement Scale (JES), grounded in Goffman's role theory (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010). Commercially, the Gallup Q12 Survey has been widely used, which links well-being to business outcomes (Harter, Schmidt and Keyes, 2003).

### **2.3.7 Antecedents and Consequences of Engagement**

In section 2.2.7, antecedents and outcomes of job crafting were reviewed, whereas this section focuses on the antecedents and consequences identified in the engagement literature. Some antecedents, such as leadership and supportive work conditions, appear in both domains, but the emphasis is on how they sustain vigour, dedication, and absorption rather than shaping crafting behaviours.

#### **2.3.7.1 Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

According to Kahn (1990), individuals fully engage in their work only when they find it meaningful (psychological meaningfulness), feel safe (psychological safety) and have the capacity to invest themselves in their roles (psychological availability). Psychological presence allows employees to immerse themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their roles. In this section, the antecedents of employee engagement are presented by these foundational psychological conditions (Crawford et al., 2013).

As shown in Table 2.1, the antecedents of engagement are grouped according to Kahn's three psychological conditions. Factors such as autonomy, challenge, and feedback strengthen meaningfulness, while trust, justice, and supportive leadership foster safety. Personal resources such as optimism and self-efficacy sustain psychological availability by supporting employees' capacity to invest themselves in their roles. Together, these factors form the conditions necessary for engagement.

**Table 2.1 Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

<b>Psychological Condition</b>	<b>Antecedent Factors</b>	<b>Collective Impact</b>
Meaningfulness	<b>Job-related Structural Factors:</b> Job autonomy (Kahn, 1990); Job challenge (LePine, Podsakoff and LePine, 2005); Performance feedback (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004); Job crafting behaviour (Tims, Derks and Bakker, 2016).	Structural factors such as autonomy, challenge, and constructive feedback make work purposeful by offering chances for growth and contribution, which stimulate intrinsic motivation and strengthen engagement.
	<b>Person–Role Alignment Factors:</b> Work-role / person–job fit (Crawford, LePine and Rich, 2010); Role identity (Rothbard, 2001).	When personal values match work roles, employees view their work as a reflection of their personal values, which increases purpose and meaningfulness for engagement.
<b>Safety</b>	Trust and coworker support (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011); Leader–member exchange (Aryee et al., 2012); Servant leadership (Correia de Sousa and van Dierendonck, 2014); Transformational leadership (Zhu, Avolio and Walumbwa, 2009); Organisational justice (Saks, 2006); Perceived organisational support / Person–organisation fit (Biswas and Bhatnagar, 2013); Positive organisational climate (Alfes et al., 2013a).	Supportive leadership, fair treatment, and trusting relationships create a climate where employees can speak openly and use their abilities confidently without fear of blame or rejection.
<b>Availability</b>	Self-efficacy, Optimism and organisation-based self-esteem (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009); workload (Crawford et al., 2013); Role conflict (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006); Resource inadequacy (Bakker, Emmerik and Euwema, 2006).	Personal resources strengthen readiness to engage, whereas excessive workload and limited resources drain psychological capacity, hindering engagement.

As indicated in Table 2.2, engaged employees exhibit higher task performance, creativity, and commitment, which contribute to organisational effectiveness. Conversely, when meaningfulness, safety, or availability are constrained by heavy workload, limited control, or weak social support, disengagement and burnout may occur. Macey et al. (2011) identified two forms of disengagement leading to exhaustion: one stems from insufficient motivating conditions and the other from excessive involvement. These patterns highlight how the presence or absence of core psychological conditions shapes both engagement and withdrawal behaviours. Understanding these conditions explains how job crafting may reinforce or restore engagement when such psychological resources are threatened.

### 2.3.7.2 Employee Engagement Outcomes and Disengagement

**Table 2.2: Engagement Outcomes and Disengagement**

Category	Outcome (with citation)	Interpretive Summary
<b>Positive Outcomes of Engagement</b>	Enhanced task performance (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012); Reduced turnover intentions (Alfes et al., 2013b); Innovative work behaviour (Slatten and Mehmetoglu, 2011); Job satisfaction (Yeh, 2013); Affective commitment and extra-role behaviour (Karatepe, 2013); Organisational citizenship behaviour (Zopiatis, Constanti and Theocharous, 2014).	Engaged employees display characteristics such as higher performance, innovation, job satisfaction, and retention because their energy and commitment translate into task and citizenship behaviours that facilitate organisational effectiveness.
<b>Disengagement and Burnout</b>	Psychological exhaustion or burnout (Macey et al., 2011); Poor social relationships (Shuck, Rocco and Albornoz, 2011; Swindall, 2011); Workload mismatch and insufficient control (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001); Value misalignment (Maslach et al., 2001); Excessive support or over-involvement leading to exhaustion (Macey et al., 2011).	When meaningfulness, safety, or availability are disrupted by unbalanced demands, unfairness, or weak relationships, employees withdraw psychologically and emotionally. This imbalance may result in burnout or turnover intentions, especially in front-line roles where resources are limited.

## 2.4 Relationship of Job Crafting and Employee Engagement

Building on Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) model discussed earlier, job crafting fosters engagement as employees align their work with personal values and goals. Through self-initiated adjustments to tasks, relationships, and perceptions, employees strengthen their ownership of their roles, which enhances motivation and energy at work. Quantitative studies have shown that job crafting promotes vigour, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2015). This study adopts Wrzesniewski and Dutton's job crafting framework for its inclusion of cognitive and interpretive elements align with the constructivist perspective guiding this research.

Although previous research has explored reciprocal relationships between job crafting and engagement, this study adopts a directional view in which job crafting leads to engagement. Vogt et al.'s (2016) three-wave longitudinal study found no significant reverse effect, supporting this directional assumption. This position suggests that proactive crafting behaviours can initiate, rather than simply reflect, the motivational state of engagement.

A key distinction between the two job crafting frameworks lies in cognitive crafting, which refers to reframing work for personal meaning. In recent years, scholars have attempted to integrate job crafting and engagement with meaningfulness within quantitative studies. Hulshof, Demerouti and Le Blanc (2019) and Tims, Derks and Bakker (2016) demonstrated that behavioural crafting improved person–job fit and daily meaningfulness, which in turn increased engagement. However, these JD-R-based models exclude cognitive crafting, viewing it as a perceptual rather than a behavioural process. This limitation has left cognitive crafting largely unexplored.

Letona-Ibañez et al. (2021) extended Wrzesniewski and Dutton's framework in a quantitative study that work meaning mediated the relationship between job crafting and engagement, with cognitive crafting showing the strongest predictive effect. This finding reinforces the importance of cognitive crafting as a measurable construct that shapes psychological meaningfulness within Kahn's (1990) conditions and connects crafting directly to engagement.

Few qualitative investigations have explored the relationship between job crafting and engagement. Lazazzara, Tims and Gennaro (2020) noted that qualitative studies remain limited. This scarcity highlights the need for context-specific studies that interpret

employees' lived experiences in depth, a gap this study addresses by exploring how frontline Millennials construct engagement through job crafting in retail settings.

#### **2.4.1 Purpose of This Study**

In developing this qualitative study on job crafting in the retail workplace, it is essential to consider contextual factors such as organisational support and HRM practices. While POS and PHRM have been frequently validated in quantitative studies on job crafting and employee engagement, they play key roles in shaping conditions in the workplace that allow employees to modify tasks, relationships, and cognition for engagement (Guan and Frenkel, 2018; Kim et al, 2018). The inclusion of POS and PHRM in job crafting studies is grounded in SET, which explains that employees who feel valued and cared for are more likely to engage in proactive job crafting (Park et al., 2020). Within this framework, leadership and HR practices serve as foundational elements within POS, providing qualitative insights into how employees perceive opportunities to redefine their work in ways that align their own values and preferences with organisational objectives (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). These signals create room for task, relational, and cognitive crafting.

This study builds on prior quantitative findings that explored the relationship between job crafting and employee engagement (Bakker, 2010; Bakker, Rodriguez-Munoz and Sanz Vergel, 2016). While the motivational role of cognitive crafting has been validated quantitatively, those studies often overlooked the lived experiences and contextual relationships shaping how employees engaged in these behaviours (Letona-Ibanez, 2021). This research adopted a qualitative lens to investigate how Millennials in the Hong Kong retail sector engaged in job crafting to enhance their work engagement. With job crafting being closely aligned with Millennials' preferences for autonomy, proactiveness, connectedness, and meaningful work, this study examines how Millennials in the Hong Kong retail sector engage in job crafting to enhance their engagement and work experiences. By focusing on contextual elements such as organisational support and HRM practices, this study extends existing qualitative literature by revealing how employees proactively modify their roles to foster engagement within specific retail and organisational contexts.

#### **2.4.2 Conceptualisation in Meaningfulness**

Before examining how meaningful work relates to job crafting and engagement, it is essential to understand the definitions of meaning-related concepts. 'Meaning' can be constructed individually and socially (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Individually, it reflects a person's own interpretation of what is meaningful, while socially, it refers to the accepted norms and shared understandings among people. Therefore, 'meaning' can be derived from personal and collective perspectives. 'Meaning of work' refers to the employees' subjective experience of their work purpose and job significance (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010), while 'meaningful work' is defined as contributing to others by fulfilling their needs and creating positive impacts on others' lives (You et al., 2021). 'Meaningfulness' is an even more complex and subjective concept that refers to employees finding positive meaning in work that contributes to a greater good and enriches their lives (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012).

Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) identified four main categories of meaning in work: self, others, context, and spirituality. Other perspectives also emphasise that meaning comes from how job characteristics, personal values, organisational practices, and societal expectations work together (You et al., 2021). Employees who balance these dimensions and sources are more likely to experience work as meaningful. The meaning of work and meaningfulness also play a key role in this study. In job crafting theory, cognitive crafting focuses on reframing the meaning of one's role for better person-job fit, which consequently strengthens employees' experience of meaningful work. Through this process, employees proactively shape their jobs to better align with their values and interests, aiming to experience their work more meaningfully. Furthermore, person-job fit influences perceived meaningfulness, job satisfaction, and performance (Guo and Hou, 2022; Lee et al., 2017; Tims, Derks and Bakker, 2016).

Regarding Kahn's engagement model, psychological meaningfulness is considered the most significant factor in enhancing the level of engagement among the three psychological conditions (Albrecht, 2013; Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Whittington et al., 2017). Several factors are identified to enhance employee engagement through meaningful work, namely job challenges, feedback, autonomy, job variety, role fit, opportunities for development, rewards and recognition (Crawford et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990). When employees perceive their work to be meaningful, they tend to invest fully in the job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Whittington et al. (2017) also find that meaningfulness positively impacts affective commitment, job satisfaction and organisational performance.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.5.1 Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was first introduced by George Homans (1958) and later developed by other scholars. The core concepts involve choices, trust, reciprocal exchange relationships, and obligations (Emerson, 1976).

Blau (2017, p. 91) defines social exchange as the 'voluntary action of individuals who are motivated by the returns'. In SET, relationships are built on a cost-benefit analysis that includes a comparison of alternatives. Notably, employees tend to place a higher value on resources offered voluntarily by their organisation compared to those resulting from factors outside the organisation's control (Shore and Shore, 1995).

There are two types of exchange relationships: economic and social. Economic exchanges are based on quantified terms, while social exchanges are based on feelings of obligation, trust, and gratitude. Social exchange relationships are supported by the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). According to the theory, recipients of a positive exchange will feel indebted and are likely to reciprocate to a greater level to minimise their discomfort. Conversely, the exchange may cease if either party fails to honour the relationship.

In the workplace, social exchange theory (SET) frames the ongoing reciprocal obligations between employers and employees, shaping future interactions and reinforcing commitments (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 2001). Over time, these exchanges form the foundation of trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Behaviours such as leader-member exchange and organisational citizenship are closely linked to this concept, exemplifying the core tenets of social exchange within the organisation (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Parris and Peachey, 2013).

In the context of POS, SET explains how employees' perceptions of organisational support can enhance feelings of obligation and commitment. If employees feel valued and supported, they may reciprocate by enhancing their engagement at work. Proactive crafting behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour are reciprocal responses to perceived organisational support (Gong et al., 2018; Kantén, 2014). Employees who feel supported develop trust in the organisation and, in return, respond with stronger engagement (Saks, 2006; Frenkel, Restubog and Bednall, 2012).

Similarly, when employees perceive the HRM strategies as fair and caring, they are motivated to reciprocate positively, enhancing their job crafting and engagement (Saks, 2022; Hu, McCune Stein and Mao, 2020).

### **2.5.2 Self Determination Theory (SDT)**

SDT is a macro theory about human motivation and was founded by Deci and Ryan in 1985. It explains that motivation can be characterised by different types and attributes. It explains how different forms of motivation are linked to well-being. The three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are foundational, innate, and ingrained in human nature. The fulfilment of the three needs facilitates various forms of motivation, namely, autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation. These motivations contribute to optimal functioning, well-being, and performance in the workplace. Within organisations, these needs shape how employees experience intrinsic drive and engagement (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Applying a motivational theory such as SDT also supports the understanding of job crafting and employee engagement, as both concepts relate to the fulfilment of basic psychological needs. While SET describes reciprocal exchanges, SDT explains the internal processes that sustain motivation.

Autonomy refers to individuals' psychological freedom to make independent decisions. It is a key component of psychological empowerment. Jobs designed with higher levels of autonomy are believed to increase job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Tims and Bakker, 2010). Competence is the experience of proficiency and effectiveness at work. This can be realised by integrating tasks that are stimulating but manageable, offering opportunities for skill enhancement and development. Relatedness concerns the need to feel connected to others in positive relationships. It includes the sense of being accepted, valued, and cared for. It can be achieved by fostering belonging and connection in the workplace by encouraging close-knit teamwork, collaboration, and social interaction (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Grant, 2007).

SDT clearly distinguishes between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and internalised extrinsic motivation (identified and integrated regulation), whereas controlled motivation encompasses introjected regulation and external regulation. Although external outcomes or rewards initially drive extrinsic motivation, some forms of it can be internalised and transformed into personal values (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

SDT also helps examine how workplace conditions support or satisfy basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), which, in turn, affect employees' engagement and job crafting behaviours. This theoretical framework helps assess how organisational support and HRM practices influence these motivational factors. It explains how and why Millennial retail staff engage with their roles not only from individual perspectives but also within the broader organisational environment. Since the satisfaction of these needs is related to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction (Unanue et al., 2017), work engagement (Gagne and Deci, 2005), extra-role behaviour (Broeck et al., 2021), and work performance (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2000), SDT is an effective motivation theory to explain this study.

#### **2.5.2.1 SDT and Job Crafting**

Meeting the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through practices like job crafting is essential for continuous growth, well-being, and professional fulfilment.

Task crafting involves adjusting job tasks to align with personal interests and skills, enhancing autonomy and allowing employees to tailor their work environment to better suit their preferences. Cognitive crafting supports employees in reshaping their perceptions of their roles, focusing on aspects that highlight their strengths and effectiveness, ultimately reinforcing their competence. Relational crafting focuses on building and strengthening social connections in the workplace, helping employees satisfy their need for relatedness (Lee and Song, 2020; Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014). In essence, SDT clarifies why job crafting serves as a self-initiated means of satisfying psychological needs in the workplace.

#### **2.5.2.2 SDT and Employee Engagement**

SDT and employee engagement are closely related through the concept of intrinsic motivation and the fulfilment of basic psychological needs. SDT posits that when the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, individuals are more likely to experience enhanced levels of autonomous motivation. This type of motivation is crucial for fostering deep, enduring engagement in work. When employees feel they have control over their work (autonomy), are effective in their roles (competence), and have strong connections with others (relatedness), they are more likely to engage, contributing positively to their performance and well-being (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2000). Since SDT

is a multi-layered theory, its impact extends to leadership (Slemp, Kern and Vella-Brodrick, 2015) and meaningful work (Martela and Riekkilä, 2018), both of which are essential aspects of this study. Together with SET, SDT explains how external support and internal motivation interact to sustain engagement.

## **2.6 Relevant Motivational Theories**

To understand the factors that influence job crafting and engagement in this study, it is essential to review motivational perspectives such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, and the Job Characteristics Model. A summary of these perspectives and their relevance to job crafting and engagement is provided in Appendix 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

## **2.7 Organisational Factors:**

Job crafting behaviours are shaped by a combination of factors related to the individual, the specific job, and the broader organisational context (Loi, Lin and Tan, 2019; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Prior studies have focused on the influence of job characteristics (Kanten, 2014) and individual traits such as a proactive personality (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012), while the impact of organisational factors has received less attention. There is limited qualitative research exploring how perceived organisational support influences job crafting (Kim et al., 2018), and even fewer studies examine the role of HR systems in influencing the overall level of job crafting (Rudolph et al., 2017).

### **2.7.1 Perceived Organisational Support**

Perceived organisational support (POS) is rooted in organisational support theory and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organisational support refers to employees' perception that their organisations value their work-related contributions and care about their well-being, which in turn affects their attitudes, behaviours, and performance. It involves social exchange relationships between employees and employers, as well as the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). McAllister and Bigley (2002, p. 895) posited that POS is 'egocentric in nature', as it reflects how individuals personally perceive organisational support, whereas organisational care refers to support extended collectively to all employees.

Organisational factors that contribute to POS include organisational justice (Shore and Shore, 1995), trust (DeConinck, 2010), perceived supervisory support (Dawley, Houghton and Bucklew, 2010), leader-member exchange (Sluss, Klimchak and Holmes, 2008), growth opportunities, and colleague support (Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015) and supportive HR practices (Chen, Cheng and Chen, 2017).

POS has been linked to multiple outcomes, including in-role and extra-role behaviour, well-being, and reduced counterproductive work behaviour (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). It also influences job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intention (Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015).

#### **2.7.1.1 Job Crafting and POS**

When employees feel that the organisation cares about their well-being and values their efforts, they experience positive emotions and may proactively engage in job crafting to

align their personal values and interests with their roles. Through altering job tasks, fostering relationships, and reframing the meaning of the job, employees eventually become more engaged and contribute to organisational performance (Fredrickson, 2001; Ingusci et al., 2016; Kim et al, 2018a; Kim et al, 2018b; Park et al., 2020). POS also encourages discretionary behaviours often described as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), voluntary behaviours that support colleagues and organisational goals beyond formal job requirements (Organ, 2018). Such voluntary behaviours motivate employees to contribute beyond prescribed duties, and this reflects reciprocity under SET. Among the three forms of job crafting, POS has a stronger effect on task and cognitive crafting than on relational crafting (Kim et al., 2018).

### **2.7.1.2 Employee Engagement and POS**

Perceived organisational support (POS) is increasingly recognised as a crucial factor that influences both employee attitudes and behaviours related to engagement (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006). Factors such as organisational fairness, leader support, HR practices, and work conditions are closely linked to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Leadership plays a vital role, with Saks (2019) highlighting the significance of leader support in shaping employees' perceptions of organisational support, which in turn impacts engagement. Similarly, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) noted that colleague support is a critical predictor of engagement, emphasising the importance of social factors in the workplace. POS is shaped by HRM practices, and higher POS is related to stronger engagement (Aktar and Pangil, 2017). The perception of fairness within the organisation also contributes significantly to POS and, consequently, to employee engagement (Javed and Tariq, 2015). Taken together, POS not only strengthens engagement directly but also creates a supportive environment...

### **2.7.1.3 Organisational Trust**

Organisational trust is key to fostering positive behaviours within an organisation and is influenced by perceptions of organisational justice, trustworthiness, and the quality of interpersonal interactions (Puusa and Tolvanen, 2006; Tan and Tan, 2000). It refers to employees' belief that the organisation behaves with integrity, honours its commitments, and acts in ways that support both the employees' well-being and the organisation's success (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995). Trust forms part of the social exchange process that sustains reciprocity within organisations.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) argued that organisational trust mediates the relationship between organisational support and various positive outcomes. Employees who trusted their organisation tended to be more engaged and willing to go beyond their formal duties. Organisational trust also acted as a buffer in times of uncertainty, allowing employees to remain committed to organisational goals even in challenging times. POS fosters trust by addressing employees' socio-emotional needs, such as belonging and fair treatment, whereas perceived fairness (both procedural and distributive justice) serves as a key precursor to organisational trust ( Colquitt, Scott and LePine, 2007; Kurtessis et al., 2017 ), Employees are more likely to trust their organisation when they believe decisions are made fairly and equitably; this strengthens their overall commitment to the organisation.

Organisational trust represents employees' confidence in their organisation, including both interpersonal trust (focused on relationships with colleagues and supervisors) and impersonal trust (related to the organisation's systems and structures) (Vanhala and Tzafrir, 2021). Interpersonal trust facilitates positive relationships and teamwork among employees, promoting collaboration and commitment within teams (Costigan, Liter and Berman, 1998; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). On the other hand, impersonal trust allows employees to have confidence in the organisation's stability and fairness, independent of individual interactions. This trust is reinforced by consistent organisational practices and top management actions, which provide a reliable framework that strengthens employees' confidence in the organisation (Lampaki and Papadakis, 2018).

Organisational trust is closely tied to POS, as SET suggests that employees develop reciprocal trust based on how their contributions are acknowledged and valued (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). SET identifies three key types of exchange relationships: trust between colleagues (lateral trust), trust in immediate supervisors (vertical trust), and trust in the organisation itself (Masterson et al., 2000). POS facilitates a supportive culture that promotes loyalty, constructive and positive behaviours, and improved performance outcomes to strengthen trust within the organisation (Tzafrir, Gur and Blumen, 2015). These reciprocal trust exchanges reflect how SET operates within organisations.

Leaders' behaviours are key in building trust with employees and maintaining these relationships over time (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Trust in leadership includes cognitive

trust, which is based on perceptions of a leader's reliability and competence (Shapiro, 1987), and affective trust, which stems from emotional connections such as kindness and sincerity (McAllister, 1995). Clear communication and equitable management practices are essential for building trust (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). However, trust could quickly erode if leaders excessively highlight employees' weaknesses, and this impacts the relationship negatively (Arakawa and Greenberg, 2007).

Leadership styles such as empowering, servant, and transformational leadership contribute to creating a culture of trust that fosters teamwork and collaboration across the organisation (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). The strong foundation of trust encourages job crafting and engagement, as autonomy is closely linked to it (Kaltiainen, Lipponen and Petrou, 2018). A trusted work environment not only helps reduce conflicts but also reinforces the psychological contract and solidifies perceived organisational support (Rousseau, 1989; Khan, Mubarik and Islam, 2021). Leaders who cultivate trust and create a climate that values care and appreciation help employees feel meaningful and safe (Kahn, 1990; Kroth and Keeler, 2009). As a whole, trust serves as both a condition and an outcome of positive leadership and supportive organisational climates.

#### **2.7.1.4 Leadership**

Leadership is a multifaceted concept encompassing various styles that have emerged over time. It is a critical organisational factor that drives success and employee engagement (Luthans, 2002; Luthans et al., 2001). Leaders play an indispensable role in creating a positive workplace where employees can flourish and find meaning in their work (Cameron, 2012; Schein, 2010).

Positive leadership styles, such as servant, transformational, and engaging leadership, focus on motivating, empowering, and inspiring employees while prioritising trust, compassion, well-being, and growth (Cameron, 2012; Schaufeli, 2015). These styles often overlap, making it challenging to identify a universally effective approach for all organisational contexts. Despite their differences, they share core attributes, such as fostering positive interactions, promoting team collaboration, and encouraging employee autonomy (Decuyper and Schaufeli, 2020). Positive leadership practices that align employees' values with organisational goals are critical drivers of meaningful work experiences and enhanced employee engagement (Whittington et al., 2017).

As Millennials become prominent in the workplace, positive leadership styles address their diverse preferences, such as seeking care, flexibility, autonomy, connectedness, and recognition. While this thesis explored various leadership styles, special attention was given primarily to servant leadership and secondarily to transformational leadership because of their alignment with Millennials' values in retail. These leadership styles emphasise people-centred, altruistic practices and help create a trust-based and empowering work environment. By prioritising employees' needs, these styles align closely with Millennials' aspirations for teamwork, mentoring, recognition, independence, and mastery opportunities.

Both servant and transformational leadership positively influence job crafting and employee engagement, whereas transactional and laissez-faire leadership discourage job crafting and contribute to disengagement. These leadership styles also shape perceptions of organisational support and trust, which influence job crafting and engagement. Different leadership styles are summarised in Appendix 2.2.

#### **a) Leadership and Job Crafting**

In the context of job crafting, leaders play an important role in supporting perceived opportunities for employees to initiate their own crafting behaviours. Leadership that empowers employees and grants autonomy, such as servant leadership (Van Dierendonck and Nuijten, 2011), empowering leadership (Kim and Beehr, 2018), and transformational leadership (Aryee et al., 2012), helps increase employees' proactive behaviour. Leaders' perceptions of job crafting determine whether job crafting is viewed as a constructive behaviour or as one that diverges from organisational expectations. Some supervisors may give negative feedback if they perceive job crafting as self-serving. Conversely, they are more likely to support it if they perceive it as contributing to organisational goals (Grant, Parker and Collins, 2009).

#### **b) Leadership and Employee Engagement**

Leadership is crucial in fostering employee engagement (Burke and Ng, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008). Buckingham and Coffman (1999, p. 33) stated that 'people leave managers, not companies', emphasising the significant impact of managerial behaviour on engagement levels. Managers' actions and leadership styles directly influence HRM practices and the overall work climate. Different leadership approaches have been linked to employee engagement through trust, empowerment, and meaning at work. Engaging

leadership, developed by Schaufeli, is specifically tailored for engagement. It is informed by principles from Self Determination Theory (SDT). Through SDT, employees can meet the innate needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Engaging leaders helps employees recognise the meaningfulness of their contributions, which strengthens engagement (Slemp, Kern and Vella-Brodrick, 2015). However, this thesis places greater emphasis on two positive leadership styles, namely, servant leadership and transformational leadership.

#### **2.7.1.5 Leader-Member Exchange**

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory emphasises the significance of the quality of relationships between leaders and subordinates. High-quality LMX relationships are characterised by mutual trust, respect, and obligation, leading to positive outcomes in the workplace. These relationships foster a supportive work environment, increasing job satisfaction and performance (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Employees in high-quality LMX relationships are more likely to receive resources, and this makes them act proactively and be more engaged in their roles, which is consistent with SET. In Chinese society, the relational culture of 'Guanxi' exemplifies high-quality LMX (Chen and Chen, 2004).

#### **2.7.1.6 Role of Middle Manager (Retail Manager)**

Based on this study, relational crafting emerged as a core factor that influenced Millennial frontline staff. Middle managers are the central nervous system of an organisation (Guth and MacMillan, 1986). Shop managers serve as intermediaries between senior management and shop floor staff. They are responsible for ensuring that executive decisions are implemented and staff capabilities are considered (Nielsen and Gonzalez, 2010). Shop managers play a vital role in creating a collaborative and supportive work environment that nurtures meaningful relationships among teams. The responsibility of shaping team culture often rests with shop managers on the retail floor. It is important to recognise that in the retail setting, many shop managers predominantly focus on day-to-day operations. As many shop managers have limited access to formal people management training due to their secondary education backgrounds, it is understandable that they often rely on common sense or emulate role models from their past careers. These managerial approaches are closely tied to leadership style, which further influences employee engagement.

#### **2.7.1.7 Co-workers and Teams**

Scholars and managers increasingly recognise the impact of social characteristics on workplace relationships (Grant and Parker, 2009). The contemporary work environment emphasises four key social characteristics: interdependence, feedback from others, social support, and external interactions (Grant, 2007; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2008). These social elements not only enhance well-being and role perception but also significantly influence attitudinal and behavioural outcomes like job satisfaction, employee engagement, and turnover intentions (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007; Saks, 2006).

Social factors such as co-worker relationships shape perceptions of meaningful work and contribute to positive mood and job satisfaction, impacting overall well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). Colleagues are an important social factor that shapes employees' job crafting (Wang, Li and Chen, 2020). They offer timely support and feedback, as well as guidance and insights on work duties and roles (Bizzi, 2017). In relational crafting, coworkers' behaviour can be explained by team-member exchange (TMX), workplace friendship, and relational identity. TMX provides valuable feedback, helps each member understand the roles, and increases mutual learning (Hung et al., 2020; Lee, 2020). Workplace friendship refers to interpersonal relationships developed within the organisation, characterised by mutual commitment and emotional and psychological bonds between team members (Sias and Gallagher, 2009; Berman et al., 2002; McGuire, 2007). Relational identity reinforces employees' intention to stay (Cinar and Basim, 2022). Collectively, these group characteristics enhance job crafting, particularly collaborative crafting, by promoting a supportive and cohesive team environment.

Teamwork engagement supports team performance (Salanova et al., 2003; Torrente et al., 2012). Employees working in teams influence each other, and this process can be explained by social psychological theories, namely social norms, modelling, and emotional contagion (Tims et al., 2013). Engagement scholars have long discussed social relationships for their meaningful impact on employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Kahn and Heaphy, 2013; Saks, 2006; Saks, 2019). Taken together, team engagement illustrates how social factors contribute to a supportive organisational environment.

### 2.7.2 Perceived Human Resources Management Practices

HRM systems consist of synergistic sets of HR practices (Boon, Den Hartog and Lepak, 2019). Earlier research focused on the effect of HRM systems on productivity, but scholars now emphasise that employees' perceptions of HRM practices play a central role in shaping attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Khilji and Wang 2006). Yet, the same HRM practices may elicit different behavioural responses due to variation in values, expectations, and experiences (Guest, 1999). This explains why recent studies emphasise the need to examine HRM bundles holistically and through the lens of employees' subjective interpretations.

Some studies suggest that employees' work attitudes are shaped more by their perception of HRM practices rather than by the actual HRM practices (Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2009). This highlights the importance of employees' subjective experiences and perceptions in their response to HRM initiatives. Perceived HRM matters because organisations often rely on managerial reports that may not represent how frontline employees actually experience HR practices (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Allen, Shore and Griffeth (2003) stated that among perceived HRM elements, the fairness of rewards, participation in decision making, and growth opportunities contribute to POS, which is related to job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Following Wang et al. (2020), PHRM is understood as a perception-driven construct influenced by how employees understand HR practices in this study. Employees often interpret these practices by forming beliefs about the organisation's underlying motives. Through organisational personification, they view the organisation as a humanlike agent whose actions are intentional (Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo, 2007; Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007). HR attributions then help employees judge whether HR practices reflect business priorities (e.g., quality or cost control) or a more employee-oriented philosophy (Nishii et al., 2008). These interpretations influence outcomes such as trust, engagement, and discretionary behaviour.

Organisational climate is defined as shared perceptions of an organisation's policies, practices, and procedures in the workplace, while climate strength reflects the extent of consensus among employees about these perceptions and reflects how consistently HR signals are interpreted (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Under a strong HR system, the HR practices send clear, visible, and consistent signals about expected behaviours and

priorities of the organisation, while weak HR systems lack clarity and consistency, creating ambiguity and variation in how employees judge HR practices. HRM practices function as signals that communicate to employees the intended meaning and values of the organisation. Organisational climate reflects employees' shared perceptions of HRM policies and practices (content) and how these are communicated in practice (process). This climate is shaped by the strength of the HRM system, which is reflected in the distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus of HR signals (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Some studies suggest that rewards in the HRM process can exert a stronger influence on employee reactions than formal HR policy content alone (Frenkel, Li and Restubog, 2012; Katou, 2013).

### **2.7.2.1 HRM and Engagement**

HRM practices signal an organisation's investment in its employees. When employees feel valued and trusted, SET suggests that they reciprocate through discretionary behaviours and greater contribution to the organisation. Some studies show that HRM influences factors linked to employee engagement, such as training opportunities (Salanova, Agut and Peiro, 2005), performance feedback, and task variety (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008). Work engagement is also shaped by employees' attitudes toward PHRM practices (Alfes et al., 2013a; Boon and Kalshoven, 2014).

### **2.7.2.2 HRM and Job Crafting**

Studies on HRM practices and the job crafting relationship are still limited, and many remain conceptual (Albrecht et al., 2015; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Only four studies have specifically examined job crafting in relation to HRM practices (Guan and Frenkel, 2018; Hu, McCune Stein and Mao, 2020; Hu et al., 2022; Meijerink, Bos-Nehles and de Leede, 2020). This scarcity indicates that job crafting has received limited attention from HRM scholars and practitioners. Studies have shown a positive relationship between HRM and job crafting. Guan and Frenkel argued that if employees perceive HR practices as strong and supportive, they will be more likely to engage in job crafting and perform higher work engagement (Guan and Frenkel, 2018). Similarly, in Hu and colleagues' empirical studies, the implementation of HRM systems enhanced both task and relational crafting through employees' perceptions of the HRM system (Hu, McCune Stein and Mao, 2020; Hu et al., 2022). Since job crafting is a self-initiated process, HRM can facilitate it by cultivating a work environment that fosters meaningful

work, encourages collaborative learning, and provides development opportunities. When HRM practices signal organisational care and support, employees are more likely to engage in job crafting. Employees supported by job-relevant training and clear HR communication actively redefine their roles to align with both personal and organisational goals (Guan and Frenkel, 2018; Meijerink, Bos-Nehles and de Leede, 2020).

### **2.7.2.3 HRM and Meaningfulness**

HRM policies influence how jobs are structured and experienced. Practices such as empowerment, recognition, and development frame job design by determining the autonomy and support employees experience. Research on meaningful work has shown that job characteristics, particularly autonomy, skill variety, and task significance, enhance meaningfulness, motivation, and satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) further demonstrated that meaning also stems from social and contextual factors, such as making a positive difference to others. In HRM studies, scholars have criticised performance-driven HR systems for neglecting human needs and employee experience (Bates et al., 2001). Subsequent HR development research emphasised meaningful work and purpose, aiming to balance organisational performance with human-centred growth (Chalofsky, 2003; Kuchinke, 2010).

### **2.7.2.4 HRM Practices**

Although Wang et al.'s (2020) PHRM model and WorldatWork's (2020) total rewards framework formed the basis of the initial HRM categories, the interview data revealed additional HRM related factors that were important to participants' experiences. Total rewards combine monetary and non-monetary elements and support meaningful work experience (Hoole and Hotz, 2016; Kahn, 1990). Prior studies have shown that training opportunities (Salanova, Agut and Peiró, 2005) and performance feedback (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008) have been identified as HRM related factors linked to engagement. Training develops capability and confidence, and supports psychological availability (Noe, Tews and McConnell Dachner, 2010; Kahn, 1990). Regular feedback helps employees monitor progress and adjust their approach, which is particularly valued by Millennials (Barnes, 2014; Whittington et al., 2017; Deal and Levenson, 2016). Fairness in this study refers to employees' perceptions of procedural and distributive justice. Justice strengthens trust when outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment are handled fairly and consistently (Colquitt, Greenberg and Zapata-Phelan, 2013; Tyler and Blader,

2003). Together, these HRM practices, covering rewards, appraisal, justice, training, and feedback, illustrate how structured systems of care, fairness, and development communicate organisational support that sustains employee engagement. A detailed review is provided in Appendix 2.5.

Saks (2022) describes 'Caring HRM' as HR practices that signal organisational care through fairness, recognition, development, and well-being support. These practices contribute to POS by communicating that employees are valued. Saks's caring HRM practices create an environment that demonstrates care and concern for employees' well-being and organisational welfare. They also inform employees' perceptions of the organisational climate, which influences collective behaviours and performance (Chuang and Liao, 2010). Although caring HRM is discretionary, organisations adopt these practices to support employees' growth and well-being, which strengthens engagement (Cooper-Thomas, Xu and Saks, 2018). In return, organisations expect outcomes such as increased employee engagement and reciprocal commitment based on SET (Saks, 2022).

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundations

This section explains the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework of the study.

2.8.1 summarises the key references that guided the framework. 2.8.2 presents the integrated conceptual framework and explains the relationships among these concepts.

### 2.8.1 Theoretical Foundations

Key references guiding the conceptual framework:

**Job Crafting:** This study adopts Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) three-dimensional job crafting model, including task, relational and cognitive crafting.

**Employee Engagement:** This study adopts Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) model, comprising vigour, dedication, and absorption.

**Perceived Organisational Support (POS):** This study adopts Ahmed and Nawaz's (2015) dimensions of supervisor support, coworker support, justice, and growth opportunities.

**Perceived Human Resource Management (PHRM):** Perceptions of HR management in this study were initially guided by Wang et al.'s (2020) framework, which identifies four core HR practices: selection, development, performance management, and rewards. Selection was excluded because severe labour shortages limited its strategic relevance in all three companies. Under such conditions, HR strategies tended to prioritise workforce development and retention. Rewards were conceptualised using the Total Rewards model (WorldatWork, 2020), which offered a more comprehensive view of compensation, benefits, recognition, well-being, and development.

To maintain conceptual clarity and reflect employees' experiences, two adjustments were made. First, growth opportunities originally positioned under POS in Ahmed and Nawaz (2015) were reassigned to PHRM, as development and training were delivered through HR across the three companies. Second, this study focuses on justice as it is delivered through formal HRM systems, not the interactional justice captured by POS. In all three companies, fairness was expressed primarily through HRM practices, namely pay, promotion, recognition, and performance appraisal. This observation aligns with research on HRM fairness and justice climate (Colquitt et al., 2013). Consequently, aspects of procedural and distributive justice were incorporated into PHRM as employees' perceptions of fair and transparent HR processes.

**Social Exchange Theory (SET):** Adopted from Blau (1964) as the theoretical basis to explain reciprocal relationships between employees and their organisations.

**Self Determination Theory (SDT):** Drawn from Deci and Ryan's (1985) foundational work on intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs.

### **2.8.2 Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework provides a foundation for exploring critical aspects throughout the research (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). In this study, the researcher seeks to understand how organisational conditions and employee experiences interact to shape engagement among Millennial frontline staff in the Hong Kong retail sector. The concept framework explains central ideas and relationships, integrates relevant theories and concepts, and enhances research transparency (Maxwell, 2012), which guides interpretation and links the research to its theoretical base. This ensures a comprehensive investigation into the interplay between job crafting (JC), perceived organisational support (POS), perceived human resource practices (PHRM), and employee engagement (EE) of Millennials, and is guided by two complementary theories, Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Self Determination Theory (SDT).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the overall conceptual structure of this study. The left side presents contextual factors (POS and PHRM), the centre shows job crafting as the linking process, and the right side displays employee engagement as the outcome. Solid arrows indicate the primary conceptual pathways, and outlined arrows represent the theoretical foundations of SET and SDT at the base, supporting the reciprocal and motivational processes.

Drawing on SET and SDT, this framework interprets POS and PHRM practices as contextual factors that signal employee reciprocity and satisfy intrinsic needs. Based on SET, POS expressed through fair and caring treatments motivates employees to reciprocate with proactive job crafting and stronger engagement (Saks, 2006; Kim, Im and Qu, 2018). From the SDT perspective, autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs explain both job crafting and engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Gagné and Deci, 2005). By integrating these two theories, it captures both external exchange conditions and internal motivational processes and jointly explains how Millennials in Hong Kong craft their jobs and sustain engagement.

POS is highly related to both job crafting and employee engagement. Kim et al. (2018) claimed that job crafting behaviour may result from POS after employees perceived the organisation cares about their contribution, voice and well-being. POS has been identified to be a key factor in enhancing employee engagement by other scholars (Khajuria and Khan, 2022; Saks, 2006).

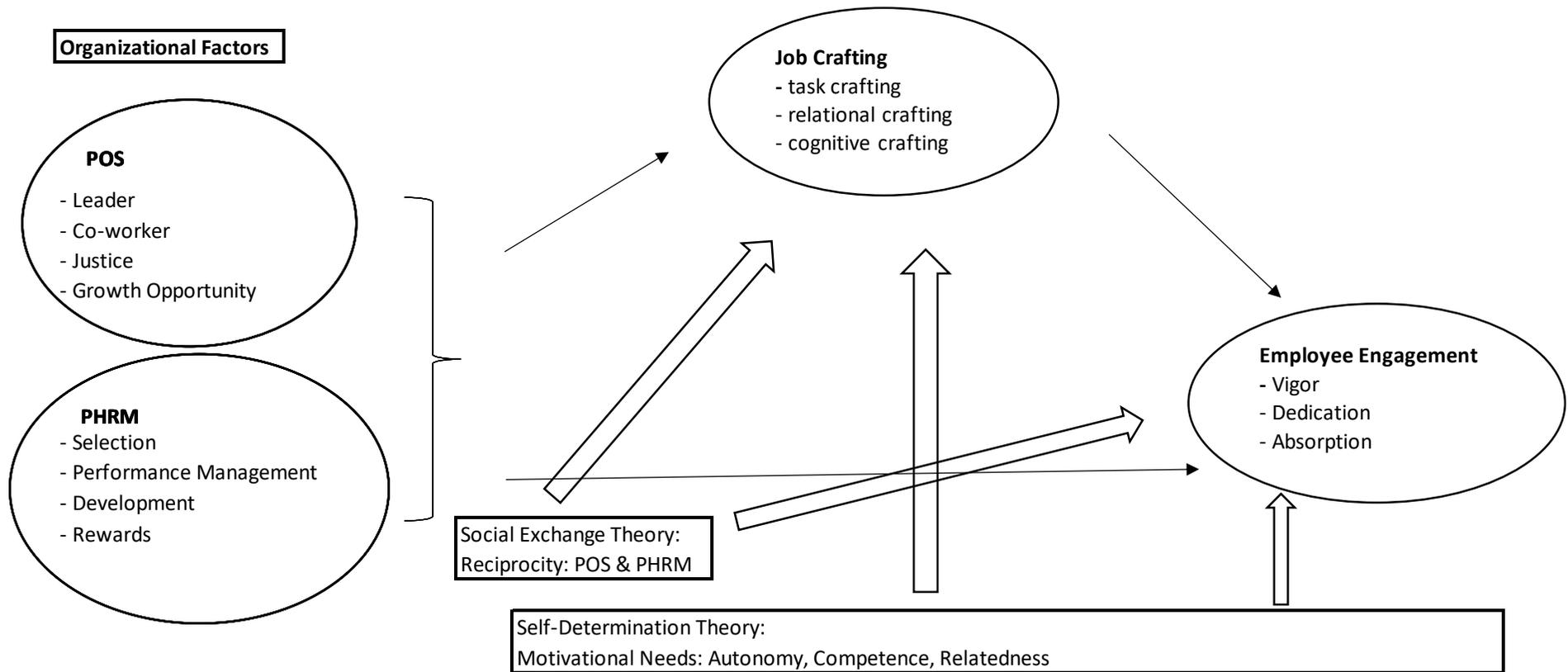
Guan and Frenkel (2018) argued that PHRM practices support job crafting by providing training in knowledge and skills, promoting collaboration, and supporting decision participation. As job crafting is an employee-centric approach, perceived HRM aligns perfectly with this bottom-up process, whereas the focus is on employees' feelings and perception. Alfes et al. (2013a) further reinforced the positive impact of perceived HRM on employee engagement.

At the centre of the framework, job crafting functions as the proactive process that links organisational conditions to outcomes. Employees engage in task, relational, and cognitive crafting to align their jobs with their strengths, values, and preferences. The job-crafting process complements the intrinsic and proactive aspects of motivation. SDT explains the motivational needs behind these crafting behaviours. By fulfilling the psychological requirement of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, job crafting facilitates intrinsic motivation and provides meaningfulness in daily work for Millennials.

On the outcome side, employee engagement is represented by the three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These dimensions reflect the energy, commitment, and deep involvement that distinguish engaged employees. SDT emphasises intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which provide a holistic pathway for employees to interact with work environments to satisfy their psychological needs for engagement. Together with SET, this framework integrates exchange-based process SET and need-based motivation SDT into a multi-layered framework to explore contextual factors that influence how Millennials in the retail sector engage with their organisations through an in-depth qualitative lens.

Collectively, these elements illustrate how the study interprets job crafting as the process linking contextual support (POS and PHRM) with employee engagement outcomes among Millennial retail staff.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework of Job Crafting and Employment Engagement



## 2.9 Research Gap

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is still no published work in Hong Kong that has examined the link between job crafting and employee engagement in the retail service sector. This study addresses the gap by exploring job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial frontline employees in Hong Kong retail. It incorporates a comprehensive model that includes POS and PHRM and integrates SET and SDT.

First, this research examined job crafting through a qualitative lens to uncover contextual factors such as job design, leadership, and organisational environment that shape job crafting behaviours and engagement. At the time this study was conceptualised in early 2020, no qualitative studies had examined how job crafting relates to employee engagement in organisational contexts, as the literature was predominantly quantitative. Job crafting reviews, including Lazazzara et al.'s (2020) qualitative meta-synthesis and Park and Park's (2023) future research agenda, highlighted the same need for contextual and qualitative exploration. While these later studies confirmed the urgency and relevance of this direction, the present research aimed to explore this under-researched area.

Second, most research on job crafting, employee engagement, POS, and PHRM has been conducted within Western contexts. Millennials in Hong Kong's collectivist and hierarchical environment remain underexplored, especially in studies adopting an integrated SET and SDT perspective connecting reciprocity (POS) and need fulfilment (PHRM practices) to crafting and engagement. This cultural gap limits understanding of how they experience autonomy, relationships, work meaning, and engagement at work.

Third, few empirical studies have investigated the combined influence of POS and PHRM on job crafting from the employee perspective. Existing quantitative works tend to treat these factors separately. This study addressed that need by analysing how organisational support and HRM practices interact to motivate and discourage job crafting behaviours among Millennials in Hong Kong retail.

Fourth, despite the retail industry's substantial contribution to Hong Kong's GDP, Millennial frontline staff have received limited scholarly attention. Millennial retail employees may require distinct motivational strategies, organisational support, and leadership preferences that differ from those of other generational cohorts and from employees working in office settings. This thesis addresses these gaps to understand how

the job preferences and needs of Millennial frontline staff influence engagement and organisational productivity.

In sum, these gaps highlight the limited understanding of the job crafting process, its connection to meaningful engagement, and the lack of qualitative, context-specific studies on frontline Millennials. These issues define the core areas that require deeper investigation.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

To conclude, this study addresses the conceptual gaps identified earlier and establishes a coherent foundation. It explores the job crafting process with the theoretical integration of reciprocity (SET), motivation (SDT) and contextual factors (POS and PHRM) while aligning the generational and cultural focus of the research. This alignment links the literature review to the analytical directions developed in Chapters 3 and 5 and ensures that the identified gaps are addressed in this study.

## **Chapter3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Section 3.1 outlines the structure of this chapter. Section 3.2 justifies the philosophical stance and chosen paradigm. Section 3.3 delineates the research design and strategy, addressing how the research questions were approached. Section 3.4 describes the data collection approach, explaining how data were gathered and analysed. Section 3.5 outlines the analytical techniques used to interpret the data and derive insights. Section 3.6 discusses trustworthiness and ethical considerations, highlighting measures to ensure participant well-being and confidentiality. Finally, Section 3.7 summarises the key elements of the research approach.

### **3.2 Philosophical Stance**

Philosophy is derived from the Greek word meaning 'the love of wisdom' (Birks, 2014). Philosophy is generally related to higher-order questions, such as the meaning of life, which are usually broad and abstract. It provides the lens through which individuals view the world. It also helps solidify the foundation of a research study, as philosophical inquiry encourages deeper reflection. It is essential for research to generate new knowledge and to address gaps that remain unexplored in current knowledge (Crossan, 2003).

A philosophical stance is expressed through four key elements of a research paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. These elements explain the underlying view of reality, knowledge, the method, and the underlying values that shape the research. These elements clarify the assumptions that guide the research and ensure the methodology and findings are grounded in a coherent theoretical framework that relates to the research questions.

The researcher's philosophical beliefs steer the direction of the research study. It is the researcher's role to identify the study's aim and determine an appropriate paradigm, including ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions, to answer the research questions. The researcher's capability and approach also influence the quality and outcomes of the study (Procter and Padfield, 1998).

### **3.2.1 Philosophical Foundations and Paradigms**

Philosophical foundations are crucial in shaping a researcher's approach to inquiry. The concepts of ontology and epistemology are interwoven. Philosophical views of reality influence how researchers determine what counts as legitimate knowledge. After defining the ontological position, researchers determine how knowledge can be acquired. The methodology explains how the research is conducted. Easterby-Smith and Thorpe (1997) posited that exploring philosophy was significant to research methodology because it helped researchers gain an in-depth understanding of methods and avoid inappropriate use of specific strategies at an early stage. Most importantly, it also helped researchers identify the limitations of different methodologies. Furthermore, axiology concerns the values and beliefs that inform the research process. By exploring these components, researchers can clarify the philosophical assumptions that guide their studies and ensure theoretical consistency (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2002; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). These assumptions also establish the link between philosophy, methodology, and the research questions.

### **3.2.2 Ontology**

Both ontology and epistemology form the foundations of philosophy, addressing the nature of existence and knowledge, respectively (Crotty, 1998). Ontology is a branch of philosophy that concerns the nature of being, existence, and reality. Multiple realities are believed to exist, and this view is shaped by the researcher's subjective assumptions. An ontological stance helps researchers to question what they consider as real and how these perceptions influence the interpretation of data collected from participants. Guba (1990) argued that qualitative researchers often act as philosophers who share ontological assumptions about reality. Ontology is important in a research study as it reflects the researcher's beliefs about the fundamental nature which constitutes themes and meaning embedded in the research data (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Creswell, 2013).

This study explored the employees' experiences and perceptions of job crafting and employee engagement, which acknowledges multiple realities and various subjective interpretations under a 'relativist' perspective of social constructivism. From this viewpoint, the researcher recognises that each participant's reality is co-constructed through personal experience within the organisational context of Hong Kong's retail industry.

### **3.2.3 Epistemology**

In Greek, the word episteme means 'knowledge'. In research, epistemology refers to 'the theory of knowledge'. It focuses on how truth and reality are understood about the world in relation to human experience (Cooksey and McDonald, 2019; Audi, 2010). Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that epistemology describes the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied. Through epistemology, knowledge is formed by the interaction between the researcher's perspective and participants' experiences; it deepens the interpretation of the research phenomenon. Questions such as how truth is understood and how knowledge is acquired, justified, and communicated are essential to epistemology (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Cooksey and McDonald, 2019).

Collectively, it drives researchers to ask how we know what we know, which is vital to understanding knowledge. It encourages researchers to unveil knowledge through social interaction within the research context. Epistemology is vital because it positions the researcher in the context of the study and defines how issues of truth and knowledge are explored. Davidson and LePore (1986) questioned whether absolute truth exists, highlighting the complexity of epistemological debates. Ultimately, Crotty (1998) argued that researchers must understand how their study contributes to knowledge within its field.

This study is based on the belief that knowledge is best derived from retail staff's subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. The epistemological stance aligns with interpretivism and argues that meaning is constructed through social interaction and contextual understanding between the researcher and participants.

### **3.2.4 Methodology**

Methodology explains how the philosophical stance of a study connects with its research design, methods, and strategies for achieving the research objectives (Mills and Birks, 2014). It concerns how the research study is conducted in a systematic and coherent way. Common methodologies include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. It also involves the overall research design, techniques for data collection and data analysis, and how findings are interpreted. The ultimate objective is to generate insights and knowledge from the data to address the research questions and contribute meaningfully to the field. This study adopted a qualitative multiple case study methodology to explore job crafting practices and employee engagement among

Millennial frontline retail staff in Hong Kong. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and interpretations within their organisational contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### **3.2.5 Axiology**

Axiology relates to the role of values in shaping the research process and guiding ethical decision making throughout a study. It concerns the moral and personal beliefs of the researcher and describes the ethical values in the research process. Finnis (2011) described axiology as a philosophical approach to making value-based decisions. Researchers have to distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour when designing a study and applying these principles to participants, data handling, and the interpretation of findings. These values include ethical considerations, such as ensuring that the research outcomes are beneficial rather than harmful to the participants, the academic community, or the wider public (Scheffler, 1994). Furthermore, researchers are expected to maintain honesty and transparency in data collection and interpretation. Fairness must be upheld throughout the research process (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). In this study, axiology guided ethical practice from obtaining consent and protecting confidentiality to representing participants' voices with fairness, maintaining integrity throughout the research process.

### **3.2.6 Paradigm**

A paradigm is a broad theoretical framework or worldview that guides how researchers understand and approach a particular phenomenon or field of study. It provides a set of assumptions, concepts, and methods that guide research. The term 'paradigm' was introduced by Kuhn (2012) to describe a scientific revolution (Locke, Golden-Biddle and Reay, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2002) defined paradigms as human-constructed frameworks that give data its meaning. Guba (1990, p. 17) described a paradigm as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action.'

While paradigms tend to be comprehensive, interpretive frameworks are more specific and often applied within a particular paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) asserted that a paradigm includes the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions, which inform methodological choices. This study adopted a social constructivist paradigm.

Researchers have used different typologies in the literature to describe sets of beliefs, which are often called paradigms or philosophical assumptions. For example, Mills and Birks (2014) discussed positivism, postpositivism, postmodernism, critical theory, and constructivism, while Creswell et al. (2007) added participatory and pragmatism to these key paradigms.

Drawing on this perspective, this study used Creswell et al.'s (2007) paradigm framework to understand social constructivism as the guiding paradigm for exploring contextual insights through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis.

### **a) Positivism**

Positivism is a scientific philosophy that asserts knowledge is obtained through studying and measuring observable phenomena. Positivists believe in objective truths that can be uncovered using scientific methods (Willig, 2013). Positivists view scientists as capable of representing objective truth (Smith, 1998), studying social phenomena like natural objects, employing quantitative methods to test hypotheses, and analysing causal or correlational relationships (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). However, positivism is criticised for overlooking the complexities of human experience (Blustein et al., 2005) and for being overly simplistic and narrow in examining social and human phenomena (Moccia, 1988; Playle, 1995). Postpositivism then emerged to address these limitations, aiming to respond to such critiques.

Positivist methodologies emphasise quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments to identify causal relationships and give generalisable findings (Flick, 2022). In contrast to the 'realist' viewpoint of quantitative researchers, who seek to measure and explain natural phenomena, qualitative researchers prioritise understanding the 'how' and 'why' of social situations. They recognise multiple realities and subjective interpretations from a 'relativist' perspective, which views truth as socially constructed rather than absolute.

### **b) Postpositivism**

Postpositivism is an approach that acknowledges the complexity and subjectivity of reality while still valuing empirical evidence and rational analysis. It extends the positivist paradigm by emphasising observation and measurement as the foundation of scientific knowledge. Postpositivists recognise that all knowledge is tentative and open to revision

with new evidence (Bryman, 2016; Saldana, 2011). Both paradigms operate within a realist and critical realist ontology and an objective epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Guba noted that while positivism assumes reality can be fully known, postpositivism acknowledges that reality can never be completely understood (Guba, 1990). Researchers use multiple methods to gain a closer understanding of reality, recognising that truth can only be approached and not fully attained. A key distinction is that positivism focuses on 'theory verification', whereas postpositivism emphasises 'theory falsification' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Overall, postpositivism emphasises empirical investigation and critical reflection while recognising the limitations and complexities of scientific inquiry.

### **c) Participatory and Pragmatism**

Other paradigms, such as the participatory and pragmatic worldviews, also contribute to qualitative inquiry. The participatory paradigm focuses on collaboration, shared decision making, and the co-construction of knowledge with participants (Creswell et al., 2007; Kemmis and Wilkinson, 2002), while pragmatism emphasises practical outcomes and flexible methodologies for addressing real-world problems (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Creswell et al., 2007). These approaches support studies that aim to create social change or generate actionable insights, but they differ from social constructivism, which emphasises understanding and how individuals interpret their experiences. They are included here to show the wider range of qualitative paradigms and do not guide the approach used in this study.

### **d) Social Constructivism**

Since the focus of this study was to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of Millennials in the Hong Kong retail workforce, a social constructivist paradigm was adopted. This paradigm emphasises the co-construction of reality through social interactions and cultural contexts (Creswell et al., 2007).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Mertens (2019), social constructivism views individuals as meaning-makers who interpret their world through subjective and context-specific experiences. Subjective meanings are shaped socially, historically, and culturally, forming through interaction with others (Berger and Luckmann, 2016; Crotty, 1998).

Social constructivists explore how people construct meaning within specific settings, using open-ended questions to allow participants to express their interpretations. They recognise that their backgrounds influence their interpretations and intentionally position themselves within the research process to interpret the meanings that others have about the world, making qualitative research interpretive (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011; Schwandt, 2007).

This study adopted a relativist ontology and a social constructivist paradigm to understand the context of job crafting and engagement in the Hong Kong retail sector and the human experiences of Millennial frontline retail employees. As Tesch (1990) described, interpretive analysis involves 'decontextualisation and recontextualisation,' where data are first separated into meaningful parts and then reassembled to identify relationships and themes across cases. This interpretive approach is well-suited for understanding the multifaceted nature of job crafting and employee engagement within this context.

However, the social constructivist paradigm has limitations. One major critique is that its reliance on subjective interpretation challenges objectivity and generalisability (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Another limitation is that it is often deeply embedded in specific contexts, which may limit its transferability (Crotty, 1998). The lack of standardised methods for reproducibility and reliability also affects the credibility of research results (Bryman, 2016). Critics also argue that the emphasis on multiple realities and subjective experiences may overlook broader structural influences on social phenomena (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Despite these limitations, social constructivist research is valuable for exploring complex social realities and workplace experiences.

### **3.3 Research Design and Strategy**

The primary purpose of this study was to explore job crafting and employee engagement among Millennials in the retail industry. To achieve this, the researcher linked theory to empirical context, aligning data collection and analysis methods with a social constructivist approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). Creswell identified five common qualitative strategies: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, and ethnography, each offering unique processes and strengths suited to different research questions and goals.

Narrative research explores individuals' life stories, while phenomenology seeks to understand human consciousness and experiences. Ethnography immerses researchers in

cultural groups to study their beliefs and practices. Grounded theory is used to develop theories from data, while a case study provides an in-depth analysis of specific individuals or groups (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015). Different approaches provide diverse epistemological and theoretical perspectives in qualitative studies. This study adopted a multiple case study approach to deeply understand and explore employee behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes in job crafting and engagement within a specific context (Stake, 1995). This method helped explain key factors influencing these behaviours.

### **3.3.1 Research Design**

Research design can be conceptualised as a 'blueprint' for a research study (Cooper and Schindler, 2013). Yin (2015) described research design as a guide for addressing the research question. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) posited an alternative notion of research design. They claimed that a research design should be a reflexive process implemented throughout the research journey. In sum, a strong and systematic research design strengthens the credibility of the study.

### **3.3.2 Aims of Research**

Understanding employee engagement and job crafting practices of Millennial retail frontline staff in Hong Kong was essential to examining their impact on the retail industry. As Millennials represented the largest workforce demographic, their work behaviour, attitudes, and engagement directed strategies in workforce development and talent management within the retail sector. Such patterns influence workforce planning for current and future employers. Since employee engagement is a critical factor in employee performance and productivity, this study aimed to explore and identify approaches to enhancing engagement for better organisational outcomes. Job crafting practices have been proven to have a positive impact on employee engagement, primarily in quantitative studies from Western countries (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012; Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2017; Vogt et al., 2016). However, this relationship remains underexplored in Hong Kong, particularly in the retail sector. The factors that facilitate or hinder job crafting in Hong Kong's retail workforce can inform the design of labour-market policies and enhance productivity. Qualitative findings can offer unparalleled detail and nuanced insight into specific phenomena or complex human behaviour that quantitative research cannot capture. In Hong Kong, for example, vacancy rates in the retail workforce

in 2017 and 2018 were around 10%, while turnover exceeded 43% (HKRMA, 2019). If the retail workforce shortage persists, Hong Kong's image as a shopping destination would be impaired. This qualitative study aimed to understand which factors Millennials considered important for improving engagement in Hong Kong retail organisations.

This research design began with selecting a topic and an appropriate paradigm. The study focused on job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail salespeople, emphasising their proactive motivations and work experiences. As the topic involved personal meanings and contextual understanding, the inquiry was grounded in an interpretive paradigm.

### **3.3.3 Research Questions**

Core Question: How are employee engagement and job crafting intertwined in the context of the Hong Kong retail industry among Millennials?

RQ1: How do job crafting practices influence employee engagement within the Millennial retail workforce?

RQ2: How do perceived organisational support and perceived human resource management practices impact job crafting and employee engagement?

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- I. To acquire an in-depth understanding of the practices and significance of job crafting among millennials in retail organisations in Hong Kong
- ii. To identify the challenges and the hindrances of job crafting in the work environment of the retail industry in Hong Kong
- iii. To evaluate management's perception and endorsement of job crafting practices
- iv. To explore the impact of organisational support and HR management practices on employees' perception of job crafting and employee engagement
- v. To examine the impact of job crafting on employee engagement for individuals and organisations
- vi. To gain an understanding of millennials' reward preferences and expectations, with the aim of enhancing employee engagement in the retail sector of Hong Kong

Nelson et al. (1995) stated that the choice of research approach depended on the questions asked, whereas the questions depended on the context that the researchers wanted to explore. This research study sought to explore and understand employees' behaviours, which were evolving and shaped by their experiences; a qualitative research method was well-suited to this objective.

Qualitative research emphasises how the inquiry is carried out and the overall orientation that guides the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). It is grounded in assumptions, a particular worldview, and a theoretical framework. It then examines research problems by exploring the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. To investigate such issues, qualitative researchers use a developing approach to inquiry, collecting data in natural settings that considers the people and locations being studied and then analysing the data to identify patterns or themes. The research presentation includes the participants' perspectives, the researcher's reflexivity, and a detailed description and interpretation of the problem (Creswell et al., 2006; Creswell et al., 2007).

The techniques employed in qualitative research can be likened to quilt-making, montage, or jazz improvisation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In qualitative research, researchers incorporate their own psychological and emotional perspectives into their interpretation of the data, empowering participants to share their stories while also creating opportunities for readers to envision and explore the research context. This process encourages readers to bring their perspectives to the research and develop new ways of understanding the topic underexplored (Creswell, 2013; Trainor and Graue, 2013).

#### **3.3.4 Research Strategy**

Since this study aimed to understand the complex work behaviours of job crafting and employee engagement among Millennials in a retail context in Hong Kong, a qualitative multiple-case study was adopted. In this study, 24 participants were recruited from three different organisations to explore these phenomena from the frontline staff's perspectives.

#### **3.3.5 Case Study**

Stake asserted that a case study involves examining the uniqueness and intricacy of an individual case, aiming to grasp its behaviour within significant contexts (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Yin (2009) posited that when the focus of a study is to answer 'how' and 'why'

questions and aims to cover contextual conditions, particularly when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clear, a case study can be used. The combination of an exploratory approach and an interpretivist epistemology supports a deep exploration of the complex and individualised nature of employee engagement and job crafting. This study focuses on participants' experiences and perceptions to make meaning of their subjective experiences, while acknowledging the socially constructed nature of the phenomenon. In view of generalizability, Stake (1995, p. 8) proposes that 'the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation.' Yin (2009) took a different approach, arguing that the case study findings are generalised to theoretical propositions rather than to populations (Yin, 2009, p. 38). He also emphasises the importance of analytic generalisation in case study methodology, where researchers aim to derive theoretical insights or generalisations from the in-depth analysis of individual cases. This study involved an in-depth and detailed investigation of real-life situations in the Hong Kong retail industry as the contextual setting, and it was justified to use a case study to illustrate this nested phenomenon. Additionally, the conceptual framework of this study was based on the SET and SDT to understand employee behaviours, which confirmed Yin's analytic generalisation.

This study adopted a multiple-case approach, and the richness of data from different organisations showed how similar phenomena performed differently in diverse organisational and social settings as well as how participants interpreted their experiences (Dyson and Genishi, 2005). The high employee turnover rates faced by these companies, coupled with the unique challenges and commonalities in millennials' work behaviours, highlighted the complexity of the context. Both Stake and Yin emphasised the importance of using multiple data sources to enhance the validity and reliability of case study findings (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This principle was essential to this research.

The unit of analysis for this study was the Millennials' frontline retail salespeople in Hong Kong. This choice supported an in-depth understanding of their experiences, perceptions, and behaviours related to job crafting and employee engagement. By examining individual-level data, the study aimed to uncover the personal and contextual factors that influenced their engagement and job crafting within Hong Kong's fast-paced retail environment.

### 3.3.6 Multiple case study design

This study adopted a multiple-case study approach. Within-case and cross-case strategies were used to comprehend the conceptual richness of employee engagement and job crafting work behaviour among Millennials. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) proposed that within-case sampling is inherently nested. Yin (2009) posited that the researcher should first identify and understand each case individually in the within-case pattern, then proceed to compare across cases to determine whether the findings show either literal or theoretical replication.

Based on this design, the study selected three contrasting cases to represent different organisational settings within Hong Kong's sports retail sector. This approach allowed the researcher to compare how organisational and managerial differences influenced employee behaviour. The within-case analysis provided organisation-level insights by comparing perspectives among different participant groups, such as frontline staff, shop supervisors, and line managers, to identify differences in perceptions and experiences of job crafting, as well as perceptions of HR practices and organisational support. The cross-case analysis revealed industry-level trends, best practices, and areas for improvement. It contributed to a holistic view of how job crafting and employee engagement functioned across three organisations in this retail industry.

The researcher selected a multinational company to typify the brand owner segment in this sports retail landscape. Among distributors, several significant players were considered, but the one chosen offered a systematic setup and prominent presence to typify distributors. For retailers, although large foreign and local retailers existed, a small local retailer with a distinct company culture, setup, and management systems was chosen for this study. According to Stake, the beauty of a multiple case study lies not in representation or generalisation but in the ability to explain patterns through unique cases (Stake, 1995). While the number of cases was small, the selected organisations offered diversity and in-depth examination. Herriott and Firestone (1983) stated that evidence from multiple cases is richer and more compelling than that from a single case study (Herriott and Firestone, 1983).

Background of the organisations:

Company A is a multinational brand owner with a structured and strategic HRM system. The Asia-Pacific HR team had adopted practices such as systematic training, a 360-degree

feedback appraisal system, and formalised performance management processes. One of its brands was selected as the case setting for this study. To maintain confidentiality, the thesis referred to the sport represented by that brand as 'A Sport'. It represented the multinational segment in the study.

Company B is a foreign-owned but locally managed distributor with over 100 retail outlets. Its structure is hierarchical, blending Western ownership with Chinese managerial practices. The HR function prioritised recruitment and daily operations to address persistent staff turnover. The parent company introduced an employee-engagement programme involving periodic surveys, but employees reported limited follow-through.

Company C is a small local retailer with around 50 stores, mainly in residential districts. It had a flat structure and limited HRM systems beyond basic payroll and recruitment. Recruitment for frontline roles relied mainly on referrals. The organisation also experienced heavy workloads and operational inefficiencies, contributing to high turnover among retail staff. It represented the small to medium-sized and discount segment in the Hong Kong retail sector.

These three organisations were selected because they represented contrasting contexts with distinct levels of organisational support and HRM practices, which were key antecedents in the conceptual framework. By analysing their distinct ownership backgrounds, work practices, and management approach, this study sought to identify both the similarities and differences in their organisational culture and to examine how these factors shaped employee behaviours.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Participant Selection:**

Based on the industry structure outlined in Chapter 1, three types of organisations, brand owners, distributors, and retailers, were purposively selected to represent Hong Kong's sports retail sector. A total of 24 participants from three organisations were selected for this study.

In phase one, invitation letters were sent to the human resources departments of the identified retail organisations. However, no responses were received within the first two weeks, and follow-up emails were sent again. Since 2020, the retail industry has suffered globally due to COVID-19, with people staying home to avoid infection. In Hong Kong, the

situation worsened with six months of social unrest starting in June 2019. Consequently, human resources departments were preoccupied with cost-cutting, headcount streamlining, and salary freezing plans, which made participation in research a low priority. To address the non-response, the researcher implemented a contingency plan. After another two weeks of waiting, purposive sampling was initiated in phase two by contacting line managers through personal connections to confirm their willingness to participate in the research.

Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling methods were applied to recruit participants working in these sample cases. Purposive sampling was a deliberate choice of participants due to the possession of extensive and relevant knowledge or experience related to the research topic (Bernard, 2002). According to Morse (2016), purposive sampling was used to identify relevant participants and maximise time and cost efficiency by focusing on depth over breadth. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also proposed that a purposive sample of participants with different backgrounds helps researchers to capture a broader range of viewpoints and to enhance the overall richness and depth of the data.

Qualitative samples are generally small and purposive. This study invited 24 interviewees from three retail organisations to participate in the research. Saunders and Townsend (2016) proposed that the number of participants in qualitative interviews in organisation and workplace studies should range between twelve and sixty. Each participant was assigned a code to ensure confidentiality while distinguishing company, role, and shop location. Codes beginning with A, B, and C were related to Companies A, B, and C, respectively. A1, B1, and C1 represented office-based line managers at the company level. A2, B2, and C2 referred to shop-level managers or assistant managers. R1-R18 indicated frontline retail employees across the three organisations (Company A: R1-R6; Company B: R7-R12; Company C: R13-R18). Labels such as Shop A1 or Shop A2 represented shops from different retail outlets. This ensured that data was collected from multiple shop locations.

Participants included 18 full-time retail frontline employees, three shop-in-charge (shop manager or assistant shop manager), and three line managers. Appendix 4.1 (Participant Profile) presents their demographics, job titles, education levels and backgrounds (country of study and work), and tenure. The sample selection criteria were frontline employees

born between 1981 and 2000 working in the same shop for at least six months (Dimock, 2019; Howe and Strauss, 2000). The participants reflected a balanced gender mix. Millennial participants were mainly aged between 24 and 32, with three managers above 35. Education levels ranged from junior secondary to university, with the majority having completed secondary studies. Frontline employees' tenure varied from one year to over five years, and all participants (including managers) reported no international education or work experiences. This confirms that their perspectives were shaped locally, without overseas exposure.

Initially, each line manager was asked to recommend a shop-in-charge for the interviews. After that, each shop-in-charge referred two millennial retail frontline staff members for participation. Following the initial interviews, the researcher asked the interviewed frontline staff to refer other individuals within the same company (not necessarily from the same shop) who met the predetermined criteria. These referrals were sought as part of the sampling process.

Some retail organisations rotated retail staff across different shops after they had worked in the same location for a certain period. Therefore, the researcher used six months as the minimum tenure criterion to ensure that frontline participants had enough time to adapt to the work environment and develop social relationships.

Prior studies have shown that line managers play an important role in HRM implementation. Alfes et al.(2013a) found that perceived line manager behaviour and perceived HRM practices were linked to employee engagement. Line managers included retail managers, department managers, or brand managers. They were management personnel who oversaw brand and retail shop performances, while also conveying the employer's values and culture through strategic decisions and guidelines. Their leadership was considered to significantly influence the implementation of HRM practices and shape organisational behaviour, impacting how these values are translated to the shop floor by the shop-in-charge. General staff perceive a symbiotic relationship between organisational support, human resources management practices, and line managers (Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). The shop-in-charge was also invited to triangulate the findings and explore relational crafting and social resources as they played a significant role in team collaboration (Jung, Yoo and Arnold, 2021). After each interview, participants received a \$100 supermarket coupon as a token of

appreciation for providing valuable information. In summary, based on preset criteria, the research study selected interview participants through a combination of HR outreach, personal connections with line managers, and employee referrals within the same company.

**Table 3.1 Types of Interviewees by Organisation:**

	<b>Brand Owner (multinational)</b>	<b>Distributor (foreign- owned, localised operation)</b>	<b>Retailer (local)</b>
Retail Staff	6	6	6
Shop-in-charge (shop manager or assistant shop manager)	1	1	1
Line Manager (Brand or Retail Manager)	1	1	1

The researcher's background and study focus were explained to the participants in the initial stage of the invitation process. Ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, either in coffee shops or restaurants, while the rest were carried out via phone or Zoom, depending on social distancing rules in Hong Kong and the participants' preferences. The researcher preferred face-to-face interviews, as they provided an opportunity to establish a trusting and effective rapport and allowed for direct observation and interaction. Wolff et al. (2019) suggested that active interviews involved staged social encounters, enabling interviewees and interviewers to adjust their responses to build better interactive rapport. In addition, participants' body language, tone of voice, and other non-verbal cues can provide deeper insights into their responses (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

#### **3.4.2 Interview Protocol:**

Before the interviews, an interview guide was prepared to ensure the conversations aligned with the research objectives. It was also used to probe for rich and detailed responses when necessary. The researcher's practice of probing after participants' responses was crucial for actively engaging with the interviewees. This approach was essential in seeking clarity and going beyond layers of self-presentation, metaphorically likened to 'peeling an onion' to explore the richness of contextual details (Wolff et al., 2019)

The developed interview protocol was used to guide semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, comprising Millennial retail frontline staff, shop supervisors, and line managers from three organisations. This protocol was grounded in established scales and theoretical frameworks to ensure the data collection matched the research objective. The questions were based on four focus areas: job crafting, employee engagement, perceived organisational support, and perceived human resource management.

The Job Crafting Questionnaire by Slemp and Vella-Brodrick was used as the foundation for constructing questions related to job crafting behaviours. This scale, an adaptation of Wrzesniewski and Dutton's task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting concepts, helped explore how employees actively shape their job roles (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2013).

Interview questions for employee engagement were designed based on Schaufeli et al.'s model of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The researcher referenced the Utrecht Work Engagement Questionnaire, which provided a clear framework to assess the quality of employees' work-related experiences (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006).

The perceived organisational support (POS) questions were derived from Eisenberger et al.'s Survey of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The interview protocol incorporated elements such as supervisor support, coworker support, justice, and the provision of growth opportunities, based on the study by Ahmed and Nawaz (2015). This ensured a comprehensive understanding of employees' perception of organisational support.

Interview questions for Perceived HRM Practices (PHRM) were developed with reference to Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) and Demo et al. (2012), which informed the structure and thematic coverage of the protocol. The final interview protocol included questions on development and skill-building, performance appraisal and feedback, reward experience and fairness, and opportunities to contribute to workplace decisions.

Selection was not included as a topic due to significant labour shortages in the Hong Kong retail sector. Rewards were addressed using WorldatWork's Total Rewards framework (2021), covering compensation, well-being, benefits, development, and recognition. Fairness was examined through pay, promotion, and recognition questions, while growth was explored within training and development items. This approach ensured consistent

coverage across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on their work experiences relating to their organisation.

The interview protocol employed critical incident questions, encouraging interviewees to describe instances where they engaged in job crafting and experienced employee engagement. Participants shared their experiences during these interviews, such as the support and challenges they encountered while engaging in self-initiated job crafting. The critical incident technique allowed participants to talk through real examples in their own words, producing rich data and helping them highlight experiences most relevant to the study (Gremier, 2004).

A ranking method was adopted for the reward-related questions, where interviewees were asked to rank their preferred rewards. Krosnick (1999) asserted that when choices were provided, ranking was the preferred method. The ranking method generated numeric data indicating which rewards Millennials valued most for sustaining engagement, and these results were integrated with qualitative interpretation.

### **3.4.3 Interview Process**

The interview process played a crucial role in gathering data for analysis. In this research setting, semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilised. These interviews provided flexibility and allowed researchers to seek clarifications whenever queries arose during the interview process (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on the participants' eagerness to share their experiences and perceptions.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore job crafting and engagement practices, the organisational work environment, and the perceptions of job crafting across various job levels. Each interview began with general questions to establish rapport and gather basic demographic information, followed by specific questions informed by related literature and established scales. The definitions of job crafting and employee engagement had been sent to participants before the interviews. These concepts were re-explained at the start of each session to ensure a shared understanding, as they might be unfamiliar to some participants. This was followed by core questions about their experiences with employee engagement and job crafting. Probing questions were used to encourage participants to share detailed experiences. Participants were also asked to elaborate on the obstacles to job crafting, their perceived experiences of organisational

support, and HR management practices. They were further invited to rank the rewards they valued most. For the shop-in-charge level (shop manager or assistant manager), questions focused on their understanding and acceptance of job crafting among their staff, including awareness of Millennials' workplace expectations. The researcher also asked questions about HR policies and organisational support to validate the data collected from the frontline staff. Interviews with line managers took a more macro view, exploring their understanding of what millennial frontline employees sought in their jobs and whether management endorsed job crafting practices.

All interviews were recorded in audio format to ensure accuracy and capture participants' responses in their own words. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to produce written transcripts. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the field notes and transcribed the conversation the other day to ensure the participants still vividly remembered what they had discussed. This quick transcription allowed the researcher to follow up promptly on any unclear points. This quick review process was crucial, especially given the extended timeline caused by COVID-19 delays. Among the 24 interviews, four follow-up calls were requested to verify understanding related to the discussion.

A pilot test was conducted in Fall 2021 before the actual interviews. The purpose was to ensure the effectiveness of the question phrasing, the interview flow, and the content of the questions to make the topics understandable for interviewees (Yin, 2015). The pilot study helped the researcher to improve the data collection plan based on participants' feedback. One line manager, a shop-in-charge, and two frontline staff members participated. Consequently, some probe questions were deleted, and the sequence of the questions was adjusted. This helped improve the interview process and time control, as the pilot test interviews lasted nearly 2 hours.

The decision not to employ focus groups in this study was due to sensitivity issues. It could be challenging to obtain honest opinions about company practices and HR initiatives in the competitive retail industry. The interview questions, which covered HR strategies, team relationships, and market intelligence, required one-on-one interviews to ensure candid responses. Since the interviews were conducted during the pandemic, the researcher avoided the observation method for safety reasons.

Participants signed an informed consent form to obtain voluntary participation before the interviews started. For those who were interviewed via Zoom and phone calls, the consent forms were given to them via email, and their endorsed consent forms were emailed to them in advance. The signed form was returned by email before the interview. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by assigning a code to identify each participant's data rather than using real names. Information was stored on the researcher's personal computer with password protection.

#### **3.4.4 Secondary Data:**

In addition to the primary data collected through personal interviews, secondary data were reviewed to contextualise this study. These included company profiles available online, internal employee handbooks and training manuals, frontline job descriptions from recruitment websites, industry reports (e.g., KPMG, 2019), trade association statistics (Hong Kong Retail Management Association, 2022), and prior academic studies on retail culture and generational work values. These materials were used to support the interview findings and enhance understanding of organisational practices, job roles, and cultures.

For example, the recruitment advertisements and employee handbooks were reviewed to verify the accuracy of benefits and HR practices described by participants, and any alignment or mismatch was noted during coding. In addition, job advertisements were examined to assess benefits such as leave entitlement, caring benefits (e.g., birthday leave), incentive and bonus programmes. The tone of the advertisement was also analysed to determine whether it emphasised guest experience and staff wellbeing or focused mainly on task requirements. These observations helped understand organisational culture and were later compared across cases. Training manuals were also reviewed to assess how detailed and comprehensive the formal learning materials were, which helped verify participant comments on training quality and support. Staff handbooks were also cross-referenced with interview excerpts and job advertisements to confirm the stated company policies. To maintain confidentiality, specific company citations and details were paraphrased to protect anonymity.

### **3.5 Research Analysis**

#### **3.5.1 Transcription Process**

This study used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with retail industry employees in Hong Kong. This analysis method allowed the researcher to comprehensively explore the participants' experiences and perspectives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee engagement and job crafting among Millennials.

Although thematic analysis is a fundamental method, it does not imply low quality. It is a systematic process that requires frequent reflection and multiple perspectives to uncover underlying phenomena through identified themes. This approach integrates analysis with context (Joffe and Yardley, 2004). Additionally, thematic analysis offers theoretical and paradigmatic flexibility. For example, this study used SDT to understand motivational factors influencing employee engagement and used Social Exchange Theory to examine employee responses to organisational support and job autonomy in Hong Kong's constantly shifting retail environment.

With the interviews conducted in Chinese, it was essential to ensure that the interview guidelines and probe questions were accurately translated to maintain the integrity and reliability of the data. The researcher, fluent in English and Chinese and fully aware of the concept, performed the initial translation from English to Chinese. This ensured that the essence and intended meaning of the questions were accurately captured. To enhance the reliability of the translations and reduce the risk of bias, the researcher engaged a second translator with a master's degree in translation. This translator had no prior knowledge of the research objectives or concepts. This approach helped mitigate any unintentional influence on the translation, resulting in a more objective view of the questions. Before the interviews, the two translated versions were compared and aligned to identify discrepancies. This step was crucial to ensure that both versions contained the same context and meaning of the questions. The same back-translation approach was used to translate the transcripts from Chinese back into English for accuracy and consistency.

### **3.5.2 Thematic analysis process**

Before delving into the steps of thematic analysis, it is crucial to understand how themes and codes work in the analysis process to make sense of this study. According to Clarke and Braun (2006), a theme refers to a structured interpretation or significance extracted from the data, which provides insight into the research question. Nowell et al. (2007) expand the definition, describing a theme as involving more data interpretation and integration. Themes in thematic analysis can be classified into two levels: the semantic level, which focuses on the surface and explicit meaning; the latent level, which concerns the underlying meanings, assumptions, or ideologies (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding is an iterative refining process in which new codes emerge from repeated reading and are layered onto the existing codes. Through thematic analysis, the researcher aimed to present a rich and in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives, contributing valuable insights to the existing literature on employee engagement and job crafting in the retail industry.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases in thematic analysis: a) Familiarisation with the data; b) Generating initial codes; c) Searching for themes; d) Reviewing themes for a thematic map for analysis; e) Defining and naming themes; f) Producing the report. The researcher applied these phases to the analysis and will discuss them later in this section.

### **3.5.3 Within and Cross Case**

The deductive-inductive approach was used in this thematic analysis. It combined theory-driven and data-driven approaches to identify themes and extend existing theories whenever emerging themes arose during the research process (Percy, Kostere and Kostere, 2015). Scholars suggest using established concepts and theories as the theoretical foundation for the initial theory design. This approach helps solidify the relationship between the emergent insights and existing theories (Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, 1988; Voss, Tsiriktsis and Frohlich, 2002).

This research study made comparisons between individuals and among different retail organisations (Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafel, 2003). Comparisons were developed through systematic coding and sorting of the data. The coded data were examined to identify themes and subthemes. As this study employed a within and cross-case approach, extracting and comparing similarities and variations across cases was more intensive than

in a single case study. Initially, comparisons were conducted among individuals within each company to identify important aspects of their experiences. Subsequently, comparisons were made across different companies to analyse individual differences and how organisational differences affected job crafting and engagement. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the data and offered a more comprehensive perspective on the research subject.

The analysis focused on individuals, including retail staff, supervisors, and line managers. This individual-level analysis explored how these concepts were perceived and practised by employees. The study examined three organisations, their broader HR practices, and organisational support cultures. This approach provided a comprehensive view of how individual behaviours and organisational contexts influence job crafting and employee engagement.

**Table 3.2 Within and Cross-Case Comparison Process**

<i><b>Comparison</b></i>	<i><b>Purpose</b></i>
Within each organisation	Identify key aspects of the experience.
Within company units	Identify patterns in themes within the organisation.
Across interviewees in similar roles (e.g., line manager to line manager)	Identify how themes vary among interviewees in the same role across the three companies
Across company units	Compare job crafting and employee engagement practices among different companies.

### **3.5.4 Thematic analysis in this study**

To apply the thematic analysis process in this study, the researcher transcribed the interview data word by word, reviewing audio recordings to ensure accuracy and to capture key insights on job crafting and engagement without missing important points. This familiarisation phase provided a foundation for further analysis, helping the researcher identify key phrases and concepts for initial codes related to Millennial frontline staff’s experiences. Boyatzis defined a code as the essential component to interpret key concepts tied directly to the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). During the process, the researcher used a codebook to jot down newly emerging codes and to retrieve earlier ones consistently across the three organisations (Ando, Cousins and

Young, 2014). In this study, the process of collecting codes, developing categories, and refining themes was consistently applied across all three case organisations. For example, in the initial coding stage, employees often emphasised workplace relationships and referred to their 'colleagues and friendship as work meaning' and 'my retail supervisor always supports me,' which highlighted the importance of relational ties in job crafting. Unused codes were noted in memos for potential relevance at later stages.

Next, the researcher refined these initial codes to identify recurring patterns, organising the data into broader analytic groupings. These groupings were iteratively refined into subthemes presented in Figure 3.2, such as 'relational support facilitates autonomy', 'meaning-making frames work as purposeful', 'supervisor recognition reinforces trust and perceived support', and 'friendship and work identity as sources of meaning'. These refined subthemes captured the essence of the coding outcomes. Following Braun and Clarke's recursive process, the researcher engaged in a back-and-forth approach between coding and analysis, reflecting and revisiting previous steps to ensure accuracy and alignment with the research questions. Themes were reviewed repeatedly to avoid overlap and to maintain internal coherence and clear distinctiveness.

To maintain consistency, the researcher regularly reviewed the codebook and memos to interrelate the codes and develop themes. At this stage of analysis, additional layers of meaning were identified, adding depth to the coding patterns. During the later stages of analysis, the researcher reviewed and refined the developing subthemes through recursive comparison with the coded data. The final themes were then developed by connecting these refined subthemes with broader concepts and the research questions for meaningful interpretation. The researcher assigned descriptive names to each theme to capture their core meanings. For each case company, the final findings were summarised in Chapter 4 through summary tables (Tables 4.2a-4.2b; 4.3a-4.3b; 4.4a-4.4b) that present the key subthemes, related code groups, representative codes, and multiple interview excerpts. In the final stage, a scholarly report was created to present and analyse the themes identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach provided insights into job crafting among Millennial retail frontline employees and informed how these practices relate to engagement.

Manual coding was implemented as Creswell and Poth noted that qualitative software offers advantages when handling very large datasets, which was not required for this

study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Microsoft Excel and Word were the software applications used to support this research process. Following the manual coding process, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 provide a visual summary of the analytic development within Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Figure 3.1 presents a sample of the initial coding from the early stages of the thematic analysis, while Figure 3.2 delineates the development from quotations to interpretive themes through a recursive and flexible process. It also provides a transparent link from the raw data to the refined subthemes. In sum, these figures visualise the analytic path from raw data to refined themes, which are later synthesised and discussed in Chapter 5.

**Figure 3.1 Initial Coding Map**

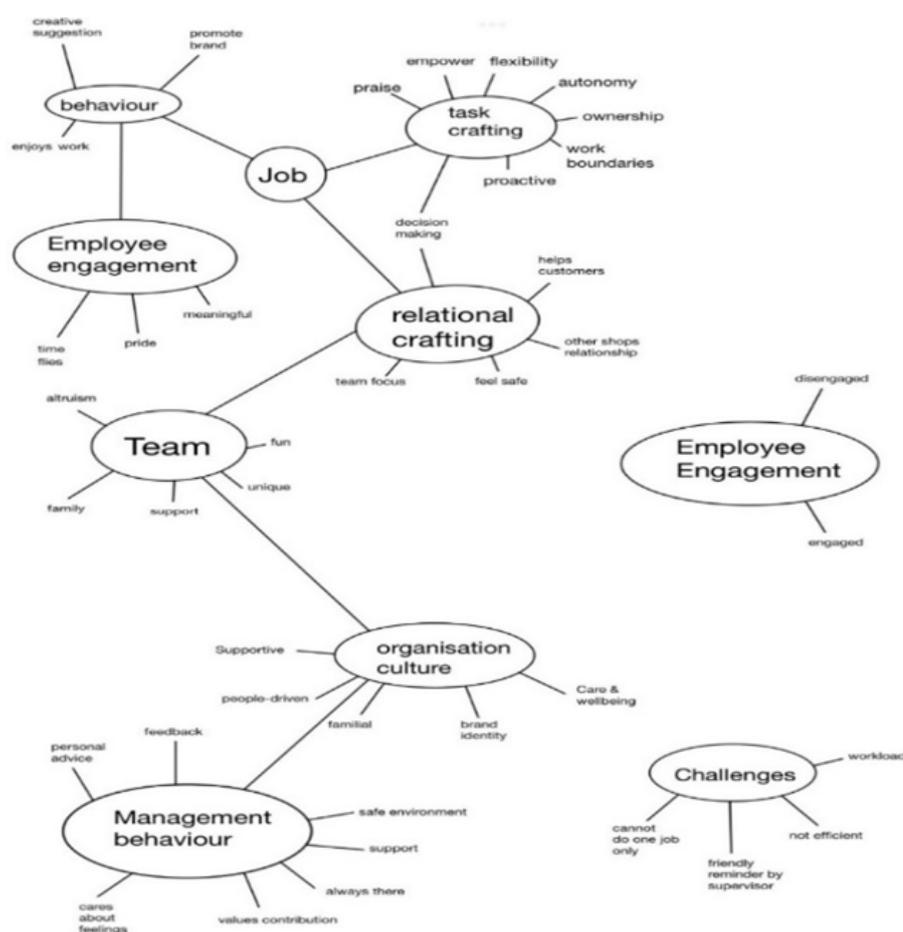
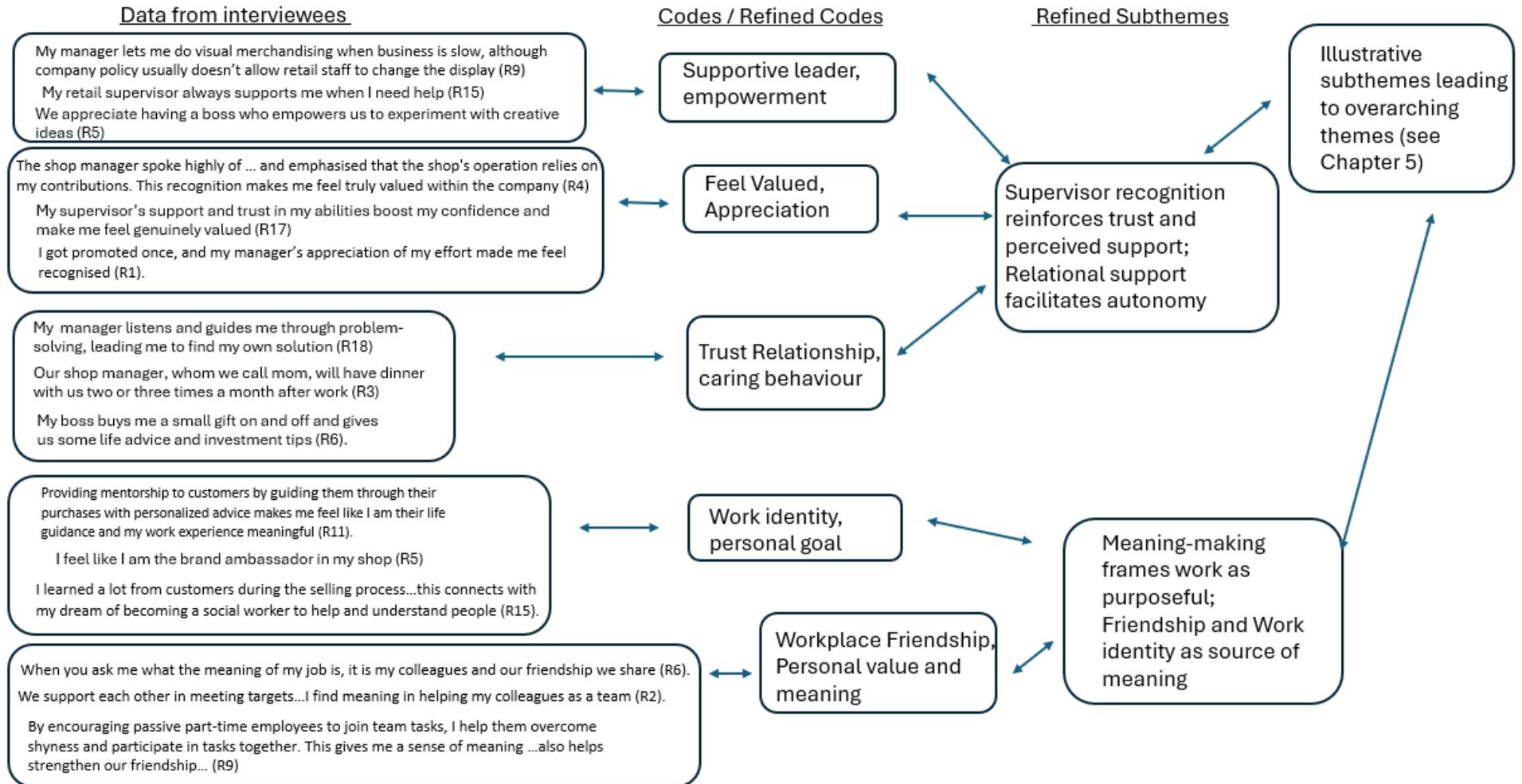


Figure 3.1 illustrates an example of the initial coding map, which shows how early codes were identified from interview excerpts and grouped into preliminary categories such as job, team, organisational culture, management behaviour, and employee engagement.

Figure 3.2 Thematic Analysis Process(Braun and Clarke, 2006): Data, Codes, and Refined Subthemes (Recursive and Interpretive Coding Flow)  
 (Recursive coding and theme refinement across all stages)



***This Figure presents the recursive coding and theme refinement process, following Braun and Clarke (2006). Multiple excerpts are drawn from participants across the three case organisations to support each code and to ensure analytic transparency.***

### **3.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

To ensure research quality and integrity, this study established clear procedures to enhance trustworthiness and uphold ethical standards throughout data collection and analysis. The following sections explain how rigour was achieved through triangulation, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. Ethical considerations are also discussed to demonstrate the researcher's commitment to transparency, confidentiality, and participant welfare.

#### **3.6.1 Triangulation**

According to Flick, triangulation in qualitative studies was not merely a strategy but an alternative to validation; it served as a method to test the validity of qualitative research by employing various methodological practices and diverse empirical materials (Flick, 2004). Data were collected from different individuals through interviews, focus groups, observations, and field notes during site visits (Creswell and Poth, 2018). To address misrepresentation and uphold ethical obligations, Stake recommended using multiple data sources (Stake, 1995). Triangulation of data enhanced the rigour and credibility of the study. In addition to primary interview data, secondary sources such as employee handbooks and training manuals were used to triangulate the HRM practices, recruitment advertisements to confirm the emphasis on sales accountability, job scope, and flexibility that employees described when discussing their job expectations, and industry reports to examine the wider context of staff shortage and turnover in the retail sector. These combined sources provided a cross-check on interview evidence and reduced the risk of relying on a single data stream, while company names and documents remained anonymised. Line managers and shop supervisors also contributed to the data triangulation to support and validate the interview findings.

#### **3.6.2 Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the overall quality of the study, which involves the data, the interpretation and the methods employed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) enhanced the notion of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, aligning them with the quantitative assessment criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity. This study generated trustworthy and insightful findings through a rigorous thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Applying multiple case studies by comparing similar and contrasting cases together also

helped improve the confidence of this work behaviour research. If a finding in one setting holds in another similar setting, the finding would become more reliable.

Bracketing refers to the method used to mitigate preconceived assumptions that the researcher has in mind. This is another way to confirm the validity of collecting and analysing data (Ahern, 1999). In this research, the researcher's experience was vital for framing this research project because the researcher played a central role in collecting and analysing the data. The researcher put aside her knowledge, values, and experience to minimise biases in the research process. Semi-structured interviews were used to guide the conversation and follow the clues of the participants, which minimised pre-assumed and planned research settings.

### **3.6.3 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the truth of research findings, i.e. the information provided represents a correct interpretation of the participants. To ensure internal validity, techniques such as extended involvement, continuous observation, triangulation, and member checks for data verification were employed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this research, prolonged engagement with participants was maintained to clarify interpretations during data analysis. Member checking was also conducted. After the interviews, the qualitative data were typed and sent back to the participants for content verification to avoid misunderstanding.

### **3.6.4 Transferability**

Transferability pertains to how far the findings of the study could be extended, applied, or generalised to other contexts or settings (Anney, 2014; Stahl and King, 2020). While qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalizability, this study enhanced transferability by incorporating data from three distinct organisations within the Hong Kong sports retail industry. This was supplemented with information from online company profiles. Additionally, a thick description of the participants and the research process, with emphasis on contexts, helped make the research more meaningful to outsiders (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). In this study, the researcher provided a detailed delineation of the research background, interview process, and research setting. These measures allowed for the contextualization of findings and the transferability of insights to similar retail environments.

### **3.6.5 Dependability and Confirmability**

Both dependability and confirmability relate to the trustworthiness and consistency of the research study. Dependability is about the stability of the findings, whereas confirmability refers to the confidence that the research findings are derived from the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). An audit trail and triangulation can further strengthen the reliability of the study. Regarding the audit trail, steps such as using systematic data collection and analysis processes, maintaining detailed documentation, and engaging in member checking helped improve the reliability and validity of this research. Furthermore, the researcher created a codebook throughout the process to record all procedures in detail to ensure transparency and support the audit trail. The triangulation practices also helped ensure that both criteria were met during this research process (Anney, 2014).

### **3.6.6 Reflexivity**

In the qualitative research process, reflexivity was essential in mitigating subjectivity and biases. Reflexivity involved critically analysing the researcher's conceptual perspective and preconceptions (Dowling, 2006; Haynes, 2012). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated, qualitative research consisted of interpretive and material practices, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, and memoing, to bring the world into view.

Reflexivity also required evaluating the researcher's role, biases, and assumptions throughout the study (Dowling, 2006). The primary aim was to remain aware of the risk of biases and their influence on the study's outcomes. This reflexive approach involved reflecting on how the researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, and social position shaped the research process and findings (Haynes, 2012).

Maintaining a reflexive approach was crucial for recognising biases and their possible impact on the study's findings (Newton et al., 2012). To support this, the researcher used memoing throughout the research journey, documenting thoughts, ideas, assumptions, perceptions, and reflections as they emerged (Dowling, 2006; Haynes, 2012; Newton et al., 2012). This transparent process facilitated a careful examination of underlying factors, resulting in a more balanced and unbiased interpretation of the data.

### **3.6.7 Ethical Consideration**

The purpose of this section is to protect the rights of the participants, conduct research ethically and transparently, and comply with the university's ethical policy. Maxwell

(2012) argued that ethics should not be treated as a separate component of the research design but integrated throughout it.

First, to preserve organisational anonymity, the actual names of the case companies and identifying citations were replaced with assigned names (Company A, Company B, and Company C). Publicly available information was used to provide relevant context while avoiding disclosure of organisational identities. Privacy and confidentiality were also key concerns for the participants. Each shop was assigned a unique code to identify members from the same team, and anonymity was maintained throughout the process. The brand in Company A was referred to as 'A Sport' to reflect its focus on active sports and performance. Two managers expressed concern about disclosing their job titles; therefore, the term 'line manager' was used for those in office-based managerial roles. This consistent use of assigned names and generalised titles ensured the confidentiality of both organisations and participants.

Second, personal and research data were restricted to the researcher and kept on an encrypted, password-protected computer. Only essential information was collected to minimise the risk of disclosing personal data. Participants' anonymity was maintained by using identity codes to replace their names. Compliance with the Hong Kong Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance further ensured privacy and confidentiality.

Third, participants were informed verbally about the purpose of the study, withdrawal procedures and the voluntary nature of the research. They had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. Before starting the interview process, participants were required to sign the informed consent form provided electronically via email, confirming that they understood the confidentiality statement.

Fourth, to protect personal data, only data related to research activity and necessary information, such as age, gender, years of employment, job title, and contact method, were collected. Sensitive details such as salary, ID numbers, religion, and addresses were excluded. Data were securely stored for up to two years and then destroyed.

The integrity of the research findings was safeguarded by complying with trustworthiness and ethical criteria during the research process. With the above measures in place, the study adequately addressed potential ethical issues to prevent any negative impact on voluntary participants, the university, and the researcher.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The researcher employed a multiple case study design, utilising qualitative methods to explore the phenomenon of job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail employees. Both within-case and cross-case analyses were conducted to gain in-depth insights into each case individually and to draw broader patterns and themes across cases. Participants for this study were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, ensuring the inclusion of individuals relevant to the research context. Data were gathered through interviews and document analysis to explore participants' perspectives and to examine relevant textual materials. By adopting this methodological approach, the study aimed to thoroughly understand the research topic while maintaining high rigour through the analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter is structured into six sections. Section 4.1 provides an overview and outlines the participants' profiles. Sections 4.2 to 4.4 apply a within-case approach to analyse each company individually, with Section 4.2 focusing on Company A, 4.3 on Company B, and 4.4 on Company C. In Section 4.5, the cross-case approach is used to compare the findings of the three companies. Section 4.6 presents a concise summary. Finally, the key responses from the participants from Company A to Company C are detailed in Appendix 4.2-4.4, Table 4.2-4.4.

### **4.1 Introduction**

The findings are based on twenty-four semi-structured interviews conducted across three retail organisations, involving line managers, shop supervisors, and frontline Millennials. A detailed participant profile, including demographic and employment information, is presented in Appendix 4.1.

This chapter is organised at two levels: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis examines five key areas: Job Crafting Practices, Challenges in Practising Job Crafting, Perceived Organisational Support and Perceived Human Resource Management practices, Engagement Motives and Psychological State, and Disengagement and Consequences. Each case is explored independently to interpret employees' lived experiences within its organisational context. The cross-case analysis then identified the similarities and differences among the cases to illustrate how contextual differences shape job crafting and engagement in the Hong Kong sports retail sector. This comparative process provided an integrated understanding of the multifaceted nature of job crafting and its implications for employee engagement and organisational support.

To preserve organisational anonymity, the researcher did not include identifying information or specific corporate references. Instead, publicly available industry data, as detailed in Section 3.4.4 on secondary data, was used to support case background descriptions.

### **4.2 Company A**

Company A, as a multinational brand owner, represents the most formalised HRM context among the three cases. This structured environment influenced how employees

interpreted organisational support, opportunities for job crafting, and their level of engagement.

In late 2019, the company faced a design-related issue that drew some negative attention in the market. During that time, the brand's creative direction was questioned, and this briefly affected customer sentiment and, for some staff, their level of engagement.

#### **4.2.1 An Integrated Approach to Job Crafting in Company A**

##### **Job Crafting Practices: Task, Relational, and Cognitive dimensions in Company A**

At Company A, job crafting emerged not just as an individual act but as interconnected behaviours that shaped both personal and organisational outcomes. Employees at Company A took proactive initiatives to craft their roles through task, relational, cognitive crafting, and collaborative crafting, with each form influencing and enhancing the others. Key participant quotes for Company A are detailed in Appendix 4.2

##### **A) Task Crafting**

**1) Job Expansion and Personalisation:** Employees at Company A actively engaged in task crafting, expanding their skill sets and reshaping their job roles based on personal values, strengths and preferences. For instance, (R2) embraced the role of a brand ambassador to align with his values to support the brand image.

**2) High Autonomy:** Autonomy was granted to staff for their own task crafting, although sometimes the shop managers would remind them about their original roles when the shops were busy. For instance, (R6), who shifted from customer-facing roles to inventory management according to her preference.

##### **B) Relational Crafting**

Relational crafting was exceptionally strong in Company A, involving not only relationships among co-workers and leaders but also with customers and stakeholders. The closest relationships were among the retail staff in Shop 1, which went beyond a friendly rapport but became family-like connections. Employees called the shop manager 'mom' and referred to each other as brothers, sisters, and cousins.

**1) Social Connections and Networking:** Networking and relationship-building supported effective operations with colleagues and customers. (R1)'s voluntary assistance to a customer who was sick and had no intention of making a sale

demonstrated this connection. (R4) also highlighted efforts to maintain relationships with other shops.

**2) Strong Collaboration and Teamwork:** Company A nurtured a family-like team environment, promoting trust and collaboration. For example, (R5) covered colleagues' shift, showing strong team spirit.

### **C) Cognitive Crafting**

Millennial employees in Company A continuously sought purpose and meaningful contributions through their work.

**1) Meaning-Making:** Employees ascribed meaning and purpose to their jobs and relationships, which made their work experience more fulfilling. For example, (R2)'s meaning-making from customers' trust and (R6) derived meaning from workplace friendship.

**2) Personal Value Alignment:** After experiencing job crafting, employees often felt happy and satisfied when personal values aligned with job tasks. (R5) aligned his interest 'A Sport' with his job.

### **D) Collaborative Crafting**

Collaborative crafting in Company A involved collective efforts to bring about desired changes at the team or organisational level. The team functioned cohesively during the competition, which led them to be awarded 'No. 1 sales performance in Asia.' (R4) mentioned that it was their team spirit that made it a success.

Among 6 frontline staff experienced job crafting across various dimensions, the team in Shop 1 showed collaborative crafting within the team.

## **4.2.2 Challenges in Practising Job Crafting in Company A**

While job crafting at Company A brought numerous benefits, it was not without challenges. It happened when it intersected with organisational norms and the specific needs of the employees.

### **A) Job perspective faced by frontline staff**

**1) Autonomy and Leadership Support:** The primary challenge involved was to obtain sufficient freedom in decision making. Overcoming this challenge required

fostering trust between teams and supervisors while adhering to company policies. (R2) expressed that the trust and mutual respect with the supervisor resolved most of the autonomy challenges.

**2) Work Intensity and Customer Engagement:** Employees also faced challenges relating to the intensity of their work, particularly when deep customer engagement detracted from other duties. As (R1) mentioned, it became difficult to balance engaging deeply with customers and managing time effectively to meet other job requirements.

## **B) Management's Perception of Job Crafting**

**1) Managerial Knowledge of Job Crafting Practices and the Benefits:** The hurdles encountered in job crafting primarily stemmed from a deficiency in managers' comprehension and awareness of the concept, as well as the benefits job crafting could bring to Company A. The management struggled to find the right balance between giving retail staff more freedom and decision making authority while preventing any misuse of that autonomy. (A2) also expressed concerns about the applicability of job crafting in the Hong Kong retail scene.

**2) Leadership and Empowerment:** Effective leaders created an environment for open communication and empowerment to facilitate the practices of job crafting. Company A's management appeared hesitant to endorse job crafting, lacking detailed analysis, yet both (A1 and A2) expressed interest in the concept.

Table 4.2a presents interview excerpts that support the interpretation of task, relational, cognitive, and collaborative crafting, as well as the related challenges discussed in Sections 4.2.1–4.2.2.

### **4.2.3 Organisational Characteristics in Company A**

#### **A) Organisational Support**

At Company A, HRM practices fostered job crafting by creating a supportive and engaging work environment. Supportive leadership inspired employees to align their values with the organisation's objectives, enhancing job crafting and engagement. Strong team

**Table 4.2a. Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company A: Job Crafting Practices and Challenges (Sections 4.2.1-4.2.2)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.2)
<b>(4.2.1) Job Crafting Practices - Integrated Approach</b>	<i>Task Crafting - Job Expansion and Personalisation</i>	brand ambassadorship, personal values, initiative	I've crafted my tasks to become the ambassador of the brand ... adds value to the customer experience and contributes to our brand image. (R2)
	<i>Task Crafting - Autonomy and Job Fit</i>	preferred task shift , self-choice	I don't like facing customers ... I have taken on inventory management responsibilities.(R6)
	<i>Relational Crafting - Team Work</i>	strong team work, altruistic behaviour	I covered my friend's shifts for fourteen consecutive days...exhausting, but bonding with my team makes it worthwhile. (R2)
	<i>Relational Crafting - Customer Connection</i>	customers relations, job alignment	I was very satisfied when customers became friends...this job aligns with my interests (R4)
	<i>Cognitive Crafting - Meaning and Purpose</i>	finding meaning, customer trust, value alignment	When customers trust me, I feel my work is meaningful because I can boost their self-confidence.(R2)
	<i>Collaborative Crafting - Team Achievement</i>	collective effort, shared goal, sales success	Our team spirit helped us become Asia's No. 1 sales performance shop ... I'm so proud of that.(R4)
<b>(4.2.2) Challenges in Practising Job Crafting</b>	<i>Autonomy and Leadership Balance</i>	supervisor approval, trust, role conflict	Sometimes, my immediate boss does not fully agree with the way I sell the products ... but she respects my decision.(R2)
	<i>Work Intensity and Customer Engagement</i>	time pressure, multi-tasking	When immersed in serving customers, , I barely have time to focus on building strong customer relationships.(R1)
	<i>Management's Perception of Job Crafting</i>	autonomy, trust, reframing jobs	Millennials like their space ...we trust them and give them autonomy to develop their strengths. (A1); Job crafting sounds interesting to me, especially in reframing the job. (A2)

collaboration and a caring atmosphere promoted the feeling of belonging. These HRM practices collectively contribute to a positive environment that facilitates job crafting.

- 1) Supportive Leadership: Employees expressed that they had a strong team spirit. Leaders with a positive leadership style helped motivate and inspire employees to

unleash their potential and enhance their job crafting experience. (R6) expressed that she felt valued and respected.

**2) Team Collaboration and Commitment:** The spirit within teams at Company A contributed to a supportive environment where employees felt a deep bonding and commitment. (R3) described how mutual support between team members helped them meet sales targets.

**3) Caring Work Atmosphere:** The organisational culture at Company A fostered a caring atmosphere, where well-being and personal relationships were prioritised, promoting relational crafting. Perceiving such caring support, in return, the frontline staff went above and beyond to support the supervisor, the brand and company sales objectives. The action of reciprocity was clearly shown in Company A, with two staff members emphasising how they felt cared for and responded by supporting managers to meet their targets.

**4) Eroded Trust in Brand Identity:** (R1) reported that changes in brand attitudes negatively affected cognitive crafting of some staff, worsening their perception of the brand identity and their sense of belonging.

## **B) Human Resources Management Practices in Company A**

While the PHRM framework (Wang et al., 2020) and the Total Rewards model (WorldatWork, 2020) guided the initial HRM categories in this study, the interview data indicated that frontline staff interpreted HRM more broadly. As participants repeatedly described training, feedback, fairness, and transparency as part of their daily experience of HR systems, these elements were incorporated into the PHRM categories to ensure alignment between the conceptual framework and the qualitative findings.

### **1) Total Rewards**

**Employees' Preferred rewards:** In Company A, total rewards encompassed compensation, well-being, company benefits, development, and recognition. Among six participants, 50% picked 'well-being' as their top choice, followed by recognition and compensation. Despite the importance of monetary rewards, participants emphasised that a positive working environment, characterised by strong team relationships and supportive leadership, was a key part of their well-

being. These criteria were important for job satisfaction and engagement when selecting or changing jobs.

**a) Compensation:** A Strategic incentive scheme was used as a tool to foster team bonding. The incentive scheme emphasised team support by having the manager redistribute excess orders to help staff who fell short of targets.

**b) Nurturing Well-being and Caring HRM Initiatives:** Well-being was unanimously the top preference among participants from all three organisations, while recognition and compensation were also highly valued. Company A's Wellness holidays and flexible work arrangements were highly appreciated by frontline staff, reflecting the organisation's commitment to employee health and its caring approach towards employees' well-being through supportive workplace policies. Almost all participants expressed pride and satisfaction when they mentioned the Wellness holidays.

**c) Recognition, Performance Appraisal, and Feedback:** The company had a systematic HRM system to ensure the objectivity of performance appraisals. Work goals were set annually and reviewed with managers every six months, providing an opportunity for recognition. (R1) indicated that the company recognised the effort he made, and (R2) mentioned he received regular feedback from his supervisor.

**d) Training and Development Opportunities:** Company A provided extensive training opportunities, including product training and customer service training, to strengthen the skill sets and competence. Training sessions continued even during COVID through Zoom.

**2) Fairness and Transparency:** Participants generally perceived the organisation as fair due to the integration of objective assessment systems into performance evaluations and promotions. Information was transparent and communicated through emails, and employees had equal opportunities to engage with upper management to express their thoughts. These perceptions align with procedural and distributive justice, as employees viewed both the decision making processes and the outcomes as fair.

To conclude, after reviewing the HRM practices and organisational characteristics, Shop 1 demonstrated the strongest collaborative and relational crafting among others. This internal variation reflected how differences in team atmosphere and leadership consistency shaped job crafting behaviour within the same brand.

#### **4.2.4 Employee Engagement in Company A**

The motives of engagement were determining factors as they indicated what made employees engaged. Employee engagement at Company A was primarily driven by a combination of vigour, dedication, and absorption. Management's perception of employee engagement and disengagement would also be discussed in this section.

##### **A) Motives for Employee Engagement**

Employees at Company A identified team collaboration and workplace friendship, leader-member exchange, supportive leadership, meaningful and purposeful work, person-job fit, empowerment and autonomy, proactiveness, work-life balance and well-being, and strong brand identity as crucial drivers of their engagement. Notably, 84% of participants highlighted the meaningful relationships with team members and supportive leaders as key factors fostering their engagement.

**1) Community and Support:** The relational crafting at Company A reflected family-like team bonding and workplace friendships, as noted by (R3). These close connections led to team members being more aware of and responsive to each other's emotions, which in turn influenced their levels of engagement.

**2) High Leader-Member Exchange:** At Company A, LMX was considered as high quality, with both frontline staff and managers highly participating and reciprocating positive behaviours. This mutual trust, respect, and obligation nurtured a proactive approach to relational crafting, where employees supported managers in achieving managers' monthly sales targets, as recalled by (R2). This LMX served as a key motivator for employee engagement, as it encouraged a deeper commitment and connection to their roles.

**3) Person-Job fit:** Employees provided numerous examples demonstrating how they tailored their roles to align with their preferences and values, making their jobs more meaningful (stated in previous sections). For instance, (R2) was enthusiastic about representing and promoting the brand to more sports

enthusiasts, and (R6) found meaning by focusing on her preferred tasks in managing inventory and stock, which she felt contributed to the team. This job crafting approach became a key motivator for employee engagement, as it allowed employees to master the job to align with employees' personal interests and meaning at work.

**4) Meaning and Purposeful Work:** Job crafting supported employees to adjust their roles with job significance and purpose, serving as a primary motivator for fostering engagement. By aligning their work with intrinsic interests, as demonstrated in (R3), employees were not only motivated but also committed to upholding the brand's reputation and ensuring customer satisfaction.

**5) Autonomy and Proactiveness:** Employees in Company A were allowed to make decisions and customise their tasks. This empowerment made them feel more in control and motivated to take a proactive approach to job crafting. The ability to modify their roles according to personal preferences became a key driver of increased employee engagement, as they felt more invested and committed to their work. (R3) shared that, acting on his own initiative, he refunded the customer before receiving official approval from the office, and his supervisor supported his decision.

**6) Work-life balance and Well-being:** Autonomy granted by job crafting and the caring HRM practices in Company A allowed frontline staff to enjoy the flexibility to accommodate personal needs and preferences for better work-life integration. Consequently, this flexibility enhanced their overall well-being and motivation as employees felt more empowered and connected to their work, leading to greater engagement.

**7) Job Satisfaction:** Frontline employees tailored their jobs to better fit their personal preferences and values, leading to job satisfaction. All participants in Company A reported job satisfaction, which served as a motivator for higher levels of engagement.

**8) Brand Identity:** Some frontline staff (R2 and R5) owned a strong brand identity and were highly connected with the brand. They were interested in the 'A Sport' and the identity of the brand. They proactively refined their tasks as brand

ambassadors to engage customers beyond sales transactions, but promoting 'A Sport' and the brand concept.

## **B) Experiencing Engagement Through Psychological States**

**1) Vigour:** Employees' resilience and energy existed in their daily work. (R2) demonstrated resilience during busy days.

**2) Dedication:** Pride and a strong identification with the brand motivated employees, enhancing their dedication. For example, (R2 and R5) shared their pride and identification with the brand and acted as brand ambassadors when serving customers.

**3) Absorption:** This state was characterised by deep immersion in work activities. When retail staff experienced absorption, they were deeply focused on their work and felt a state of flow where time passed unnoticed. (R5) reported that time flew when she and her colleagues were working as a team, which she described as an enjoyable experience.

## **C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement**

Understanding management's perspective on employee engagement was crucial because management's awareness and attitude towards engagement determine the support and resources allocated to fostering efforts like job crafting, whereas it supported enhancing engagement. Therefore, assessing management's perspective provided valuable insights into possible challenges and opportunities for promoting job crafting.

Management at Company A demonstrated a thorough understanding of employee engagement and its critical contribution to the company's success. They recognised that fostering employee engagement could lead to employees' job satisfaction, personal development, higher organisational productivity and overall job satisfaction, thus actively supporting initiatives to enhance it.

### **4.2.5 Disengagement in Company A**

#### **A) Challenges on PR Crisis and the Impact on Engagement**

While Company A demonstrated strong engagement through job crafting and a supportive work environment, it faced challenges that led to disengagement, particularly highlighted during a PR crisis in brand values and employee loyalty. The removal of a

politically sensitive sneaker design amid the social unrest in Hong Kong in 2019 led to disengagement among employees and customers, putting the resilience of its workforce to the test.

**1) Decline in Employee Morale:** According to (R1), many employees loved the brand and felt the company's actions betrayed its core values of authenticity and freedom of expression. This incident affected morale, revealing the fragile balance between corporate decisions and employee values, impacting both engagement and loyalty. Consequently, some employees from other shops left the company.

**2) Mitigating the Fallout through Positive Team Climate:** Despite this setback, the strong interpersonal connections fostered through relational crafting, particularly in Shop 1, helped mitigate the fallout. Leveraging a positive team climate, the organisation demonstrated resilience and adaptability in managing disruptions and disengagement.

Overall, at Company A, employees actively engaged in job crafting and found meaning through strong interpersonal relationships and supportive organisational policies. This contributed to greater significance in their work and high levels of engagement.

**Summary:**

Company A showed high engagement through close team relationships and strong supervisor support, helping employees find their work meaningful. Autonomy for task expansion and cognitive crafting also helped staff understand their roles. This work environment strengthened performance and built a resilient climate with connectedness and adaptivity, which allowed the company to handle occasional disruptions such as design-related issues. Caring HRM practices that focused on staff well-being further supported job crafting for higher engagement.

Table 4.2b summarises Interview excerpts that support the interpretation of organisational characteristics, employee engagement, and disengagement discussed in Sections 4.2.3-4.2.5.

**Table 4.2b. Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company A: Organisational Characteristics, Employee Engagement and Disengagement (Sections 4.2.3-4.2.5)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.2)
<b>(4.2.3) Organisational Characteristics</b>	<i>Family-Like Team Climate</i>	friendship, emotional bond, manager care	The shop manager spoke highly of me...This recognition makes me feel truly valued within the company. (R4)
	<i>Caring Work Atmosphere</i>	workplace friendship, family-like team	Our manager, whom we call mom...we go shopping together on holidays.(R3); my boss buys me small gifts on and off and gives us some life advice. (R6)
	<i>Caring HRM</i>	wellbeing, flexibility	appreciate the Wellness holidays for the flexibility ...make me feel that our company genuinely cares about our health and safety. (R2)
	<i>Perforamnce Appraisal, Recognition</i>	feedback, recognition	my effort made me feel being recognised. (R1); lots of chances to get feedback from the managers informally. (R2); We are encouraged to voice concerns to senior levels. (R5)
	<i>HRM, Fairness</i>	transparency, communication	the promotion system is quite fair. (R3); The company is transparent. (R1)
<b>(4.2.4) Employee Engagement</b>	<i>Trust and Psychological Safety</i>	sense of belonging, open communication	I trust my family here and feel safe even though I make mistakes.(R3)
	<i>Leader-Member Exchange</i>	management support, reciprocal relationship	struggle to meet our individual daily targets...they reassign their sales orders to help us out. Their altruistic and caring leadership energizes me ...more engaged and enthusiastic. (R2)
<b>(4.2.5) Disengagement Indicators</b>	<i>Breach of Organisational Values</i>	loss of trust, disillusionment, turnover intent	Several people left because they felt the company betrayed its own values.(R1)

## 4.3 Company B

### Introduction

In Company B, a foreign-owned but locally managed distributor, hierarchical communication norms and surface-level HRM practices affected how employees viewed managerial support and the credibility of engagement initiatives. Employees perceived these initiatives as routine procedures rather than genuine efforts to support them, which reduced their trust in the organisation.

### Restricted Opportunities for Job Crafting in Company B

#### Job Crafting Practices in Company B

In Company B, the perceived opportunities to job crafting were limited to task adjustment and relational crafting, particularly with supervisors and teams. Key responses on Job crafting initiatives for Company B are detailed in Appendix 4.3.

#### A) Task Crafting

**1) Skill Expansion for task significance:** The hierarchical structure limited crafting opportunities, so task modification was used to ascribe new meaning. (R7) found that customer interactions with elderly clients were meaningful, viewing their role as providing service beyond a transactional relationship.

**2) Task Modification:** Participant (R8) expressed frustration with limited task flexibility as she wanted to take on visual merchandising to add meaning to her role, which was her interest.

#### B) Relational Crafting

**1) Social Connections and Customer Engagement:** (R10 and R12) primarily highlighted connections between customers and themselves based on different reasons, such as driving business, friendship, and for their own learning intentions.

**2) Team Cooperation:** Employees fostered team cohesion to facilitate stronger team bonds. (R10) proactively approached part-time staff for better collaboration.

#### C) Cognitive crafting

**1) Meaning-Making and Task Significance:** Enhancing customer experiences and creating joyful customer journeys emerged as meaningful work values in most of

the employees, such as (R9 and R11). (R12) had a different perspective, prioritising monetary rewards over customer connections.

#### **4.3.2. Challenges in Practising Job Crafting in Company B**

##### **A) Employees' Difficulties with Job Crafting Practices**

**1) Autonomy Constraints:** Despite enthusiasm from employees to propose proactive task crafting to enhance customer engagement, some participants (R10 and R11) felt disappointed that the shop managers rejected constructive ideas regarding effective sales strategies.

**2) Lack of Perceived Opportunity to Craft:** Frontline staff were constrained by rigid store policies and thus lacked opportunities to redesign their jobs. For example, (R8) wanted to engage in relational crafting with customers, but this was rejected by the manager.

##### **(B) Management's Perspectives on Job Crafting**

Management at Company B held a cautious attitude toward the practice of job crafting within the retail setting. Their concerns largely stemmed from the complexity of job roles and their perceived stereotypes in Millennials' character traits.

**1) Scepticism and Concerns:** The concept of job crafting faced many scepticisms by managers who questioned its efficacy and suitability. (B2) had concerns that job crafting might compromise the balance and efficiency required in a tightly coordinated retail environment.

**2) Perception of Millennials:** (B2) also expressed concerns about motivating Millennials and assumed Millennials were lazy. This perception suggested a disconnect between managerial expectations and the actual engagement levels of younger staff.

**3) Leadership and Perception in Empowerment:** Despite suggestions from employees to innovate and improve processes, such as enhancing sales strategies or customer interactions, managers often resisted these changes. Specifically, (B1) believed that the training provided to retail staff was adequate, and (B2) shared that empowering frontline staff was not considered necessary.

#### **4.3.3 Organisational Characteristics in Company B**

## **A) Organisational Support**

In Company B, only two out of six participants mentioned that they had received manager support for task crafting and praise for their performance. The other four claimed that they did not perceive the supervisor as supportive.

**1) Leadership in Diverse Management Style:** After reviewing the organisational characteristics of Company B, it was clear that leadership style influences job crafting practices. (R9) under supportive supervisors reported some degree of autonomy and open communication, whereas those led by transactional leadership style, such as (R10), faced tighter control and weaker trust. This contrast illustrated uneven leadership influence and its impact on employees' engagement initiatives.

**2) Team Dynamics:** The transient nature of the workforce hindered the development of deep team connections. (R7) indicated that high turnover rates contributed to limited chances to cultivate cohesive relationships, making it challenging to develop team-driven sales strategies.

**3) Organisational Constraints and Hierarchical Structure:** The hierarchical structure, consistently described by the employees, discouraged shop-in-charges from forming close, supportive relationships with staff, hindering task and relational crafting. Table 4.3a highlights Interview excerpts that support the interpretation of task, relational, cognitive, and collaborative crafting, as well as the related challenges discussed in Sections 4.3.1-4.3.2.

## **B) Human Resources Management Practices**

### **1) Total Rewards**

**Employees' Preferred Rewards:** In company B, Well-being, Compensation, and Training and Development were the top three rewards preferred by the participants. The results were quite average among the six participants. They all agreed that total rewards were key motivators. Same as Company A, they emphasised that they would not switch jobs solely for better rewards. Work-life balance, positive team climate, and effective leadership were equally vital.

**Table 4.3a. Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company B: Job Crafting Practices and Challenges (Sections 4.3.1–4.3.2)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.3)
<b>(4.3.1) Job Crafting Practices - Restricted Opportunities</b>	<i>Task Crafting - Skill Expansion for task significance</i>	customer care for elderly clients, learning from customers	I've read about aging issues ... be their friendly support and companionship during their visit.(R7)
	<i>Task Crafting - Task Modification and Interest</i>	desire for visual merchandising, manager rejection	I enjoy designing window displays ... but my manager prefers I focus on sales.(R8)
	<i>Relational Crafting - Team Cooperation</i>	Encouraging part-timers, team bonding	Encouraging passive part-time employees to join team tasks ...build a collaborative atmosphere.(R9)
	<i>Relational Crafting - Social Connection</i>	customer engagement, interest	I enjoy talking with customers to learn from their unique experiences.(R12)
	<i>Cognitive Crafting - Meaning Making</i>	purpose beyond sales, personal value of work	I always reframe my work purpose to satisfy customer needs ...I feel I'm providing value beyond just meeting sales targets. (R9)
	<i>Cognitive Crafting - Meaningful purpose</i>	personal value	Making money for my future study is the meaning and purpose of working here. (R12)
<b>(4.3.2) Challenges in Practising Job Crafting</b>	<i>Lack of Perceived Opportunity to Craft</i>	unsafe environment, boss-worker conflict	My shop manager complains I should focus on big sales instead of building customer trust.(R8)
	<i>Managerial Scepticism and Concerns</i>	fear of inefficiency, imbalance task focus	Job crafting could lead to employees focusing too much on tasks they enjoy ...disrupt shop operation...(B2)
	<i>Leadership and Empowerment</i>	resistance to ideas, control orientation	Frontline staff often propose things... but I believe we need to adhere to company policies...ensure central control.(B2)

**a) Employee Well-being Initiatives:** The shop manager accommodated staff requests to avoid working on public holidays, understanding that the Millennial valued work-life balance as a top priority.

**b) Training and Career Development Opportunities:** Training within Company B was inadequate. (R8) noted that there were instances where new hires decided to leave the company due to training delays.

**c) Performance Appraisal, Recognition, and Feedback:** There was a notable lack of clear communication and feedback regarding what was required for promotion, leaving employees uncertain about their career advancement paths. Five participants told the researcher they were unsure how to secure a promotion.

**2) Fairness, Transparency, and Communication:** The employees believed the company's practices were generally fair, though occasionally lacking proper communication. For example, (R7) recalled that his promotion was informed through email instead of by his direct supervisor.

#### **4.3.4 Employee Engagement in Company B**

##### **A) Motives for Employee Engagement**

**1) Meaningful Customer Interaction:** In Company B, (R7) and (R12) identified meaningful customer relationships as the primary driver of engagement.

**2) Power of Autonomy:** (R7 and R8) mentioned being highly engaged when he had a chance for autonomy and faced work challenges, despite the company generally lacking empowerment.

**3) Limited Autonomy and Proactiveness:** Due to the lack of support and autonomy in Company B, retail employees sought crafting opportunities proactively to align with their interests. (R8) modified the display, and (R11) guided customers as life advice; these actions aligned with their personal interests.

##### **B) Experience Through Vigour, Dedication, and Absorption**

**1) Vigour:** (R9) found energy and engagement in helping customers.

**2) Dedication:** Employees experienced meaningfulness and pride in their work dealing with customers, which allowed them to invest more in their jobs.

**3) Absorption:** (R9) experienced losing track of time while analysing sales data

##### **C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement**

Management in Company B linked the concept of engagement with employee motivation. While they prioritised conducting engagement surveys to monitor and measure engagement levels, they focused less on developing strategies to enhance engagement, indicating a more measurement-focused rather than action-oriented approach.

### **4.3.5 Disengagement by Apathetic Leaders in Company B**

#### **A) Trust in Leadership and Top-Down Culture**

Trust between leaders and employees was rarely mentioned. Participants cited incidents of unempathetic attitudes from leaders who prioritised tasks over genuine concern for employee well-being. Furthermore, the company's mandatory greeting steps left frontline staff feeling disrespected and somewhat unreasonable. Two staff members expressed that the company was not their preferred employer.

#### **B) Lacking Communication and Autonomy**

In Company B, employees feel disengaged due to limited autonomy and poor communication from leaders, as shared by (R11 and R12). This results in a lack of understanding of what employees find meaningful in their work. The hierarchical culture further frustrates employees, as their ideas are often disregarded. Feeling their roles lack purpose and their contributions are not valued, employees may ultimately decide to leave the company.

#### **Summary**

Employees at Company B were primarily motivated by relational crafting through meaningful customer relationships. However, the company faced challenges due to inadequate organisational support, ineffective HR practices, and a hierarchical corporate culture. The leaders failed to create an environment that fostered crafting and engagement. These issues hindered mutual trust development, limiting employee autonomy and control. Consequently, this led to demotivation, reduced productivity, and a decline in overall organisational performance in the long run.

Table 4.3b provides Interview excerpts that support the interpretation of organisational characteristics, employee engagement, and disengagement discussed in Sections 4.3.3-4.3.5.

**Table 4.3b Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company B: Organisational Characteristics, Employee Engagement and Disengagement (Sections 4.3.3-4.3.5)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.3)
<b>(4.3.3) Organisational Characteristics</b>	<i>Leadership Support</i>	uneven supervisor support;, manager inconsistency	My manager allowed me...to deliver product to customer...even though it was against company policy. (R8); My boss frequently ignores my suggestions ...(R10);
	<i>Team Dynamics</i>	high turnover, weak cohesion	The rapid staff turnover makes it difficult to establish strong team spirit.(R7)
	<i>Well-being</i>	importance of work-life balance	I value work-life balance...I seldom work overtime here.(R8)
	<i>Inconsistent Performance Appraisal</i>	unclear promotion	I am uncertain about what more I should do to secure a promotion. (R7)
	<i>Lack of Feedback, Poor HRM</i>	lack of feedback, poor communication	...not much feedback received from the management .(R9); I discovered my promotion through an email.(R7)
<b>(4.3.4) Employee Engagement (Motives and States)</b>	<i>Meaningful Customer Interaction</i>	relationship building, trust	I feel meaningful and engaged when ...establish a trusting relationship with customers.(R8)
	<i>Vigour, Dedication, Absorption</i>	energy, pride, time loss in work	I am a big fan of the brand ... my passion and energy are contagious.(R9); feel proud after helping the customer (R7); lose track of time (R9)
<b>(4.3.5) Disengagement by Apathetic Leaders</b>	<i>Trust in Leadership</i>	lack of empathy, formalism	When I called in sick ... the shop manager only wanted a doctor's note ... made me feel mistrusted.(R11)

## 4.4 Company C

In Company C, a flat structure gave frontline staff considerable autonomy, yet limited resources and heavy workloads weakened their perception of organisational support and left them with little space to craft their roles. These conditions contributed to frequent turnover and different levels of engagement across the organisation.

### 4.4.1 High Task Crafting and Heavy Workload in Company C

#### Job Crafting Practices in Company C

At Company C, job crafting reflected informal and self-directed behaviours shaped by high autonomy and laissez-faire leadership, which demonstrated how employees crafted their roles in response to limited HR support. Relational crafting was supported by a cooperative team and a loyal, well-acquainted customer base. Key responses on Job crafting initiatives for Company C are detailed in Appendix 4.4.

#### A) Task Crafting

- 1) Job Enrichment and Proactiveness:** In Company C, (R14) shared that she enjoyed task crafting and the flexibility gained in job customisation in their role, which made them more accountable for her role.
- 2) Autonomy:** Due to the labour shortage, (R13 and R16), who had job titles as retail sales assistants, were actually in charge of the shop's operation, which made them feel valued and satisfied.
- 3) Competency and self-identity:** (R16) demonstrated competence and a shift in self-identity by proactively managing sales and orders, even during time off.

#### B) Relational Crafting

- 1) Social Connections with customers:** Through relational crafting, employees built strong connections with customers, enhancing their passion for work. (R16) recalled that customers would sometimes buy her an afternoon tea, which made her feel connected to them.
- 2) Supportive Team:** Millennial employees (R16 and R18) greatly valued leaders who employed coaching techniques to give guidance on workplace practices.

Further, in some locations with one large shop and one small shop side by side, employees expressed that the teams supported each other well.

### **C) Cognitive Crafting**

**1) Meaning-Making and Value Alignment:** Employees' purposes varied, with one-third finding meaning in monetary compensation due to the exhausting nature of their work. The remaining two-thirds found purpose in engaging with customers.

#### **4.4.2 Challenges in Practising Job Crafting in Company C**

##### **A) Overwhelming Workload from the Employee's Perspective**

**Work Intensity:** The overwhelming workload left employees such as (R16, R17 and R18) exhausted, draining the energy needed for cognitive crafting to reshape their roles and find meaning.

##### **B) Management's Perception**

**Managerial Knowledge of Job Crafting Practices:** While Company C's leadership provided autonomy and authority to employees, they did not endorse job crafting due to labour shortages and the expectation that employees handle a wide array of tasks.

#### **4.4.3 Organisational Characteristics in Company C**

##### **A) Organisational Support**

In organisational support, most tasks were performed manually, leading to inefficiencies in Company C. The lack of technological support, especially in stock management, was a major concern. Employees had to rely on manual updates instead of automatic replenishment systems. This workload also contributed to the shortage of labour, as new recruits quickly left due to the overwhelming workloads. While shop managers were supportive, empowered, and engaged closely with their teams when needed, the lack of technological infrastructure limited overall operational effectiveness. The POS was low, negatively affecting employee morale and retention.

**1) Leadership:** Shop leaders in Company C fostered supportive relationships with (R17) and the team. Moreover, shop staff would help each other and establish relationships with other shop members for better work cooperation.

##### **2) Organisational Constraints:**

**a) Heavy Workload:** Reported by (R13), outdated retail technology led to an excessive workload and high turnover, hindering Millennial employees from engaging in job crafting.

**b) Laissez-Faire Leadership in Senior Management:** Despite the independence gained from empowerment, employees lacked organisational support for their heavy workloads and daily challenges, as noted by (R14). They were not able to raise these issues directly to HR or the senior management team

## **B) Human Resources Management**

HRM practices at Company C were notably underdeveloped. The HR department was very small and lacked proper functionality beyond recruitment. Essential HR functions such as training and development, performance appraisal systems, and channels for feedback and recognition were extremely limited. Employee well-being was largely ignored, as evidenced by long working hours and few holidays. This lack of comprehensive HR support contributed to high turnover rates and overall dissatisfaction among employees. The poor HRM practices (PHRM) further diminished the perceived organisational support, creating a cycle of disengagement and high employee turnover.

Table 4.4a presents Interview excerpts that support the interpretation of task, relational, cognitive, and collaborative crafting, as well as the related challenges discussed in Sections 4.4.1-4.4.2.

### **1) Total Rewards**

**a) Preferred Employee Rewards:** Both compensation and well-being were their top preferred rewards, followed by recognition.

**b) Employee Well-being:** Four employees complained that labour shortages prevented them from taking annual leave. Although Company C offered small gifts during festivals, these gestures failed to motivate

**c) Lack of Training and Development Opportunities:** Training was primarily vendor-led and conducted online, with selling skills taught on the job. However, four staff reported that they had never attended any training in Company C.

**Table 4.4a. Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company C: Job Crafting Practices and Challenges (Sections 4.4.1-4.4.2)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.4)
<b>(4.4.1) Job Crafting Practices - High Task Crafting and Heavy Workload</b>	Task Crafting - Autonomy	independent shop operation, ownership, personal goal	I'm empowered to take charge of shop operations and daily business ... being a shop owner is my life goal.(R13)
	Task Crafting - Competency and Self-identity	self-management, responsibility, professional growth	I took the initiative to regularly review daily sales ... it helped me see myself as a shop in-charge.(R16)
	Relational Crafting - Team Support	interdependence, team and leader support	I felt supported by my manager and teammate...their assistance made me feel supported."(R16); My shop manager listens and guides me ... the decisions come from my ideas.(R18)
	Relational Crafting - Customer Connection	customer loyalty, neighbourhood bond, emotional reward	Most of the customers ...even buy me afternoon tea...makes me feel connected and satisfied. (R16)
	<i>Cognitive Crafting - Meaning and Value Alignment</i>	monetary motivation, personal growth, personal value	Manpower shortage exhausts me daily, but the monetary compensation give me dual benefits...learning store operation...also become my parents' bank... the pay here is closer to what supervisor earn...makes me feel my effort is paid off (R18).
	<i>Cognitive Crafting - Meaning and Value Alignment</i>	personal meaning, job alignment	[customers]who live nearby and share their stories. This connects with my dream of becoming a social worker to help and understand people.(R15)
	<b>(4.4.2) Challenges in Practising Job Crafting</b>	<i>Work Intensity and Fatigue</i>	heavy manual work, lack of time for reflection
<i>Management's Perception of Job Crafting</i>		idealistic concept, labour shortage pressure, multi-tasking expectation	Job crafting sounds kind of idealistic ... we need staff to handle different tasks.(C2)

## 2) Fairness and Recognition

**a) Performance Appraisal:** Employees at Company C lacked clarity on career paths, and appraisals were done irregularly, leading to inconsistent recognition and promotion standards, as noted by (R16 and R17).

**b) Salary Disparity:** (R14) perceived unfairness in the salary range and highlighted the salary disparity for new hires.

Within Company C, one employee expressed frustration about pay inequalities between newcomers and long-serving staff (R14), while another viewed the higher pay compared with larger retailers as recognition that his effort had paid off (R18). These contrasting views reflected a tension between fairness and the autonomy employees valued in their daily work.

#### **4.4.4 Employee Engagement in Company C**

##### **A) Motives for Engagement**

In the interviews, 50% of the participants expressed that the autonomy they enjoyed fuelled their motivation and job engagement. Some also highlighted the value of customer interactions and a friendly work atmosphere in cultivating job satisfaction and fostering engagement at work.

**1) Autonomy, Challenges and Job Satisfaction:** Task crafting with autonomy and skill expansion played a key role in Company C. The autonomy provided to (R14 and R17) gave them opportunities to take initiatives in learning new skills and overcoming challenges at work, which in turn fostered job satisfaction.

**2) Meaningful Work:** Most of the meaningful work at Company C came from helping customers and fulfilling their needs, as noted by (R13 and R15).

**3) Person-job fit:** (R14) shared that granted autonomy supported employees to align their interests and values with the job role.

**4) Social Connection and Engagement:** The empowerment and carefree management style in the office created a cooperative work environment on the retail floor, since frontline staff needed to support each other, as explained by (R15).

##### **B) Feeling Engaged Through Vigour, Dedication, and Absorption**

**1) Vigour:** Vigour could also be found when the employees were encountering difficulties and challenges. Owing to the limited organisational support, (R14) needed to find solutions proactively, which made her engaged.

**2) Dedication:** Staff engaged at work when they faced challenging sales targets independently. (R13) felt meaningful in mentoring new staff. Both challenging and meaningful brought dedication at work.

**3) Absorption:** At Company C, employees always encountered instances of absorption when they were fully immersed in their tasks, such as (R13).

### **C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement**

The manager at Company C believed that employee engagement was a blend of team passion and motivation. They thought that compensation was a key factor for Millennials, so they offered higher salaries to motivate shop staff and empowered shop managers to foster team passion, emphasising these elements in their management practices.

#### **4.4.5 Disengagement Exacerbated by Heavy Workload and Unfairness**

**A) Workload:** (R15) voiced his frustration and dissatisfaction with the time and energy spent on logistics aspects of the job that did not align with his initial expectations.

**B) Unfairness:** In addition to the excessive work demands, salary inequity also detrimentally impacted employee engagement, as noted by (R14).

### **Summary**

To summarise, Company C provided employees with considerable autonomy. The leadership adopted a laissez-faire approach and intervened minimally in task execution. This setup encouraged employees to own their responsibilities and make decisions independently. In such a workplace, job crafting, which is characterised by proactive self-management strategies, could efficiently boost employee engagement if HR support and operational processes were of a high standard.

Table 4.4b summarises Interview excerpts that support the interpretation of organisational characteristics, employee engagement, and disengagement discussed in Sections 4.4.3-4.4.5.

**Table 4.4b. Thematic Summary of Categories, Codes, and Interview Excerpts for Company C: Organisational Characteristics, Employee Engagement and Disengagement (Sections 4.4.3-4.4.5)**

Main Category	Sub-Category	Representative Codes	Interview Excerpts (Appendix 4.4)
<b>(4.4.3) Organisational Characteristics</b>	Leadership	supporting leaders, corporative	My supervisor is accomodating...and support from other shops.(R14)
	<i>Organisational Constraints</i>	outdated systems, missing headcount, laissez-faire management	lack of support in logistics ...make me feel disappointed. The missing headcount in my shop was never filled .(R14)
	<i>Total Rewards</i>	pay focus, well-being neglected, poor HRM	Money is what I'm looking for in this company.(R18); I haven't had annual leave in six months.(R17)
	<i>Performance Appraisal, Lack of Feedback</i>	poor HRM, no feedback, no training	I don't know what's missing in my performance ... never provide feedback.(R16); I never joined any training.(R15)
<b>(4.4.4) Employee Engagement (Motives and States)</b>	<i>Autonomy and Satisfaction</i>	self-learning, personal growth, decision authority	Everything is through self-learning ... I enjoy solving problems on my own.(R14)
	<i>Person-Job Fit</i>	creative decoration, display interest alignment	I like dressing up the shop during festivals ... enhance my job satisfaction and engagement.(R14)
	<i>Vigour, Dedication, Absorption</i>	energy from challenge, mentoring satisfaction	Despite pressure, empowerment fuels me with energy.(R14); I feel satisfaction...mentor new employees.(R15)
<b>(4.4.5) Disengagement by Heavy Workload and Unfairness</b>	<i>Unfairness and Inequity, workload and fatigue</i>	salary inequality, inefficiency and manual work	Someone with the same title... received higher salary.(R14); "I'm wasting my life to do all manual work here.(R15)

## 4.5 Comparison of Findings

Following the comprehensive case studies in three organisations, Section 4.5 employs cross-case analysis to gain comparative insights and enhance validity. It comprises several subsections:

4.5.1 summarises job-crafting practices and challenges. 4.5.2 evaluates perceived organisational support and HRM practices. 4.5.3 examines motives, psychological states, and the link to engagement. 4.5.4 contrasts management views on job crafting and engagement. 4.5.5 synthesises how organisational differences influence engagement. The three cases showed distinctive approaches to job crafting and engagement. Company A's structured and caring system fostered strong relational and collaborative crafting; Company B's procedural control limited autonomy and relational exchange; and Company C's informal, high freedom setting partly compensated for weak HR structure. This approach provides clarity and a systematic examination of job crafting and its impact on engagement, forming the cross-case analysis.

**Table 4.5.1 Job Crafting Practices and Challenges**

Practices	Company A	Company B	Company C
a) Task Crafting	<p>Proactive in expanding task boundaries for preference and value alignment.</p> <p>Promote task ownership and support autonomy</p> <p>Task identity to enhance the significance of the job</p> <p>Engage innovative and creative problem-solving approaches</p>	<p>Lack of opportunities to alter task boundaries</p> <p>Lack of empowerment from the supervisors</p> <p>Adhering to the job description provides limited opportunities for proactivity</p>	<p>Autonomy and decision making opportunities</p> <p>Task expansion and task variety tailored for person-job fit.</p> <p>Proactive and self-managed initiatives to facilitate creativity</p> <p>Empowerment from managers to support ownership and to enhance job satisfaction</p>
b) Relational Crafting	<p>Family-like team bonding and highly cohesive team dynamic</p> <p>Supportive and high-trust building climate</p> <p>Personalised customer relationships for customer loyalty and fulfilling the customer journey</p>	<p>Harmonious and respectful cooperation among teammates</p> <p>Customer engagement for job satisfaction and value alignment</p> <p>Challenging to foster relationships with shop managers</p>	<p>Collaborative team climate in the work environment</p> <p>Supportive leaders and mutual trust</p> <p>Customer trust and loyalty</p>

Practices	Company A	Company B	Company C
c) Cognitive Crafting	Job redefining and reframing to align with employees' passions and interests	Sense of meaningfulness from customers' positive feedback	Job significance in providing a delightful customer journey
d) Collaborative Crafting	Collaborate in a team effort to achieve shared vision and goals		
Challenges	<p>Task prioritisation and work intensity hinder crafting flexibility</p> <p>The balance between the employee's full autonomy and the company's goal</p> <p>Management's lack of comprehension preventing the endorsement of job crafting</p>	<p>Constraints on granting autonomy to employees due to a hierarchical culture</p> <p>Management's understanding of job crafting is deemed job crafting impractical for Millennials</p>	<p>Heavy workload and insufficient training programs for skill development hinder the job crafting initiatives</p> <p>Management discouraged job crafting due to the need for multitasking in daily operations</p>

#### 4.5.1 Job Crafting Practices and Challenges

In the context of job crafting practices among the employees in three companies, staff in Company A exemplified relational crafting practices and occasionally demonstrated collaborative crafting. Regarding task crafting, employees in both Company A and Company C had considerable opportunities to modify their roles and exercise autonomy. Cognitive crafting, initiated independently by intrinsic motivation without external support, was observed among Millennial employees in all three companies. The primary challenges in job crafting were related to autonomy and management support.

In task crafting, the three companies recognised its importance but differed in proactivity, autonomy, and creativity within their approaches. Staff in Company A focused on task expansion and work identity. Employees in Company B faced limited opportunities for task crafting, lacking autonomy and empowerment. Company C placed a strong emphasis on staff autonomy, empowerment, and proactive initiatives. These cases demonstrated different task crafting practices and priorities within each company.

In all three companies, staff recognised the importance of relational crafting for team collaboration, each with unique approaches. Company A focused on trust-building and creating a family-like team atmosphere, prioritising customer relationships for brand

promotion. Company B was characterised by harmonious team cooperation and active customer engagement. Meanwhile, Company C highlighted supportive leadership at the shop level and mutual trust among team members, with a special focus on building consumer rapport.

Cognitive crafting practices aimed at enhancing meaningfulness, redefining roles, and emphasising job significance were demonstrated in all three companies. In addition to job-related elements, the concept of meaningful work also extends to establishing meaningful relationships with customers and coworkers. All interviewees emphasised that positive workplace relationships were the key factor for their engagement with the organisation. Millennial employees, known for their desire for meaningful work, align well with the principles of cognitive crafting.

Apart from the three crafting initiatives, collaborative crafting was also observed in Company A, where team members collaboratively crafted task boundaries and work practices.

Across the companies, autonomy emerged as a shared challenge, as they needed to balance employees' desire for autonomy with the need to maintain control over work processes.

Although staff in all three companies encountered job crafting challenges, their specific issues varied. Staff in Company A faced challenges in task prioritisation and balancing autonomy. Employees in Company B needed to deal with a hierarchical structure, limited autonomy, and low trust in management. Staff in Company C struggled with heavy workloads, insufficient training, and management's perception of job crafting. The unique challenges of each company impeded the progress of job crafting.

#### **4.5.2 Perceived Organisational Support and Perceived HRM Practices**

Perceived organisational support and perceived HRM practices were examined to explore their impact on job crafting and employee engagement because any discoveries in these realms could yield valuable insights for management. They were essential dimensions that management could actively influence and shape. Based on these insights, management could implement necessary measures to improve engagement in the Hong Kong retail industry.

**Table 4.5.2 Perceived Organisational Support and Perceived HRM Practices**

Perceived Organisational Support	Company A	Company B	Company C
Leadership	<p>Positive leadership encompasses favourable qualities of coaching, servant, and transformational leadership to support and provide psychological safety to employees</p> <p>Employees feel valued, trusted, and respected</p> <p>Nurturing employees' well-being and personal lives</p>	<p>transactional leadership and hierarchical management style with result oriented and task-driven culture</p>	<p>Supportive and empowering leaders to support and guide employees in crafting initiatives and daily operations</p> <p>Laissez-faire senior management with minimal organisational support</p>
Teaming	<p>Strong trust and family-like bonding for collaboration and synergy</p>	<p>Cooperative team relations to support daily operations</p>	<p>Cooperative teamwork to solve daily operation problems and create innovative solutions</p>
Other organisational support	<p>Systematic and efficient workflow</p> <p>Automated technology to support retail operations, such as traffic count and an inventory system</p>	<p>Systematic and efficient workflow</p> <p>Automated technology supporting retail operations, such as traffic counting and an inventory system</p>	<p>Extensive manual work due to inefficient and non-systematic workflow and logistics</p> <p>Overwhelming workload due to lagging in technology</p>
<b>Perceived HRM Practices</b>			
a) Total rewards	<p>1<sup>st</sup> – Well-being</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> – Recognition</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> - Compensation</p>	<p>1st – Well-being</p> <p>2nd – Compensation</p> <p>3rd - Development</p>	<p>1st – Well-being and Compensation</p> <p>3rd – Recognition</p>
b) Employee Well-being	<p>Offered Wellness holidays during the pandemic as a gesture of caring</p>	<p>Support Millennials on holiday re-arrangement as a well-being support</p>	<p>Limited holidays</p> <p>Small gifts for staff during festivals to support well-being</p>

Perceived Organisational Support	Company A	Company B	Company C
c) Fairness, Transparency and Communication	<p>Fair with an objective performance evaluation system</p> <p>Transparent with information shared via emails</p> <p>Frequent communication, both formal and informal, fostered a work environment to freely express opinions and ideas</p>	<p>Fair in company policies</p> <p>Transparency could be improved, especially in the monthly and annual shop targets</p> <p>Communication between management and employees was infrequent, especially in promotion communication</p>	<p>Unfair salary disparities among newcomers, deviating from the standard range</p> <p>Frequent informal communication between shop managers and staff, yet lacking internal communication from HR and top management</p>
d) Performance Appraisal, Feedback and Recognition	<p>Structured performance assessment system with bi-annual goal setting and reviews</p> <p>Frequent informal feedback</p> <p>The career path was clearly shared with employees</p>	<p>Unstructured annual performance review</p> <p>Lack of communication in the career path</p> <p>No clear guidelines for promotion</p> <p>Communication gap in the promotion process</p>	<p>Unclear appraisal schedule with undefined timing for appraisals</p> <p>Lack of communication in the career path</p> <p>No clear guidelines for promotion</p>
e) Training for skill development	<p>Abundant training opportunities, including core training such as product and selling skills training for staff's learning and growth</p>	<p>Inadequate training in product knowledge</p> <p>Impractical selling skill training</p>	<p>No training in product information, where selling skills were relied on, and on-the-job training</p>
f) Millennials and job-crafting-friendly HR initiatives	<p>Staff Wellness holidays for their well-being, fostering mastery and flexibility in job arrangement</p>	<p>The majority of job crafting initiatives originated from employees themselves</p>	<p>Autonomy and flexibility were provided in the workplace to cater for the expectations of Millennials</p>

In leadership, Company A embraced positive leadership styles that supported well-being. Company B leaned toward transactional leadership within a hierarchical culture, while Company C emphasised empowering and laissez-faire leadership to guide employees in their roles. These differences illustrated distinct leadership and organisational cultures within each company.

In terms of teaming, three companies recognised the importance of effective teamwork within their organisations. They all emphasised collaboration and working together as teams to achieve their respective goals, but they focused on different dimensions. Company A focused on building high trust and fostering family-like bonding, which was influenced by leadership. Company B emphasised cooperative teamwork for daily operations, and Company C relied on collaborative problem-solving and innovation, driven by empowering leaders. Different teaming relationships are aligned with the leadership and organisational cultures of the companies.

Other forms of organisational support, including technological advancement and operational efficiency that affected workload, were also critical in facilitating engagement in retailing. Both Companies A and B operated under a systematic and efficient automated workflow, showing their reliance on structured and streamlined processes. Company C faced significant challenges related to manual work, inefficiency, and technological lag, which led to the disengagement of technology-savvy Millennial employees.

In total rewards, well-being ranked first among the three companies. Compensation was the second preferred reward, followed by recognition.

In terms of employee well-being, the three companies differed in their approaches. Company A stood out for offering Wellness Holidays during the pandemic as a gesture of care, demonstrating a unique commitment to employees' well-being. In contrast, Company B focused on supporting Millennial employees in adjusting their holiday schedules to align with their specific flexibility needs. Company C faced challenges related to employee well-being due to heavy workload and fewer holidays, which could impact employees' work-life balance. At the same time, the company offered small gifts to staff during festivals, reflecting their efforts to support employee well-being despite holiday-related challenges. All well-being initiatives and constraints revealed the different corporate cultures.

Regarding fairness, transparency, and communication, the three companies exercised their practices differently. For instance, Company A maintained fairness through an objective performance evaluation system, whereas salary disparities among newcomers at Company C were identified as a concern for fairness.

Appraisal is one of the key responsibilities in HR management. According to the study, employees in Company A perceived the appraisal process as fair. They noted that formal reviews occurred biannually, complemented by regular feedback with supervisors. The career path was clearly communicated to the staff. In Companies B and C, however, the appraisal system barely satisfied employees. Objective promotion guidelines and career path trajectories were not fully transparent or clearly communicated to staff. These HR practices were linked to lower engagement.

Regarding transparency, Company A was characterised by sharing information transparently via email. Company B expressed the need for improved transparency, particularly in monthly and annual targets.

Lastly, with respect to communication, Company A fostered a work environment that encouraged frequent formal and informal communication, which facilitated free expression of opinions and ideas to cultivate a safe and trusted work environment between management and employees. In contrast, employees in Company B reported infrequent communication with HR and management, particularly in promotion-related matters. Retail staff in Company C experienced mixed views on communication. They had frequent informal interactions with shop-level managers but reported a lack of internal communication with the HR department.

Overall, each company showed that different HRM practices were connected to employee engagement. For instance, Company A was emphasising open communication, Company B sought improvements in transparency on sales targets and promotion guidelines, and Company C addressed newcomer salary disparities as fairness concerns.

All three companies acknowledged the importance of training for skill development, yet they varied in the availability and practicality of their training opportunities. Company A succeeded by offering extensive training opportunities. This included essential training in product knowledge and selling skills, as well as seasonal briefings on new products, demonstrating a strong commitment to staff learning and growth. In contrast, Company B struggled with inadequate training in product knowledge, and their selling skills training was deemed impractical. This might affect employees' confidence to engage with and serve customers. Additionally, both Companies B and C heavily relied on on-the-job training for skill development. This approach could create gaps in employees' knowledge

and competencies, as on-the-job training is often less systematic. Such uneven training quality can result in inconsistency in skill and knowledge development.

In summary, all three companies acknowledged Millennials' distinctive traits and the significance of implementing job-crafting-friendly HR initiatives. They shared a common emphasis on flexibility, well-being, teaming, and autonomy as key components related to job crafting and Millennials' preferences. Company A was supported by granted autonomy, collaborative teamwork, and Wellness Holidays, whereas Company C focused on workplace autonomy and flexibility tailored to meet Millennials' expectations. Conversely, Company B's job crafting efforts were solely initiated by employees themselves. All these initiatives highlighted the unique HR approaches and the importance of job crafting initiatives.

#### **4.5.3 Employee Engagement**

All three companies shared common motives for employee engagement, such as autonomy, teaming, and job satisfaction; they also had distinct approaches and factors that were uniquely linked to engagement. Company A prioritised supportive leadership and brand identity alignment. Company B valued meaningful customer feedback, and Company C placed a strong emphasis on autonomy, collaborative team practices, and customer interaction. Understanding these differences could help tailor engagement strategies to each company's specific needs and culture.

While employees in the three companies exhibited all three psychological states, their focus differed significantly. Company A demonstrated a strong dedication to taking pride in shop performance. Company B prioritised finding significance through customer satisfaction, and Company C highlighted vigour and resilience to support a self-managed workplace. These differences represented various motivational factors and cultural aspects of the organisations.

Disengagement was observed in these cases, even though job crafting did enhance employee engagement to some extent. Brand identity issues in Company A, low trust between management and employees in Company B, and overwhelming workload in Company C elicited disappointment and burnout, which were related to lower levels of employee engagement.

**Table 4.5.3 Employee Engagement**

	Company A	Company B	Company C
Motives for Employee Engagement	<p>positive leaders who trust, respect and value employees</p> <p>Team collaboration promoted belonging and collective achievement</p> <p>Autonomy for employees</p> <p>Meaningful positive feedback from customers</p> <p>Brand identity aligned with personal meaning and value</p>	<p>Meaningfulness from customer feedback</p> <p>Meaningful work experience interacting with coworkers</p> <p>Selective cases with autonomy granted to employees</p>	<p>Autonomy at work</p> <p>Cooperative team climate for mutual support with shop leaders and team</p> <p>Customer interaction</p>
Psychological States	<p>Vigour: resilience (Work under pressure calmly and efficiently)</p> <p>Dedication: a) pride (Proud to work for a brand of the generation)</p> <p>b) task significance and meaningful work (the job tasks aligned with their values)</p> <p>Absorption: losing track of time</p>	<p>Vigour: energy (energise to deal with regular customers)</p> <p>Dedication: a) pride (pride and satisfaction after helping customers)</p> <p>b) work significance and meaningfulness (customers came back for a return purchase)</p> <p>Absorption: dive into the job, and time passed</p>	<p>Vigour: resilience (overcome pressure with energy)</p> <p>Dedication: a) challenges (handled challenging sales targets independently)</p> <p>b) meaningful work and significant work (contribution to staff development)</p> <p>Absorption: immersed in the job</p>
Disengagement	<p>Disengagement by Incidents affected the brand identity</p>	<p>Lack of a trusted relationship between management and employees hindered autonomy and empowerment</p>	<p>Demotivated by an overwhelming workload</p> <p>Disparity in newcomers' salaries</p>

**Table 4.5.4 Management Perceptions on Job Crafting and Engagement**

	Company A	Company B	Company C
a) Management's perception of the Job Crafting concept	Showed interest in job crafting and would gather more information to understand its feasibility in carrying out in retail	Not interested and asserted that job crafting was neither practical nor applicable to retail	Job crafting was deemed impractical for Company C due to the necessity for frontline staff to multitask to keep the shop running
b) Management perceived challenges in job crafting	Ways to balance shifting responsibilities and job prioritisation	An imbalance in workload affects overall team performance  A shortage of labour that cannot satisfy various crafting requests from staff	Shortage of labour and concern about passing the buck
c) Management's understanding of Millennials in terms of i) unique traits	High expectations for a flexible work environment  Demand for work-life balance  Tech-savvy and enjoy gaming  Prioritise personal fulfilment  Need timely feedback and recognition	Lazy, self-centred  demanding a flexible workplace, work-life balance, and fast promotion	Millennials needed appreciation and recognition  Looked for a job, not for a career Lack of multi-task capability
ii) Job crafting practices	Agreed that Millennials would become enthusiastic about aligning the job with strengths and preferences if job crafting were practised	Believed that Millennials retail staff would perform well under clear instructions and well-defined roles.  Thought that job crafting was not welcome by Millennials because they liked guidelines	Job crafting was not the company's focus  Understood that Millennials might like it, but not suitable for Company C

	Company A	Company B	Company C
iii) Management's total reward preference	1 <sup>st</sup> – Recognition 2 <sup>nd</sup> – Wellbeing 3 <sup>rd</sup> – Compensation (Also emphasises the importance of providing a fun and energetic work environment to Millennials)	1 <sup>st</sup> – Compensation 2 <sup>nd</sup> – Development 3 <sup>rd</sup> - Benefit	1 <sup>st</sup> – Compensation 2 <sup>nd</sup> – Wellbeing 3 <sup>rd</sup> - Recognition
Understanding the Importance of Employee Engagement	Well-understood employee engagement and its contribution to the company	Linked the engagement concept with employee motivation Prioritised engagement survey execution for monitoring and measuring engagement figures over strategies for enhancing engagement.	Believed that employee engagement was a blend of team passion and motivation

#### 4.5.4 Management Perceptions on Job Crafting and Engagement

When it comes to management perceptions of job crafting and employee engagement, Company A showed an open attitude towards job crafting ideas and was willing to explore them. In contrast, both Company B and Company C showed little interest in job crafting concepts, which they deemed job crafting impractical in the retail industry.

When considering the challenges that could hinder the adoption of job crafting, all three companies expressed concerns about workload imbalances. They also shared worries about labour shortages and the feasibility of accommodating job crafting initiatives.

All three companies displayed a good understanding of the traits associated with Millennial employees. However, they portrayed these traits differently. Company A projected them positively. Company B used a relatively negative tone to describe Millennials, and Company C believed that Millennial employees were not fully committed and preferred one task at a time. These varying tones may be reflected in the formulation of their company policies.

The managerial perceptions of job crafting among Millennials provided interesting insights. Company A believed that Millennials would be interested in job crafting, while Company B thought that Millennials preferred clearly defined roles and instructions over self-initiated task crafting. In the case of Company C, although management believed that Millennial employees would appreciate job crafting, they stated that it would not be feasible because all employees were required to perform multiple duties in the shop.

Recognising the importance of employee engagement in today's business landscape, Company A made concerted efforts in engagement initiatives, which were reflected in its organisational support and HRM practices. On the other hand, the management of Company B and Company C viewed employee engagement primarily as a matter of motivation. However, Company B appeared more focused on conducting engagement surveys rather than developing concrete strategies to engage employees. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the employee engagement initiatives originated from the parent company rather than from their own management.

In summary, the cross-case analyses presented in Section 4 demonstrate how organisational practices, management approaches, and company policies shape job crafting. These factors were also related to variations in employee engagement levels and the relationship between organisational practices and job crafting.

#### **4.6 Summaries of Findings**

Company A: Company A demonstrated high engagement and active job crafting, primarily driven by strong relationships across leaders, teammates, and customers. This relationship fostered a family-like atmosphere, collaborative crafting, and mutual trust within teams. The HRM support was strong, with strategies that showed genuine care for employees, further enhancing commitment and morale. Autonomy gave employees opportunities to adjust their roles to better match their strengths and interests, which supported task and cognitive crafting in daily work. These combined practices contributed to outstanding financial performance, showing the positive impact of relational and collaborative efforts. Although disengagement emerged following a PR crisis that affected morale and loyalty, positive employee engagement partially mitigated its negative effects.

Company B: In Company B, employees found their work meaningful through cognitive crafting. They reframed the purpose of serving customers from meeting sales targets to supporting customers to enjoy a satisfying consumer journey. This meaning-making was

supported by relational crafting through customer interactions. While autonomy was limited, the employees sought adaptive motives to practice task crafting by redefining sales tasks as acts of assisting and helping customers, which contributed to the meaningfulness of their roles. Disengagement stemmed from unempathetic leadership and rigid procedures, leading to mistrust and dissatisfaction. As a result, the lack of genuine concern for well-being and strict adherence to procedures often left employees feeling unappreciated.

Company C: Company C demonstrated active task crafting through autonomy, which was closely related to employee engagement. Autonomy stimulated employees to cope with challenges and improved their competencies by learning new skills independently. Cognitive crafting supported engagement by reinforcing meaningful work and person-job fit. Relational crafting played a secondary role compared to the autonomy available in the workplace. However, heavy workloads and perceived unfairness contributed to disengagement, which impacted overall job satisfaction. The laissez-faire leadership style provided autonomy but offered insufficient HRM support, leading to employee frustration.

To summarise, four descriptive categories emerged: meaningful relationships, work meaningfulness, autonomy, and meaningful work. These elements served as the foundation for the thematic analysis, guiding the exploration of job crafting practices within each company's unique setting.

From these findings, three themes emerged: a) Leveraging Job Crafting to Strengthen Engagement, b) Understanding Aspirations and Challenges for Millennial Crafters, and c) Exploring the Potential Influence of Job Crafting on Employee Engagement. These themes highlighted how employee experiences in job crafting aligned with engagement motives, shaped by each company's distinct environment.

This analysis emphasised that the impact of job crafting was shaped by contextual factors such as organisational support and HRM practices, and it showed how these practices could either facilitate or hinder crafting efforts. These findings provided a foundation for the Discussion section, where the implications for employee engagement, organisational practice, and theory would be critically analysed.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter is organised into three sections. In section 5.1, the overview of emerging themes is outlined. In section 5.2, three themes are deeply analysed to understand their implication. In section 5.3, a summary of the conclusion will be included.

### 5.1 Overview of the Discussion

The discussion is organised in a structured flow, and three discussion themes are presented. Section 5.2.1 discusses job crafting practices in daily work, including the work itself and in social ways, and elucidates how it affects engagement. Section 5.2.2 evaluates Millennials' aspirations and challenges in their work, focusing on their perceptions of organisational support, HRM practices, leadership, and coworker relations. Section 5.2.3 explains the potential impact of job crafting on employee engagement by drawing on the unique contextual factors of the three organisations. This structure ensures that the findings are examined from process, generational, and contextual perspectives of the topic, which aligns with the analysis presented in this chapter.

**Figure 5.1: Empirical Framework Linking Organisational Factors, Job Crafting, and Engagement**

#### Empirical Framework Linking Organisational Factors, Job Crafting, and Engagement

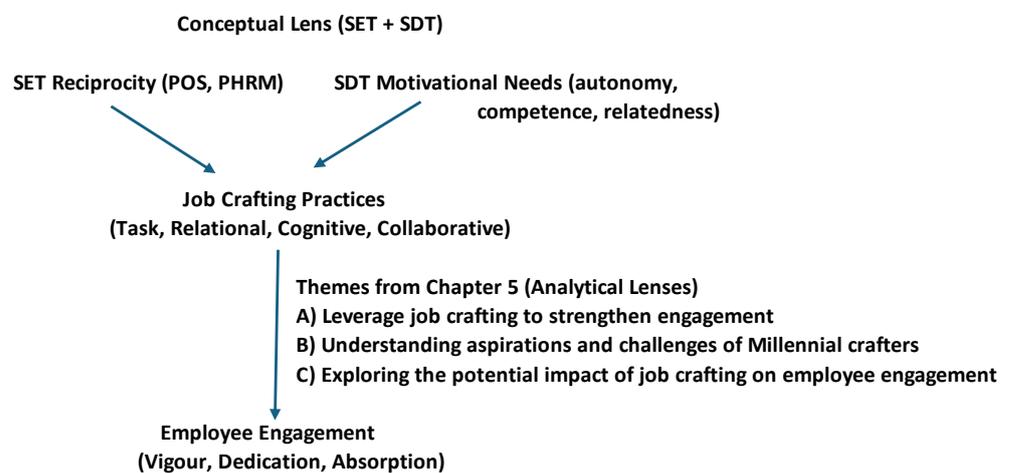


Figure 5.1 presents an empirical framework that brings together the three themes and shows how contextual factors, SDT needs, and job crafting practices shape Millennial engagement across the cases.

These three themes form the analytical foundation of the discussion and connect the empirical findings to the theoretical model. This chapter integrates the thematic findings with SET and SDT to interpret how job crafting influences Millennial engagement.

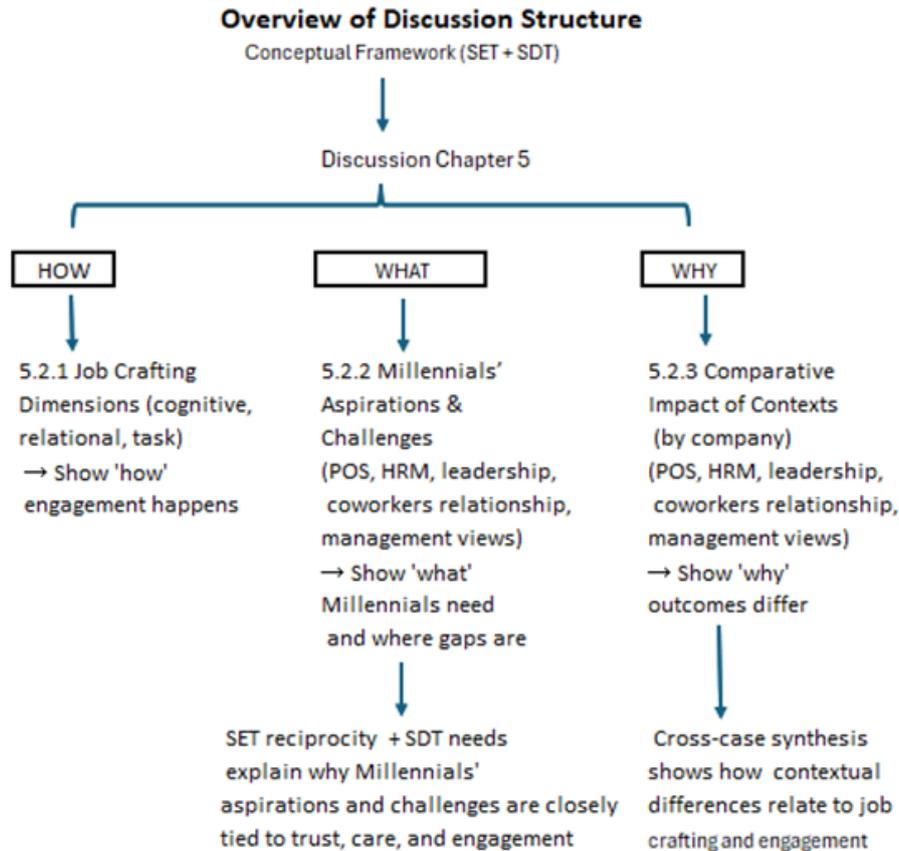
**Leveraging Job Crafting to Strengthen Engagement.** The first theme explains how cognitive, relational, task, and collaborative crafting operate in practice. It identifies the ways employees adjust tasks, reframe meanings, and build relationships, and under the situations in which these behaviours strengthen meaningfulness and engagement. This theme examines the role of job crafting, showing that crafting is present across organisations and contributes to engagement under supportive conditions.

**Understanding Aspirations and Challenges for Millennial Crafters.** The second theme analyses what Millennials seek and what constrains them when crafting their jobs. Their expectations for autonomy, trust and care, leadership support, recognition, and meaningful work shape their willingness to craft. This theme also highlights the conditions that activate or restrict job crafting, such as POS, leadership style, teamwork, organisational trust, HRM practices, and management's views on job crafting. These factors influence whether Millennials experience the motivation needed to craft their jobs and enhance engagement.

**Exploring the Potential Impact of Job Crafting on Employee Engagement.** The third theme explains why the outcomes of job crafting differ across organisational cases. It interprets how workplace environments, including organisational climate, management and team relationships, HRM approaches, and management's views determine whether crafting becomes a proactive driver of engagement or a coping response. This theme provides the comparative explanation for cross-case differences, exploring how contextual factors influence the effectiveness of job crafting in enhancing engagement.

## 5.2 Discussion of the findings

Figure 5.2 Overview of Discussion Structure



The structure shown in Figure 5.2 is grounded in the conceptual framework, which integrates SET and SDT to explain how job crafting supported meaningfulness and engagement, what aspirations and challenges Millennials faced that activated or constrained job crafting, and why the impact of job crafting on engagement differed across the three companies based on contextual factors such as POS and PHRM.

### 5.2.1 Leveraging Job Crafting to Strengthen Engagement

Job crafting and employee engagement have shown a positive relationship in various quantitative studies (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2017; Vogt et al., 2016). Job crafting is an iterative process where employees proactively reshape tasks and relationships to better align with personal values and preferences, which enhances a person's job fit (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). However, crafting behaviours themselves do not directly lead to higher engagement. Instead, the crafting process stimulates employees to reconsider what is meaningful to

them and adjust their roles to reflect those priorities which are personally significant. This realignment of work tasks and relationships toward meaningful values helps explain why job crafting can support higher engagement.

Employee engagement represents the mental and emotional connection employees feel towards their work. Kahn (1990) argued that meaningful work is essential for engagement. Building on Kahn's work, May, Gilson and Harter (2004) tested the three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety and availability, while meaningfulness is the most significant to engagement.

This section examines how Millennials experienced and applied different forms of job crafting in their work. The discussion is structured around three crafting dimensions: cognitive crafting that shaped meaning, relational crafting that built team connections, and task personalisation that supported autonomy and role ownership.

### **5.2.1.1 Cognitive Crafting and Meaningfulness**

#### **a) Reframing task for meaningful work**

In this study, employees reframed their perceptions of job tasks and relationships to make them meaningful through cognitive crafting. This mental form of job crafting helped employees align their preferences and values with job tasks or relationships connected to the job on a subjective level. According to Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski (2013), there were three ways to change perceptions to make job experiences more meaningful: expanding perception, focusing perception, and linking perceptions. In the interviews, retail staff demonstrated cases where they changed their ways of perceiving their tasks. As a result, they worked more passionately and devoted more energy to engagement.

In one case, (R16) in Company C demonstrated 'expanding perception' in job crafting. She altered her perception to take on the role of a shop owner, monitoring and taking ownership of daily sales even during her days off. As a junior sales associate, her original responsibility was to serve customers and support shop-level operations. However, she expanded her perceived role through cognitive crafting, assuming a more senior role in overseeing the shop's overall performance. This shift refined her work identity and increased her accountability. By gaining perceived autonomy, mastering challenges, and building relatedness through customer interactions, (R16) satisfied the three basic psychological needs in SDT and experienced meaningful work and engagement (Deci and

Ryan, 2012; Grant, 2007). This also aligns with Fuller and Unwin's (2017) qualitative findings, where porters cognitively reframed their 'invisible' tasks as essential contributions that strengthened identity and purpose.

In 'focusing perception', staff mentally prioritised tasks they found meaningful and used these tasks to offset less favourable aspects of their roles. In Company A, two staff members did not enjoy customer-facing sales duties. Instead, they focused on spending more time in the warehouse managing inventory and shelving, aiming to support teammates in stock management to build meaningful relationships. They both reported that as long as they could engage in these preferred tasks, they could tolerate the less enjoyable parts of the job. This shift in focus helped mitigate adversity at work (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2008).

The third perception was the 'linking perception', where employees connected their tasks to areas they cared about to build stronger motivation and preference. (R11) enjoyed helping people in need. In his sales role, he assisted customers in finding the products they sought. This provided him with happy, satisfying, and positive work experiences.

Although cognitive crafting focuses on mindset-related activities, its impact is significant as it contributes to redefining the meaning and identity of work. Cognitive crafting aligns closely with meaningful work because it allows employees to reframe the purpose of their roles, and this process helps them see themselves as more influential and impactful (Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski, 2013). In Company A, (R2) reframed his identity from a salesperson to a fashion stylist, aiming to boost customers' self-confidence by introducing mix-and-match ideas. This new professional identity influenced his behaviour and satisfaction at work, where the alignment between his interests and the job positively affected his performance and customer service (Blader, Patil and Packer, 2017).

Frontline employees derived meaning not only from personal fulfilment but also from supporting the team, serving customers, and building the brand. For instance, (R2) and (R6) felt their work held meaning for their customers and colleagues, while (R5) found meaning in representing the brand. Their roles themselves became sources of meaning, driven by intrinsic motivation and supported by crafting behaviours. This aligned with Chalofsky's study, which found that meaningful work was shaped by both individual and organisational dimensions, resulting in alignment between employees 'personal values and work activities (Chalofsky, 2003). Role identity theory also reinforces this point, as

(R2) and (R5) projected themselves as brand ambassadors. By shaping their roles around identities they valued and the brand's purpose, both staff strengthened the meaning of their work and deepened their engagement (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994; Stryker, 1980). This alignment between personal values and organisational purpose represents one of the strongest foundations for sustained engagement.

In Company A, the team actively shaped their roles through active social contact to drive engagement. Through tailoring their role perception and aligning with personal values, employees fostered positive attributes such as optimism and resilience. By engaging in cognitive crafting, employees experienced emotions like joy and interest in their work. This aligned with the 'broaden' aspect of the broaden-and-build theory, where positive emotions widen employees' ways of thinking and their approaches to work (Fredrickson, 2001).

#### **b) Meaningfulness in work**

Millennials highly value meaningfulness in work. They can be motivated by connecting their work with a larger purpose and values (Van Hyatt, 2021). For job crafters, transforming their roles into a calling can provide 'a sense of purpose and meaningfulness' (Dik and Duffy, 2009, p. 427). Wrzesniewski identified work orientations, namely job, career, and calling, which reflect how individuals interpret the meaning of their work (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Experiencing work as a calling often reflects deeper aspects of the self and is related to higher engagement and fulfilment (Steger et al., 2010). For example, cognitive crafting empowered employees such as (R2) and (R5) to redefine their roles from salespeople to brand representatives and strengthened their sense of calling by giving them purpose and connection to their work. Similar patterns appeared in Grant-Vallone and Ensher's (2017) study, where faculty used cognitive reframing to restore purpose and calling in their work.

Although customer interactions contributed to meaningful experiences, the cognitive aspect emphasised how employees interpreted and reframed these experiences. Frontline employees found meaningfulness not only in personal values but also in relationships and in contributing to a greater good (You et al., 2021). Therefore, meaning did not arise solely from customer interactions but from how employees cognitively interpreted their roles and viewed these interactions as part of a broader purpose. For example, (R7) reframed his role by learning more about ageing issues so that he could

better connect with elderly customers and act as a friendly support rather than only a salesperson. This cognitive reframing helped him experience his role as meaningful through supporting customers as a trusted companion. (R2, R8, and R11) shared that their meaningful experiences came from serving and interacting with customers, where creating value for customers made their work more satisfying. This aligned with Lips-Wiersma, Wright, and Dik (2016) that meaning-making is essential to the human character. These examples also echoed Rosso and colleagues' framework, which identified four sources of meaningful work: self, others, work context, and spiritual life (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The framework highlighted that job crafting often begins with the self and extends to these wider sources of meaning.

In SDT, autonomous motivation arises when employees find their work interesting or connected to their values, which strengthens well-being and engagement (Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan, 2017). Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014) stated that cognitive crafting is closely tied to competence because reframing work roles can improve employees' sense of capability and contribution. In Company A, (R5) saw himself as a 'brand ambassador' who promoted the 'A Sport' brand he valued, and this shift helped him perceive his role as professional and meaningful. This perception reinforced his sense of competence and supported his engagement (Autin et al., 2022; Martela and Riekk, 2018). It also aligned with Social Identity Theory, as (R5) linked his personal identity to the brand's image and values. This organisational identification encouraged stronger involvement and engagement at work (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

### **5.2.1.2 Relational Crafting and Team Relations**

#### **a) Meaningful relationship and connection**

According to Grant and Parker (2009), the workplace is shaped by connections and interpersonal relationships. It is also a place for forming friendships, receiving feedback, and networking (Latham and Pinder, 2005). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2017) also found that relational crafting enhanced engagement in work life. Consistent with this, both job crafting theory and SDT emphasise the importance of social relationships at work. Relational crafting involves changing the nature, extent, or qualities of one's interactions with others at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). From the interviews, relational crafting emerged as an important influence on Millennials' engagement in retail.

To examine how relational crafting shaped meaningfulness for Millennials, this study applied Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski's (2013) framework of reframing relationships, building relationships, and adapting relationships. In Company A, the team demonstrated 'reframing relationships' by forming strong bonds with each other. For example, (R1, R2, R3, R6, and A2) referred to each other as 'brothers and sisters,' reframing their connections to reflect family-like ties that offered unconditional support compared with typical workplace relationships (Rath, 2006). Fuller and Unwin (2017) similarly showed that hospital porters formed caring ties with nurses, colleagues, and patients, reinforcing identity and purpose in their work. In Company B, (R9) practised 'building relationships' by encouraging shy, passive part-time employees to participate in tasks together. Through this behaviour, (R9) created an inviting environment and took pride in helping others. These examples illustrate how 'building relationships' contributes to meaningfulness. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2017) found that relational crafting often involved supportive interactions and informal mentoring that helped others grow. Finally, 'adapting relationships' involves providing valuable support to others and encouraging reciprocity. This is shown in (R3)'s commitment to customer satisfaction when she personally refunded a customer beyond company policy to create a positive customer experience. These relational crafting initiatives helped increase trust and strengthen connectedness among team members and customers, which enriched employees' meaningful experiences (Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski, 2013). In Company A, active relational crafting facilitated a strong team climate, and this strengthened teamwork and collaborative crafting (Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk, 2009). In Company C, although some employees oversaw a shop independently, they still sought opportunities to craft relationships with supervisors in neighbouring shops for operational advice. Company B showed fewer team-based crafting initiatives than the other two companies, largely due to its transactional leadership style and bureaucratic culture, which placed less emphasis on building interpersonal connections. Instead, relational crafting was primarily directed toward customer interactions rather than within teams. These examples highlight the vital role of relational crafting and its impact within different retail settings. The subsequent discussion will further explore collaborative and other relational crafting practices in retail and their contribution to engagement.

## **b) Collaborative Crafting and Emotional Support**

### **i) Team**

A team is defined as a degree of interdependence among a group of people who are socially interacting (Guzzo and Dickson, 1996). In retail, teamwork is important because work is interdependent and requires cooperation and communication. Team member exchange (TMX) refers to an individual's perception of the quality of interactions and relationships at work. High-quality TMX can strengthen collaborative crafting (Hung et al., 2020) as team members support each other. Collaborative crafting expands the concept of job crafting by incorporating teamwork. This approach helps individuals pursue personal interests and supports shared organisational goals. Collaborative crafting was first identified by Leana et al. in a study where teachers crafted roles for common goals as a team (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk, 2009).

Later, more studies examined this joint crafting effort (Kira, van Eijnatten and Balkin, 2010; McClelland et al., 2014; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012). In teams, job crafting behaviours are contagious and can be modelled in the workplace to enhance person-job fit (Bakker, Rodríguez-Muñoz and Sanz Vergel, 2016). Positive crafting behaviours, when observed by colleagues, can trigger prosocial responses (Tims and Parker, 2020). Research shows that collaborative crafting has a positive impact on job satisfaction, job performance, and organisational commitment (Cheng et al., 2016).

Collaborative crafting, which emphasises collective efforts and decisions in reshaping work roles and processes, complements relational crafting by enhancing team cohesion (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk, 2009). For example, the shop manager and the frontline staff in Company A engaged in collaborative crafting by collectively enhancing work processes, including inventory tracking and pursuing aggressive sales targets, which helped drive top-line sales and led the team to win the Asia No. 1 shop competition. This collective effort helped boost sales performance, deliver high-quality work experiences, and contribute to overall team success. The impact of collaborative crafting often exceeds the sum of individual contributions, which supports job commitment, work engagement, and performance (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk, 2009).

Collaborative crafting helps team members align their personal values with the team's mission, enhancing their commitment to the brand and the organisation. This aligns with social identity theory, linking group identification to stronger commitment (Tajfel and

Turner, 2003). Belonging and loyalty enhance team cohesion, meaningfulness, and employee engagement (Ariani, 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 2003).

In Company A, employees supported one another and built trust within their teams. The exceptional shop performance relied heavily on affect-based trust among team members, characterised by emotional investment and genuine care for one another (McAllister, 1995). Consistent with broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions from this organisational climate supported proactive problem-solving and strengthened engagement (Fredrickson, 2002; Soane et al., 2012).

### **c) Customer and supervisor relationships**

#### **i) Customer**

Customer interactions and relationships enhanced work meaning for frontline Millennials. According to Steger et al. (2012), employees achieve meaningful work through three routes, namely, psychological meaningfulness (personally valuable and fulfilling), meaning-making (increasing purpose in life), and greater-than-good motivations (positive influence on others). In the interviews, retail frontline staff consistently engaged in relational crafting with customers. Crafting initiatives could be categorised into three areas outlined above. First, some employees (R1, R2 and R7) were engaged in helping customers find the right product, which they found meaningful, aligning with Steger et al.'s (2012) greater-than-good motivations. Another aspect of relational crafting was self-fulfilment through insights gained from customer interactions. As Millennials (R8) and (R13) were keen on learning, they claimed they gained extensively from customers' valuable experiences (DeVaney, 2015), which was closely related to psychological meaningfulness. Beyond selling products, some employees often reframed their roles to align with their life values. (R11) viewed guiding customers with personalised advice as a form of mentorship that connected work with personal values. Fuller and Unwin (2017) also found that frontline workers (porters) derived meaning through caring, supportive interactions with patients. These examples showed that retail employees found meaning in their work not only from internal stakeholders but also from external customers. Based on SET, employees may feel obligated to reciprocate the positive feelings they experienced from meaningful work through exceptional customer service and fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty (Christopher and Payne, 2012). Relational crafting strengthened customer relationships, as demonstrated in Company A and supported by

Kahn and Heaphy (2013), who found that relationship engagement and genuine care within teams improved customer service. The importance of relationships in driving engagement was also discussed in previous studies (Albrecht et al., 2015; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006).

## **ii) Supervisor**

Retail managers are not only responsible for the effective performance of the shop (Jung, Yoo and Arnold, 2021) but also provide an environment that encourages active relational crafting, such as team-building. Millennials tend to prioritise teamwork and social relationships (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). During the interviews, all participants indicated that small salary differences among companies in sports retailing did not significantly influence their decisions to change jobs. They emphasised that relationships and team climate at the shop level were the key factors influencing their work engagement and intention to leave. This aligns with another qualitative study by Fuller and Unwin (2017), who found that caring relational climates, supported by more experienced hospital staff, strengthened trust and meaningful work among frontline porters. In addition, the primary reason for considering job changes was their relationship with shop leaders and teammates. Therefore, supervisory behaviour was essential in creating a supportive social environment that facilitated relational crafting and building engaged teams.

Company A fostered a job-crafting-friendly environment through leaders who engaged in relational crafting and built strong leader-member exchanges (LMX). These leaders demonstrated behaviours to cultivate a highly engaged team, which aligned with transformational leadership (Hetland et al., 2018; Wang, Demerouti and Le Blanc, 2017) and servant leadership (Bavik, Bavik and Tang, 2017; Harju, Schaufeli and Hakanen, 2018). These supervisory behaviours helped create the relational conditions that supported relational crafting among team members. They focused on building relational boundaries and creating a caring, trusting, and transparent workplace climate embedded in strong personal connections. For example, (R3) and (R5) mentioned that individual daily sales targets were openly shared with all staff, and team members were encouraged to voice their opinions during morning meetings. Leaders also frequently communicated with subordinates to understand their values and preferences, which promoted relational

crafting. In this supportive work environment, most staff members had worked at Shop A1 for over three years, where team members treated one another as family.

Another approach in the retail environment is relational crafting through the establishment of Guanxi. In the Chinese community, Guanxi represents an informal personal connection (Chen and Chen, 2004). Rooted in Confucian culture, Guanxi shaped workplace relationships involving reciprocal support and emotional connection (Zhai, Lindorff and Cooper, 2013), aligning well with the characteristics of relational crafting. In Company A, shop leaders developed family-like relationships with team members, nurturing informal social bonds through a Guanxi-based approach. This approach operated in parallel with relational crafting and resulted in positive outcomes such as enhanced individual and team performance (Tims et al., 2013). It also fostered job meaningfulness (Michaelson et al., 2014). These findings also showed how the social exchange process was shaped under Hong Kong's work culture. Employees in the Hong Kong cases maintained their engagement through respect for and loyalty to their supervisors, as they believed their efforts would be recognised through leaders' support and genuine care. This form of exchange aligned with the principles of Guanxi, where reciprocal obligation and relational harmony guide workplace exchanges. Employee engagement was reinforced through trust and social connection rather than direct or openly negotiated reciprocity.

However, relational crafting can also create adverse outcomes for well-being, especially when relational obligations increase workload. In Company A, (R2) was exhausted after working fourteen days in a row to help teammates adjust their work shifts (Li, Meng and Wang, 2022). This echoed the insights from Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Bruning and Campion (2018) that relational crafting can create adverse effects. Excess workload and burnout are the most common negative impacts (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2015).

To conclude, relationships are the fundamental building block of meaningfulness in retail among Millennials. Positive leaders fostered an environment that encouraged relational crafting and supported meaningful relationships. This approach provided a pathway to meet employees' psychological needs for meaningfulness and relatedness through interpersonal interactions, which supported greater engagement (Deci and Ryan, 2000; May, Gilson and Harter, 2004).

### **5.2.1.3 Job Personalisation and Task Crafting**

Job personalisation in this study refers to how employees adjust their prescribed tasks to become more aligned with who they are and what they consider meaningful. People naturally seek choice and customisation in their work, as these allow them to express their identity and preferences (Bakker, 2020). This personalisation strengthens motivation because employees see their values reflected in their work, which increases their sense of commitment (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

#### **a) Meaningful Task Design and Significance**

According to Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski (2013), task crafting enhances meaningfulness by influencing task variety, task identity, and task significance through three approaches: adding tasks, emphasising tasks, and redesigning tasks. In this study, task crafting was closely tied to job personalisation, as employees redefined tasks to align their work with personal values and preferred ways of working.

In Company A, (R6) took the initiative to organise inventory and stock shelves so team members could access items more quickly. She viewed this task as meaningful because it matched her interest in organising and supporting team members. By 'emphasising the task' she valued, she strengthened her task identity, personalising her job where she found it significant.

In Company B, (R8) took on additional responsibility during COVID-19 by delivering stock directly to customers who required training. She viewed this task not as a transactional duty but as an opportunity to support people in need. This represented 'adding tasks', which expanded task variety and gave her work a stronger positive impact on others. In another qualitative study, Fuller and Unwin (2017) found that frontline porters derived meaning from caring for others in ways that went beyond their prescribed roles.

In the example of 'redesigning tasks', (R5) approached customers by bringing her passion for 'A Sport' into the sales conversation with genuine enthusiasm. This shift in how she carried out the task made her sales experience more purposeful, as it allowed her to express a personal interest through customer interaction, consistent with the idea of 'redesigning tasks'. This echoed findings by Vuori et al. (2012), who showed that employees redesign work content to maintain purpose and meaningfulness when demands shift.

Apart from personal fulfilment, task significance increases when work has a positive impact on others. For example, (R1) supported an unwell customer in his mid-50s by listening to his concerns rather than focusing on sales. The customer later returned with chocolates to express gratitude. (R1) found the experience rewarding. Scholars argue that when work creates value for others, employees experience a higher purpose that encourages fuller self-investment in the work (Grant 2007, Mackey and Sisodia, 2014). This full investment leads to commitment to the organisation and support engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002).

(R1)'s experience further showed how task crafting increased meaningfulness through task significance. Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) highlights that when employees consider their tasks as important to others, the work becomes more meaningful and motivating (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). From SET, when the customers feel genuine support, they reciprocate with positive responses. These responses reinforce to frontline sales staff that their effort matters and encourage continued investment (Blau, 1964). Together, JCT and SET explain how task crafting supports meaningful work and strengthens engagement.

### **b) Proactivity, Person-Job Fit, and Adaptability for Meaningful Task Crafting**

Job personalisation through task crafting allows employees to shape roles and responsibilities around their own strengths and values. Attributes linked to job crafting, such as proactivity, person–job fit, and adaptability, collectively support employees in reshaping tasks into meaningful experiences that enhance engagement. Employees experience meaningfulness when activities align with their skills, preferences, and values (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). This aligns with SDT, where intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation support meaningful work through the personalisation of tasks and roles (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

This personalisation is strengthened when employees align their goals and strengths with work activities. Employees apply goal self-concordance to pursue work that matches intrinsic values, increasing psychological meaningfulness and autonomous motivation. As Sheldon (2014) suggested, self-concordant goals make work more engaging and intrinsically rewarding. In this study, (R14), who had expertise in visual merchandising, and (R6), who preferred shelving tasks, found meaning in using their strengths in ways consistent with their personal values.

Proactivity reflects employees' drive and volition to initiate positive change (Griffin, Neal and Parker, 2007). Through self-initiated and future-focused efforts (Crant, 2000; Parker, Williams and Turner, 2006), employees felt more connected to their work and improved satisfaction, meaningfulness, and performance (Lee et al., 2017). (R7) proactively learned about elderly customers to build stronger relationships, while (R3) handled refunds proactively to improve service quality. Both demonstrated 'greater-than-self' motivation to create a positive impact on others, which enhanced their meaningfulness at work (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012).

In line with the person–job fit perspective (Cable and DeRue, 2002), employees used task crafting to bring their work closer to their own values and strengths, which supported meaningfulness and engagement. (R15) who aspired to become a social worker, felt that interacting with customers fulfilled her intrinsic need to support others. This reflected needs–supplies fit, where aligning work with personal values created psychological meaningfulness (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012) and fulfilled the intrinsic needs identified in SDT (Tims, Derks and Bakker, 2016; Guo and Hou, 2022; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Such alignment between personal values and task characteristics strengthened employees' sense of meaning and engagement.

Adaptive crafting functions as a responsive behaviour when crafting opportunities are restricted. It allowed employees to adjust their actions and thoughts to manage changing demands and sustain resilience and engagement (Jundt, Shoss and Huang, 2015). Park et al. (2020) also highlighted that adaptive behaviours, including creative problem-solving and managing ambiguity at work, helped maintain engagement under constrained conditions. Employees in Company B faced structural limits in task crafting and fewer relational opportunities with supervisors and teammates. They displayed adaptivity by helping customers, gaining meaningfulness through beneficence. This echoed Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2010) 'adaptive moves,' where employees made small task adjustments to regain autonomy and control. Vuori et al. (2012) similarly found that employees used task adjustments to preserve work meaning when traditional crafting options were limited.

SDT further explains how task crafting enhances person–job fit by supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000). When frontline staff personalised tasks, developed skills, or built meaningful customer connections, they experienced

greater psychological meaningfulness. (R5) crafted his role by promoting his preferred sport to customers, which supported his need for relatedness and strengthened brand connection. Frontline staff in Shop A1 (Company A) also crafted tasks collectively, which created a supportive climate for collaborative crafting and reinforced autonomous motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Hu, McCune Stein and Mao, 2020). These examples demonstrated how task crafting reinforced meaningfulness through SDT needs.

Overall, in this study, task crafting acted as a form of job personalisation that allowed employees to create roles that felt more purposeful and engaging. Although participants did not always use the word 'meaningful', their narratives reflected meaning-making. They described actions, motivations, or identities that extended beyond routine tasks and connected their work to a larger purpose or self-identity. By fulfilling basic SDT needs, particularly autonomy and competence, task crafting supported meaning making and engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These insights show how personalised tasks helped employees sustain a sense of purpose in their work.

## **5.2.2 Understanding Aspirations and Challenges of Millennial Crafters**

Millennials often seek opportunities to align their core traits with workplaces that support their desires for autonomy, collaborative relationships, and meaningfulness. In this study, Millennials aspired to organisational support, namely positive leadership, strong coworker relationships, and preferred HRM practices. These aspirations influenced how they adapted their roles to enhance work meaning and engagement through job crafting.

However, these aspirations often clashed with structural challenges that hinder job crafting. These included balancing job redesign with autonomy, managerial stigmatisation of job crafting and stereotypes of Millennials, unsupportive leadership styles (e.g., transactional and laissez-faire), and inadequate HRM practices. Such constraints limited Millennials' ability to fully engage in job crafting, and this created a tension between their aspirations and the realities of workplace conditions. The following subsection examines how organisational and social factors facilitate or hinder job crafting practices among Millennials in three organisations.

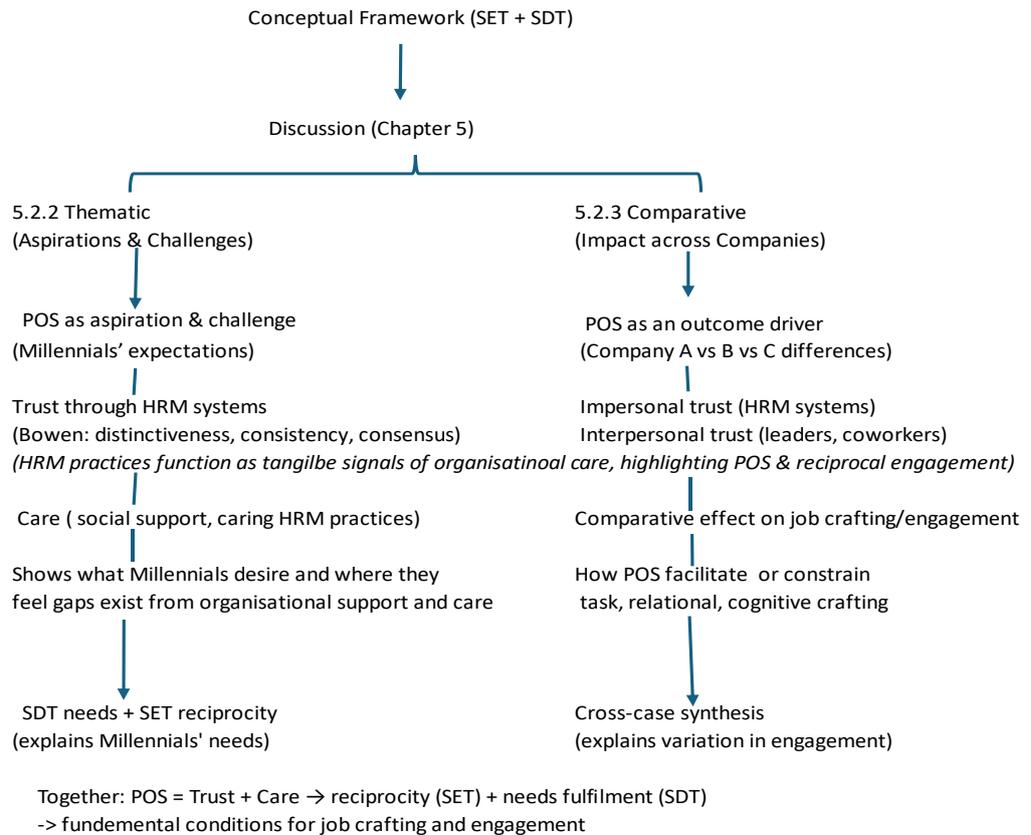
Section 5.2.2 introduces aspirations and challenges expressed by Millennials, and these factors are revisited in Section 5.2.3 in a cross-case comparison to show how they influence job crafting and engagement outcomes. The overall structure of Sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 is shown in Figure 5.3, which illustrates how the thematic and comparative analyses are derived from the conceptual framework of SET and SDT.

### **5.2.2.1 Perceived Organisational Support for Trust and Care**

POS is crucial in understanding the relationship between job crafting and employee engagement. PHRM practices act as tangible signals of organisational care that strengthen employees' perceptions of support and encourage reciprocal engagement. POS is based on the extent to which employees believe their contributions are valued and their well-being is prioritised by the organisation. This is relevant for Millennials, who view their work not only as a way of earning a living but also for meaningful connections with their organisations. According to SET, employees who feel supported are more likely to reciprocate with increased engagement. Over time, this reciprocal relationship fosters trust, loyalty, and mutual commitments between employees and the organisation (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). A strong trust climate nurtured proactivity and engagement. In this section, organisational trust is considered as an important outcome of POS.

**Figure 5.3 Logical Flow of Thematic and Comparative Discussion**

**Logical Flow of Thematic and Comparative Discussion (Section 5.2.2-5.2.3)**



Apart from organisational trust, organisational care is also analysed through caring HRM practices and social support provided by leaders and coworkers. When Millennials perceive caring and supportive relationships in the workplace, they interpret this experience as ‘care felt’ (Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli, 2011) and invest more fully in their roles. This aligns with Millennials’ key workplace aspirations.

**Organisational Trust**

As a component of POS reflecting trust and care, organisational trust was perceived differently across Companies A, B, and C through distinct HRM practices. Company A established a strong foundation of trust by implementing a cohesive HRM system aligned with Bowen and Ostroff’s (2004) principles of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. Clear career path, structured training, distinctive wellness programs, and caring HR policies made these practices meaningful and built trust among employees. Consistent practices and high consensus among employees about HR policies in Company A nurtured an environment of trust that promoted job crafting and engagement.

Conversely, Company B's transactional and inconsistent HRM practices weakened organisational trust. Employees reported that the HR practices were purely functional, with a lack of continuity and minimal emphasis on career growth. This fragmented approach left employees feeling undervalued, reducing trust and discouraging proactive engagement. Similarly, Company C's unstructured HRM framework also contributed to a lack of organisational trust. The absence of regular appraisals and transparent, equitable compensation practices affected employees' sense of fairness (Vanhala and Tzafrir, 2021).

Company A displayed high POS with a caring environment that encouraged all forms of job crafting, which facilitated high levels of engagement. In contrast, Company B's hierarchical leadership resulted in moderate POS, which limited most job crafting activities. Yet, some tasks and cognitive crafting still emerged through relationships with customers. For Company C, moderate POS was driven by autonomy, which supported task crafting; however, the absence of formal HR support restricted relational crafting and heightened the risk of burnout.

### 5.2.2.2 Aspirations

Millennials in this study sought supportive leadership, strong coworker relationships, and caring HRM practices. To understand what kind of leadership they valued most, the researcher reviewed their expressed preferences. In contrast to Section 5.2.1, which examined supervisory behaviours shaping relational crafting, this section focuses on the leadership qualities that retail frontline Millennials seek in their ideal workplace.

**Table 5.1 Comparison of Supervisory Behaviours (5.2.1.2) and Millennials' Leadership Aspirations (5.2.2.2)**

Category	Supervisory Behaviours (Reported)	Positive Leadership (Aspirations)
Focus	Shaped relational crafting and team cohesion	Seek supportive, fair, and meaningful leadership
Key Elements	Trust, communication, Guanxi, LMX	Servant and transformational qualities, coaching, and psychological safety
Outcome	Engagement through relational bonds	Engagement through support, development, and recognition
Theoretical Lens	SET, relational crafting, cultural reciprocity	SDT, POS, generational preferences

### **a) Positive Leadership**

Positive leadership behaviours were observed mainly in Company A, where managers demonstrated servant and transformational qualities, while Companies B and C also displayed supportive managerial practices, but less consistently. At Company A, servant leadership emphasised trust, individual care, personal growth, and well-being, where transformational leadership focused on inspiring meaningful work, autonomy, and coaching. Such leadership qualities were highly valued by Millennials in the workplace.

### **i) Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership promotes a culture of putting followers first and emphasises employees' emotional well-being (Liden et al, 2008; Ehrhart, 2004). By focusing on individual care, managers support Millennials in adapting tasks to their values and preferences, fulfilling their desire for meaningful jobs.

In Company A, servant leadership built a strong trust climate to support individualised growth and well-being that Millennials valued most (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). For example, (R6) shared his personal goal and sought advice from the leader, showing confidence in the leader's support. (R4) and (R3) also experienced recognition and psychological safety through positive leader interactions, which strengthened relational trust and reinforced reciprocal commitment (Blau, 1964). This people-centred approach allowed Millennials to adjust their roles without hesitation, which was consistent with Yang et al.'s (2017) study. They found that servant leadership was positively linked to job crafting behaviours and employee engagement, particularly in high-support climates.

Servant leadership also fostered a family-like team culture that strengthened team identification, group cohesion, and collaborative crafting. Staff in Shop A1 described that they could work 'without inner conflict.' This aligns with Deci, Olafsen and Ryan's (2017) view that employees become more engaged when their work identifications are integrated with other important life roles. The compensation system in Company A reinforced this by encouraging a team-oriented 'helping culture', in which employees supported one another to meet targets, facilitating relational crafting.

Millennials sought visible leaders as role models (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Servant leaders, who prioritised the needs and development of employees, acted as employees' guiding figures. Shop managers in Shop A1 demonstrated prosocial behaviour by

reallocating their own sales orders to teammates who struggled to meet daily targets. Servant leaders provided emotional and altruistic support to employees, creating a service climate and a high level of trust that encouraged positive social exchange. Based on SET, frontline sales staff such as (R1, R2 and R5) responded with high-quality customer service that went beyond standard expectations, reflecting prosocial service behaviour (Grant, 2007) and strengthening customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chen, Zhu and Zhou, 2015). These leadership practices cultivated a work environment rich in prosocial values, not only to colleagues but also to customers (Grant, 2007).

In Company A, servant leadership also satisfied Millennials' needs and preferences by cultivating a supportive work environment that offered flexibility and work-life balance, partly through supporting task crafting. They also reinforced the use of HR-led benefits, including Wellness holidays, which this cohort valued (Nwachukwu et al., 2022). Managers also communicated with employees regularly, both through formal and informal channels, to understand their needs and preferences and to listen to their concerns (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). All these actions signalled care and support to Millennial frontline staff.

SDT highlights that such a supporting environment satisfied intrinsic needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence, which enhanced engagement. This showed the positive response of Millennials to servant leadership.

## **ii) Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders inspire employees through a clear vision, encouraging creativity, fostering motivation and individualised development (Bass, 1985; Avolio, 2010). Through these behaviours, followers move beyond personal interest and connect their values to these broader goals. This leadership style supports Millennials who seek meaningful work and mentors.

In Company A, the transformational leadership helped create an environment where these leadership behaviours could emerge. For instance, three frontline sales (R1, R2 and R5) were supported by their leaders to align their values with the brand's broader vision and purpose, promoting 'A Sport' as a lifestyle during customer interactions. This reframing strengthened their identity as brand ambassadors, enhanced their commitment and reinforced their shared mission (Bass, 1999; Biddle, 1986; Mackey and Sisodia, 2014).

The shop managers' transformational leadership fostered a climate of innovation, for example, empowering staff to experiment with creative sales ideas, as reported by (R5). The leaders also inspired employees and motivated them by setting high expectations. The pursuit of the 'Asia No. 1 shop' recognition supported personal growth and created a strong collective purpose, which demonstrated collaborative crafting (Khan, Mubarik and Islam, 2021). For Millennials, this collaborative and team support environment helped them build meaningful connections with their teammates, enhancing their engagement with the team and the organisation (Ferri-Reed, 2013).

Transformational leaders strengthen Millennials' engagement by creating a climate that supports person-job fit and individual growth through job crafting. It also strengthens employees' competence by granting autonomy. In Company A, autonomy was granted to (R2) and (R6), who preferred stock shelving rather than facing customers. These conditions align with SDT, which suggests that engagement increases when work environments support essential psychological needs (Gozukara and Simsek, 2015).

To conclude, Company A's competitive advantage as a high-performing organisation stemmed from strong team cohesion and family-like relationships. This was supported by servant and transformational leadership from shop leaders, which aligned with Millennials' aspirations for meaningful connections and supportive environments. This people-centred organisational climate fostered a collaborative and inclusive workspace for better performance and engagement.

### **b) Coworkers' Strong Bonding Relationship**

While the earlier section on collaborative crafting described actual teamwork that enhanced engagement, this section turns to Millennials' aspirations for emotionally connected and caring coworker relationships. It focuses on the relational climate Millennials sought rather than the collaborative behaviours they performed. This reflects the relational qualities that Millennials valued most in their ideal workplace. A comparison table (Table 5.2) explains this contrast.

Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) found that Millennials aspired to jobs that are group-oriented, encourage participatory relationships with leaders, and provide open communication and frequent feedback. Workplace friendships (Sias and Gallagher, 2009),

**Table 5.2 Comparison of Team Collaborative Crafting (5.2.1.2) and Coworker Bonding Aspirations (5.2.2.2)**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Team (Collaborative Crafting Behaviours)</b>	<b>Coworker Bonding (Aspirations)</b>
Focus	Actual collaborative crafting observed in teams (workflow, shared targets, support)	The relational climate Millennials want (care, closeness, emotional connection)
Key Elements	How teams worked together with joint problem-solving, shared norms, workflow redesign, and trust built through interdependence	The relational climate Millennials value, workplace friendship, emotional support, caring relationships, and team-based family culture
Outcomes	Increased cohesion, better performance, stronger engagement, and higher team reliability	Higher belonging, psychological safety, stronger commitment, positive affect and well-being
Theoretical Lens	TMX, social identity, collaborative crafting, broaden-and-build theory	SET reciprocity, POS, SDT needs (relatedness, autonomy, competence), relational identity

caring supervisors and job-crafting-friendly environments that promote meaningful experiences were likely to fulfil these desires. In retail, coworker influence was predominantly through workplace friendship, which provided relational identity (Burch, 2018), greater voluntariness, authentic information-sharing (Mao, Hsieh, and Chen, 2012), positive emotions (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010), and high job satisfaction and task performance (Pillemer and Rothbard, 2018). In this study, the three organisations exhibited different types of coworker relationships, shaped by organisational climates and social factors. Company A demonstrated how close-knit, family-like friendships created a highly engaged team that contributed to the company's success. Company B's cooperative team climate remained at an operational level of cooperation, while in Company C, a supportive team climate strengthened cohesiveness and buffered dissatisfaction.

In Company A, leaders cultivated a collaborative environment that facilitated team members to build strong connections to support one another, as demonstrated in the incentive scheme. Leaders encouraged team members to assist colleagues who fell short of their goals, and this strengthened interdependence within the group. By sharing their own sales achievements, leaders demonstrated altruistic behaviour to support trust

building. SET explains that respectful relationships would be reciprocated with higher engagement and commitment (Blau, 1964). This practice aligned with Ambrose and Schminke's (2003) findings that trust involved reciprocity, where initial experiences of trust contributed to ongoing development within teams. The exchanges also strengthened perceived meaningfulness.

The high level of engagement in Company A was driven by a collaborative context shaped by people-focused leadership and HR practices, fostering prosocial motives and affective commitment among employees (Grant, 2007; Qi, Li and Zhang, 2014). Effective HR initiatives, such as performance reviews, strategic compensation, and Wellness holidays, nurtured team identification that promoted shared goals, collaboration, care, and adaptability (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Frontline sales staff in Company A expressed that these practices made them feel valued and connected to the team and the organisation. These HR initiatives strengthened trust, motivation, and loyalty among employees. These findings align with POS research, which shows that when employees perceive high organisational support, reciprocity often translates into affective commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Overall, Company A's supportive HR practices and collaborative team environment reinforced engagement and high performance.

In retail, relational crafting plays a significant role in building team relationships and fostering trust, which helps cultivate an engaged team climate (Griffin, Neal and Parker, 2007). Employees in Company A, particularly in Shop A1, demonstrated family-like bonds. (R5) described the shop and her teammates as a 'second family' and expressed genuine enjoyment in her work environment. Rath (2006) posited that family-like bonding relationships created a psychological climate that supported safety needs, which were essential for employee engagement. Rath also highlighted that such close bonding was uncommon in the workplace. This relationship promoted safety, contributing to psychological safety and psychological meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990). In addition, Obiekwe also proposed a concept of team-based family culture, which described team relationships that emphasised harmony, care, team belonging, and organisational effectiveness (Obiekwe, 2018).

In SDT, relational crafting in Company A supported employees to experience relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Through collaborative interactions and mutual support, employees strengthened their relatedness and connection. Supportive coworker

relationships made employees feel safe to adjust how they performed their work, which strengthened their autonomy. In terms of competence, a close bonding relationship encouraged feedback, skill and knowledge sharing, and mutual learning. Fulfilling these needs cultivated autonomous motivation, which increased engagement, well-being, and meaningfulness in their work (Bailey et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003).

In sum, the family-like workplace relationships in Company A reinforced relational crafting and strengthened employee engagement. This was consistent with Shuck, Rocco, and Albornoz's (2011, p. 309) findings, which highlighted that a workplace family-like relationship was the 'affective component' of the engagement.

### **c) Preferred HRM Practices**

#### **HRM and Organisational Care in POS**

In the context of POS, organisational care is fundamental to building a supportive, trust-driven climate. McAllister and Bigley (2002) defined organisational care as a core set of values focused on meeting employees' needs, supporting their well-being, and valuing their contribution. In Company A, an effective HRM system fostered a strong organisational climate of care and concern by consistently supporting employees through distinct HR practices and achieving consensus within the organisation (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Lepak and Snell (2002) highlighted that high-performance HRM systems built a psychological connection between the organisation and its employees, signalling organisational care and facilitating organisational trust. The caring HRM approach aligns with Millennials' values, as it creates feelings of being cared for and valued within the organisation. By fostering a climate of care and concern, these HRM practices satisfy the basic psychological needs of the employees for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for intrinsic motivation in SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2012; Saks, 2022).

According to Saks (2022), caring HRM practices are part of an HRM system designed to enhance employee engagement. This HRM system aims to provide some guidelines for HR practitioners to cultivate an engaged workforce. Millennials seek organisational care and value a workplace that prioritised well-being, personal growth, and flexibility, making this HRM approach an appropriate choice. Company A incorporated caring HRM initiatives across the eight areas identified in Sak's framework: job design, training and development, flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, participation in decision

making, health and safety, career development, and health and wellness programs. These initiatives provided tangible resources and discretionary offerings from the organisations, demonstrating a genuine investment in employees' well-being beyond basic job requirements. Company A applied caring HRM practices consistently, with management support across the organisation.

In Company A, Millennial employees expressed high satisfaction and a sense of pride when referring to the HRM strategies that supported their well-being at work. All participants expressed excitement about the Wellness Holiday policy during the interviews. This policy promoted work-life balance (WLB), flexibility, and health and safety. They proudly shared with their retail friends about Wellness Holidays as a symbol of the organisation's trust and care for them, which was uncommon in the retail industry, especially amid the serious labour shortage. During COVID-19, virtual training was still available to maintain employees' competence in skills and product knowledge. Employees were encouraged to participate and share their views in daily operations. For example, (R5) shared that they enjoyed the morning meetings for sharing creative ideas and were empowered to try them out at work. Among the three companies, Company A was the only one that maintained proper performance reviews for communication and career development. The concept of 'care felt', which described employees' experience of care in relationships with coworkers and leaders, was found in Company A's strong relational climate (Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli, 2011). In addition, with autonomy and support available in daily operations, employees had opportunities to adjust their tasks and relationships, and most of them engaged actively in job crafting. Snape and Redman (2010) stated that when HRM practices helped enhance intrinsic motivation within employees for more control and autonomy of the job, it elicited job crafting behaviours. Through SDT, employees in Company A had their psychological needs met at work, experiencing positive well-being and work engagement. From the SET perspective, the care and concern that they received were reciprocated through greater proactivity and performance. Taken together, these strategies demonstrate a commitment to employees' well-being, strengthening loyalty and engagement (Snape and Redman, 2010; Saks, 2022). This holistic HRM approach highlights the commitment of Company A to cultivate a supportive work environment that promotes long-term engagement.

In Company B, employees valued moderate working hours and predictable schedules, which supported work-life balance despite low autonomy and limited feedback. Several

staff claimed that this stability kept them in the job even with limited growth opportunities. In contrast, staff in Company C enjoyed autonomy but faced heavy workloads and labour shortages. In this situation, autonomy became compensatory rather than developmental, which reduced engagement. Across Companies B and C, these findings suggested that Millennials view organisational trust and care as an important driver for engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study suggests that caring HRM practices serve a dual purpose. They help satisfy intrinsic needs within SDT while reinforcing reciprocal obligations proposed in SET. This positions HRM practices as a motivational and relational link between employees and the organisation, adding to existing views that consider HRM primarily as an organisational system. Within this setting, POS captures how employees perceive and interpret these HRM practices. When employees perceive them as signals of care and opportunities for fulfilment, these perceptions translate into job crafting and engagement.

Taken together, the aspirations of Millennial employees in this study reflect a strong preference for positive leadership, supportive team relationships, and HR practices that promote care, fairness, autonomy, and growth opportunities. These aspirations appear to influence how they approach job crafting and their experience of engagement.

### **5.2.2.3 Challenges**

Building on the discussion of Millennials' aspirations in the workplace, this subsection explores the challenges they faced, namely balancing job redesign with autonomy, addressing managerial stereotypes of job crafting and younger generations, managing unsupportive leadership, and identifying gaps in HRM practices.

#### **a) Balancing job redesign and autonomy empowerment**

As discussed in Chapter 2, autonomy is a key motivational need under SDT and a primary condition of job crafting. Promoting genuine autonomy is a continuing challenge in Hong Kong's retail setting, where leaders must grant frontline staff enough discretion to adjust tasks and relationships while still complying with strict operational standards. These subtle adjustments often occur without leaders' direct supervision, and this makes managers cautious about how much discretion frontline staff should receive. In retail, where strict policies govern sales transactions, brand identity, and customer service

standards, the idea of 'freedom' raises concerns for leaders. The perception of Millennials as job hoppers (Rivers, 2018) also increases the challenge of supporting job crafting within retail settings. This intersection between organisational constraints and autonomy needs further exploration. Overall, the structural constraints of the retail environment create limited space for discretion, making leadership support essential for fostering meaningful autonomy.

To address these structural limits, leaders play a key role in creating autonomy-supportive environments. Autonomy, recognised as an essential human need (Bowie, 1998), requires leaders to signal trust by granting employees discretion over tasks and decisions for job redesign. This interpretation of trust is strengthened through high-quality LMX, reflecting genuine care and support in work relationships (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Since trust is bidirectional, restricted autonomy could reduce employees' trust in leaders, lowering their confidence in the organisation (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012).

Autonomy strengthens engagement through intrinsic motivational needs (Deci and Ryan, 2000). When employees experience ownership and freedom, they view their work as purposeful and are more likely to sustain autonomous motivation that supports long-term engagement (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017; Martela and Riecki, 2018).

In this study, Companies A and C fostered high autonomy. In Company A, shop managers provided flexibility for the team to engage in tasks according to their preferences. For example, (R6) focused on shelving, while (R2) and (R5) promoted the brand, aligning with their interests. In Company C, high autonomy was granted through management's *laissez-faire* approach. Despite limited HRM support, autonomy facilitated proactive task crafting to buffer the strain of heavy workloads. This discretion fostered ownership and helped sustain engagement under pressure (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Proactive behaviour was demonstrated by (R13) and (R16), who remained motivated under high work demands. This aligns with findings by Frese, Garst and Fay (2007), who reported that heavy workload and the perception of autonomy predicted personal initiative.

In contrast, Company B's hierarchical structure and transactional leadership style offered limited autonomy. Participants claimed that most of their proactive ideas were not accepted by their shop leaders, which led them to pursue adaptive moves for task crafting as a coping strategy to work within their constraints. For instance, (R11) provided mentorship to customers after her proposal on social media marketing was rejected by

the manager. This adaptive approach helped her align with her personal values of helping customers while making her role more manageable. Adaptive crafting allowed employees to maintain control and purpose in a restricted environment (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010; Park et al., 2020). When dealing with constraints and challenges, adaptive moves functioned as problem-solving strategies while proactive job crafting aimed at initiating changes.

These findings suggest that Millennials' desire for autonomy, demonstrated through both task control and social flexibility, was reflected in their informal job-crafting behaviours. Work-life balance, discussed earlier under employee aspirations, also shaped how Millennials interpreted autonomy as organisational care. Overall, managers need to sustain autonomy to support engagement and create more meaningful work experiences.

Across these contrasting situations, autonomy significantly shaped how employees approached task crafting. Companies A and C showed that autonomy encouraged proactive task crafting, whereas Company B's restriction encouraged adaptive coping. This highlighted the importance of leadership trust and supportive systems in policy-bound retail settings. In sum, job crafting in retail faces challenges in balancing flexibility with control, recognising its possible downsides, and addressing the lack of managerial understanding about its role in employee engagement. The latter two points will be explored further in the next section.

### **b) Millennials and the Stereotypes Held by Management**

Millennials are known for distinct work expectations and behaviours. As discussed in Chapter 2.1.1, scholars observed that Millennials prefer jobs with flexibility and opportunities for growth and refrain from working on repetitive or dull duties (Kuron et al., 2015). Millennials emphasise meaningfulness, autonomy, flexibility, and value alignment (Holt, Marques and Way, 2012), all of which reflect intrinsic motivation. These preferences align closely with job crafting: cognitive crafting for meaningful experience, task crafting for person–job fit, and autonomy for independent decision making. Managers' perception of Millennials' desire for autonomy influences how much control or freedom they exercise in practice. When leaders stereotype Millennials as self-centred and as unwilling to follow rigid processes, they become hesitant to support job crafting and maintain constrained work roles with limited flexibility.

Transactional and laissez-faire approaches often intensify stigmatisation, whereas more adaptive leadership could mitigate bias and better support job crafting. In Company B, management with a hierarchical and transactional style viewed Millennials as lazy or self-centred, and perceived their desire for autonomy as ignoring company standards and challenging authority. This management's perception aligned with McGregor's Theory X assumption that employees naturally resist work and require close supervision (McGregor, 1960). Therefore, leaders in Company B valued strict role clarity and performance control (Wang, Demerouti and Bakker, 2016) and feared that self-initiated job crafting would disrupt coordination (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2015).

Company C's laissez-faire, flat structure also raised concerns about promoting job crafting in retail. While less hierarchical, management in Company C considered job crafting unrealistic because of their high turnover and staff shortages. They preferred flexible role rotation to maintain operations and worried that excessive autonomy could leave key duties unattended. This cautious attitude reflected a mindset formed by structural pressures rather than deliberate leadership intent, a pattern that will be examined further in the following sections.

In contrast, the management in Company A showed greater openness to job crafting due to their understanding of this generation's inclination toward self-management and growth. As a result, leaders were more willing to explore job crafting further to foster engagement.

Another managerial concern about promoting job crafting is the potential drawbacks of avoidance and prevention-focused crafting. It involves employees adjusting their roles to avoid certain tasks or minimise perceived risks, which may cause inequalities in task distribution, role overload, and role conflict with coworkers within the team (Bindl and Parker, 2010; Bruning and Campion, 2018). Avoidance-oriented task crafting, if left unaddressed, may lead to coworkers' burnout and strain on team cohesion (Bruning and Campion, 2018). Further, Dierdorff and Jensen (2018) found that prevention-focused job crafting could erode both individual and collective performance. This explains why managers are cautious in promoting job crafting, as it requires leaders to balance employees' self-initiated changes with the practical demands of daily operational needs.

Overall, these managerial perceptions, ranging from control-oriented to hands-off, affect how autonomy and job crafting are practised in daily work.

## **c) Challenges in Leadership**

### **i) Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership appeared primarily in Company B, where managers focused on performance targets and close supervision rather than intrinsic motivation. Consistent with earlier findings, Millennials prefer a workplace that emphasises connection, care and trust, meaningful work, autonomy, growth, and flexibility (Deal and Levenson, 2016; Manuti, Curci and Van der Heijden, 2018; Twenge et al., 2010). However, these expectations conflict with transactional leadership, which emphasises role clarity and reward-based recognition rather than autonomy or intrinsic motivation. From an SDT perspective, excessive reliance on external rewards, limited autonomy, and an emphasis on short-term goals weaken intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement.

First, as Millennials seek autonomy and meaningful work, job crafting is a way to enhance job meaning. Leaders in Company B often dismissed employees' proactive and constructive ideas. For example, (R10) proposed offering a refund to customers, and (R8) suggested redesigning window displays. Both suggestions were declined by shop managers. These examples limited employees' opportunities to craft and reduced their proactive behaviour. However, some employees continued to seek opportunities to craft under transactional leadership for their job satisfaction. (R7) gained decision making autonomy and (R8) modified the window display when leaders were absent. This shows that Millennial frontline employees continued to pursue autonomy even within constrained conditions.

Second, transactional leadership weakens basic need satisfaction and the motivational process in SDT (Hetland et al., 2011). As transactional leaders focus mainly on individual performance over connectedness, this approach makes Millennials feel undervalued and unsupported. Two staff members indicated that they were looking for new opportunities. For example, (R12) felt distrusted due to mystery shopper evaluations and strict greeting policies. (R11) felt no compassion when calling in sick, and (R8) and (R10) felt leaders prioritised sales over employee satisfaction, all of which diminished engagement. With weakened intrinsic motivation, they viewed the role as just a job and sought alternative opportunities with greater autonomy and personal development.

For Millennials, when a transactional work culture fails to support deeper intrinsic satisfaction in their roles, they may feel undervalued and perceive that organisations have

breached the psychological contract. This perception may reduce their commitment and would suggest that organisations do not support long-term growth (Rousseau, 1989).

However, a study by Oprea, Miulescu, and Iliescu (2022) found that transactional leadership can sometimes encourage job crafting, but only in non-hierarchical settings where employees retain autonomy. Company B's close supervision appeared to suppress such outcomes. While transactional leadership offers short-term clarity and rewards, its limitations in fostering autonomy and intrinsic motivation reduce long-term engagement and job crafting for Millennials. This suggests that job crafting works better under transactional leadership when autonomy is allowed.

## **ii) Laissez-faire Leadership**

Laissez-faire leadership emerged mostly in Company C, where minimal direction, low managerial support, and limited feedback led to inconsistent engagement among frontline staff. The laissez-faire approach in Company C was driven by senior management, who impacted the overall work climate. This style of leadership lacks feedback, guidelines, and motivation, which led to role ambiguity and role conflict (Skogstad et al., 2007). For example, (R13) and (R14) enjoyed a high degree of freedom and flexibility, allowing them task crafting opportunities that met their need for autonomy under SDT (Deci and Ryan, 1985). However, minimal formal guidance and support meant that employees struggled to meet standards. This situation caused stress and dissatisfaction, as autonomy without fulfilling competence needs weakens motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The absence of structure hindered skill development, despite high autonomy. Further, the organisation failed to provide Millennials with mentorship, opportunities for growth, and a clear career path. For example, (R16) mentioned that she did not know how she was performing due to a lack of appraisals. In Company C, a laissez-faire approach led to weak HRM support and ineffective workflow, reducing engagement.

As the Millennial workforce values meaningful work, the severe labour shortage and heavy manual processes caused by outdated technology contributed to burnout and reduced work-life balance. For instance, (R15) described her job felt like she was wasting her life, while (R17) and (R18) reported burning out due to inadequate holidays. Salary disparities, increased workloads, and stress caused by unfilled headcount, as noted by (R14), also reduced trust and engagement. However, Oprea, Miulescu and Iliescu (2022)

found that laissez-faire leadership may encourage job crafting among intrinsically motivated employees when psychological needs can be met independently. Yet employees in Company C lacked the support and resources to sustain self-motivation.

These two types of leadership limited job crafting opportunities in various aspects and fell short of Millennials' preferred leadership style, leaving the organisation with moderate to low engagement. To bridge the leadership gap, it is recommended that both companies consider Company A's best practices. Moreover, adding middle management roles strategically in both companies could gradually shift the leadership culture towards a more balanced approach. For instance, Company C may consider introducing transformational middle management to define organisational vision and set goals to provide guidance. This strategy would provide Company C with a form of 'guided autonomy'. Instead of implementing sudden policy changes, this gradual approach allows leaders to inspire employees by aligning their roles with broader organisational goals as an intermediate step. Leaders could maintain flexibility while offering the necessary structure to support employees who lacked guidance. Alternatively, Company B may also consider appointing middle managers with a servant leadership style to make employees feel valued and supported. Considering that a structural change in the hierarchical setting is unlikely, a recalibrated and adaptive approach could be a solution. In sum, leaders in both companies could adopt a relational approach and focus on building interpersonal trust and team bonding to enhance engagement, job satisfaction and commitment.

#### **d) Gaps in HRM Practices and Impact on Engagement**

Weak HRM support in Companies B and C created gaps across rewards, performance appraisal, training and development, and workload management. SET suggests that when organisations fail to provide support and recognition, employees perceive it as weak POS and reduced intrinsic motivation. This pattern was clearly reflected in both Companies B and C (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Companies B and C showed major gaps in their HRM approaches, particularly in supporting caring HRM practices. The HRM practices in Company B lacked continuity, with a focus on immediate tasks and performance metrics rather than long-term development. The policies were conceptually in place but lacked consistent execution and failed to communicate the policy objectives to employees (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). This approach made it challenging for employees to experience autonomy or meaning in

their roles. In Company C, the absence of a structured HR system, including irregular appraisals, limited training, and inequitable compensation, further weakened organisational trust. According to SET, employees who sensed inadequate reciprocal investment from the organisation tended to disengage, as they perceived their contributions as undervalued (Blau, 1964). Consequently, fragmented HR practices in both companies created a trust gap that reduced engagement.

Several aspects were identified as challenges that hindered Millennial retail employees' active engagement and job crafting practices. The key areas that constrained job crafting and engagement were the reward system, appraisal, training and development, and excessive workload.

### **i) Total Reward System**

Employees in the three case studies faced challenges that hindered their ability to craft their jobs, with the reward system among them. Among the three, Company A had a well-developed HRM system with professionally executed practices, while Companies B and C had a substantial gap in their rewards, appraisal, and career development systems. These disparities reflect limitations not only in the content but also in the process of the HRM system, making the HRM system difficult for employees to view as a high-commitment system that fosters impersonal trust (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

First, the total reward system in Companies B and C reflected a misalignment between Millennial employees' expectations and management's perceptions. Management in both companies appeared to prioritise extrinsic rewards, such as compensation, based on their belief that Millennials value these rewards most. However, Millennials prioritise intrinsic rewards, with well-being as their top preference. Gallup reported 50% of employees claimed that well-being was 'very important' (Gallup, 2022). Other factors, such as meaningful work, growth opportunities, and recognition, also contributed to the perception of meaningfulness when fair compensation was already established (Bowie, 1998).

Across the three companies, work–life balance was the most valued non-financial reward as reported. Flexibility was seen as the practical means to achieve this balance, as the ability to manage their own work and social life schedule gave a stronger sense of control and autonomy (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). This improved the balance between work and personal life.

In addition to flexibility, well-being was valued by Millennial frontline employees because it aligned with their broader life goals of achieving meaningful work and reflected intrinsic motivation. These findings correspond with Herzberg's (1968) Two-Factor theory, which positioned compensation as a hygiene factor. While the absence of adequate compensation may cause dissatisfaction, its presence alone would not necessarily serve as a motivator for Millennials in sports retail.

Similarly, for frontline employees in Companies B and C, the absence of meaningful intrinsic rewards weakens reciprocal effort. This made employees limit their engagement in response to minimal organisational investment in their well-being (Blau, 1964).

## **ii) Appraisal System**

Millennials in Companies B and C faced challenges with appraisal systems that failed to provide a consistent process for recognising employee contributions. In this study, the absence of a comprehensive appraisal system impeded career goal planning, feedback communication, and recognition, leaving Millennials without clear guidance and inadequate support for their professional development.

First, Millennials in Companies B and C struggled with self-assessment of their work performance due to the absence of both formal and informal feedback. Participants (R7, R9, R16, R17) expressed that they did not receive feedback and lacked regular opportunities to discuss expectations and career paths. Without a structural appraisal process, Millennials found it challenging to develop self-awareness of their progress, strengths, and areas for improvement, which was necessary for setting self-concordant goals that were personally meaningful (Sheldon and Elliot, 1999). Sujansky and Ferri-Reed (2009) stated that Millennials expected constant feedback, while performance reviews needed to be done regularly. Delays in such reviews could be interpreted as silent disapproval, often resulting in demotivation. Consistent and constructive feedback supports Millennials in crafting meaningful work experiences and promotes both relational and cognitive crafting (Li and Takao, 2020). Effective feedback further increases job competence and psychological meaningfulness, both of which support meaningful positive engagement (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004).

Second, when appreciation is lacking, Millennials are less motivated to engage in job crafting. SET suggests that when employees receive recognition, they are more likely to respond with commitment and effort (Blau, 1964). Without feedback channels to convey

recognition and appreciation, Millennials in Companies B and C often felt that their contributions were unacknowledged. This reduced their proactiveness and motivation for engaging in both task and relational crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Third, performance appraisal plays a key role in shaping perceptions of fairness within the recognition system. In Company C, salary disparities were not based on performance evaluation, but on higher pay given to newcomers. Employees viewed the situation as unfair treatment, and it eroded trust in the employee-employer relationship. This further weakened reciprocity under SET, contributing to disengagement (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001).

### **iii) Training and Development System**

In Companies B and C, limited training left employees without essential product knowledge and selling skills, weakening their self-efficacy. (R7, R9 and R17) mentioned that they had not received adequate training, even though retail work required complex sales skills and product knowledge to build confidence and competence. This reduced employees' capacity to proactively reshape their roles. Millennials may also interpret the absence of training as a breach in the psychological contract, as they expected organisations to invest in their growth in return for their contribution and commitment to the organisation (Rousseau, 1989). Over time, this led to frustration and disengagement. Within SET, insufficient training weakens reciprocity, reducing morale and self-initiation (Blau, 1964; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Millennials value learning opportunities (Deal and Levenson, 2016), while training signals that the company is committed to investing in their growth and development (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). Since this generation seeks to play an active role in the organisation's success, they are more motivated when training supports their growth needs (Taylor, 2016; Walsh, 2015).

The desire for learning at work parallels esteem needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Employees develop self-confidence when they learn and grow (Maslow, 1970). The need for competence is fulfilled by gaining knowledge from training. Autonomy also develops through workplace learning because it helps employees better understand themselves (Chalofsky and Cavallaro, 2013; Dirkx, 2013). These align with SDT, as the basic needs of competence and autonomy are satisfied. When employees feel capable and autonomous, intrinsic motivation is strengthened (Ryan and Deci, 2000). They become more confident

in navigating challenges and aligning their values with the organisation. This was observed in Company A, where learning opportunities and 'granted autonomy' supported employees in feeling competent and autonomous when responding to challenges such as winning the Asia retail award.

#### **iv) Excessive Workload**

In Company C, Millennial employees faced substantial workload challenges, and participants such as (R15) and (R18) consistently cited exhaustion caused by manual tasks, outdated systems, and insufficient staffing. High autonomy was intended to empower employees, but without sufficient operational support, it led to workload issues and weakened engagement. According to SET, this lack of support disrupted the mutual expectations between employees and the organisations, creating an imbalance in the psychological contract. Millennials viewed heavy workloads without adequate resources as a breach of reciprocity.

Maslach's Burnout Theory emphasises that continuous high workloads, which are intensified by inefficient processes, cause emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). This connection was clearly observed in Company C, where employees (R14, R16, R18) voiced frustration over the persistent labour shortage. Employees frequently covered extra shifts and handled heavy manual tasks without support. These workload challenges created the conditions for burnout.

To further understand the motivational impact of these conditions, SDT explains how unmet psychological needs contributed to employee disengagement. In Company C, SDT highlighted how excessive workloads affected the interplay of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Van den Broeck et al. (2021) stated that satisfaction of these needs lowers exhaustion. However, Millennial employees in Company C experienced high workload pressure and had limited opportunities for development or relational crafting, which diminished their feelings of competence and relational fulfilment. Although autonomy allowed employees to manage tasks independently, the absence of HRM support, such as labour shortage, insufficient training, and poor communication, left psychological needs unmet. As a result, intrinsic motivation declined, and the likelihood of burnout increased. These challenges illustrated that while autonomy encouraged proactive job crafting, it cannot function effectively without sufficient resources and social bonding (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Frese, Garst and Fay, 2007).

In addition to unmet psychological needs, the high workload burden in Company C stemmed from HR's failure to address persistent staffing shortages, driven by a mismatch between operational demands and HR strategy. Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) claimed that a challenging workload could be beneficial, but excess demands become detrimental to employee engagement. For Millennials, work-life balance was their most preferred reward. The high turnover and employee burnout further increased recruitment difficulties and hiring costs. To address this gap, HR and leadership should streamline operational processes and upgrade technology to reduce workload. Such actions would provide an immediate solution to retain already disengaged employees.

Overall, the findings show that Millennial retail employees aspire to autonomy, meaningful work, supportive leadership, and strong peer relationships that shape their willingness to craft their jobs. These aspirations are often restricted by inconsistent managerial practices, HRM gaps, and operational demands. With trust and support, Millennials proactively craft ways to strengthen personal job fit and engagement. When conditions are weak, crafting becomes a coping rather than a developmental strategy. Overall, job crafting's impact on engagement depends heavily on the surrounding work context.

### **5.2.3 Exploring the Potential Impact of Job Crafting on Employee Engagement**

In examining the role of contextual factors such as organisational climate, POS and PHRM practices on job crafting and employee engagement, it is important to understand how these factors collectively shape the work environment in retail settings. Organisational climate refers to the shared understanding of an organisation's policies, practices, and behaviours (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2011). In this study, it refers to how these factors affect the quality of opportunities to job craft. POS refers to how employees perceive the organisation's recognition of their contributions and care for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986), while PHRM relates to employees' perceptions of HR practices such as performance appraisals, feedback, and development opportunities (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). By focusing on job crafting and employee engagement, this study explores how POS and PHRM influence employee behaviours and outcomes.

This section provides an individual analysis of Companies A, B, and C to understand the impact of job crafting behaviour on employee engagement in each setting. By examining differences in organisational climate, this analysis uncovers how work environments influence employees' ability to engage in job crafting and pursue meaningful work. SDT and SET serve as the guiding theoretical frameworks.

#### **5.2.3.1 Job Crafting and Its Influence on Employee Engagement by Company**

a) Company A: Company A exemplified a job-crafting-friendly environment where strong organisational support and caring HRM practices created a culture that promoted job crafting. The company showed a relatively employee-centric approach, with a climate of trust, care, and positive leadership, which supported a high level of job crafting and engagement. Unlike other retail environments, Company A's culture prioritised relational ties, fostering a supportive atmosphere where team collaboration helped employees work toward shared goals, contributing to high levels of collaborative crafting (Bakker, Rodriguez-Munoz and Sanz Vergel, 2016; Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk, 2009). This aligned with the relatedness need in SDT, as employees found meaning and satisfaction in building relationships and contributing to company success (Ryan and Deci, 2000). One key driver of relational crafting in Company A was the family-like atmosphere among staff, where emotional bonds helped employees feel valued and offered unconditional support (Rath, 2006). These friendships were crucial in sustaining trust and contributed to relatedness in SDT (Mao, Hsieh and Chen, 2012).

The caring environment facilitated mutual assistance and shared responsibilities, cultivating a safer climate in the work environment for relational crafting (Sias and Cahill, 1998; Berman et al., 2002). First, high-quality TMX reinforced psychological safety through feedback sharing and learning (Lee, 2020; Hung et al., 2020). Second, collaborative crafting was another key aspect that involved employees working collectively to meet organisational targets such as the No. 1 Asia Shop Sales Award, monthly sales goals, and organisational performance (Griffin, Neal and Parker, 2007). This collaborative crafting allowed employees to align their tasks with broader team objectives, supporting meaningfulness through authentic connection, and making Company A an exemplar case of meaningful relational ties. Psychological safety emerged from the caring climate, where collaborative crafting generated meaningfulness; together, these outcomes supported proactive job crafting in Company A (Kahn, 1990).

Task crafting also played a central role in Company A, as leaders granted autonomy to alter roles and responsibilities to match employees' values and preferences, improving person-job fit (Kooij et al., 2017). For example, an employee managing inventory and shelving aligned her tasks with her strengths and desire to assist coworkers. Other employees, through cognitive crafting as brand ambassadors, reshaped their work identity to align with company values. Both examples illustrated how job crafting aligned with personal strengths and values, enhancing engagement.

The synergy between relational and task crafting supported high engagement in Company A. Employees felt empowered not only through relational and collaborative crafting but also through the autonomy they experienced in task crafting. This cultivated a well-rounded environment that satisfied the needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy outlined in SDT, which enhanced engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

In summary, the organisational climate of Company A was defined by trust, team support, and collaborative crafting, making it a unique model in the retail industry. Employees felt empowered to craft not only for personal benefit but also for collective success, strengthening engagement across the organisation.

b) Company B: In Company B, job crafting and employee engagement were notably low due to a rigid and hierarchical organisational climate that limited employee autonomy. This work environment emphasised strict adherence to procedures and was performance-driven, which reduced opportunities for employees to modify their roles meaningfully.

Despite these constraints, employees engaged in task crafting through adaptive moves to compensate for reduced autonomy and create meaning in their roles. According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), such adaptive moves allowed employees to subtly adjust their tasks and strengthen personal meaning in an inflexible environment. This aligned with the concept of adaptive crafting, where adaptation is used to cope with changes. It also helped employees find satisfaction in their work even under external pressure (Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton, 2010).

Cognitive crafting supported the staff in Company B to derive work meaning. They shifted their focus from merely meeting sales targets to building meaningful connections with customers for serving a greater purpose (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2013). For example, (R7) demonstrated this by reframing interactions with elderly customers, focusing on understanding their preferences to create a more personalised connection. This reflected relatedness through customer-focused service, consistent with SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2012). It also showed that employees in Company B were actively seeking opportunities for meaningful engagement even within environmental constraints. The limited opportunity for job crafting diminished employees' ability to derive deeper meaning from their work, negatively impacting their overall engagement and satisfaction (Tims, Bakker, and Derks, 2013).

Relational crafting also played a role in a limited capacity, as employees sought to establish strong relationships with customers to find meaning at work. Tims, Bakker, and Derks posit that social bonds can improve engagement (Tims, Bakker, and Derks, 2013). For instance, (R7) and (R8) took initiatives to build a closer relationship with customers, which corresponds to SDT's relatedness, as they positively contributed to the customer's well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2012).

In sum, the rigid structure of Company B resulted in low levels of engagement and job crafting. The inflexible structure consistently restricted employees' self-initiated motives, leading to disengagement and withdrawal behaviours characteristic of quiet quitting (Gallup, 2022). This aligns with SET, which posits that when support is lacking, employees may feel undervalued and focus only on completing immediate tasks (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). The combination of low autonomy, inadequate organisational, and leadership support made it challenging for employees to align their work with personal values.

c) Company C: Company C was characterised by a flat and simple structure, moderate levels of job crafting and engagement, extensive autonomy, and limited structured HRM practices or formal support systems. This stemmed mainly from the laissez-faire leadership approach adopted by top management. The high level of autonomy allowed employees to adjust their tasks to align more closely with their skills and values, contributing to person-job fit (Tims, Bakker, and Derks, 2013). Through the autonomy granted to them, employees in Company C took ownership of their roles and made adjustments that enhanced their work experience. According to Martela and Riekkii (2018), autonomy is one of the most powerful psychological needs in creating meaningful work, as it empowers employees to feel that their actions are self-directed and aligned with their personal beliefs.

In Company C, the lack of technological and HR support created a work environment characterised by heavy workload demands. Employees used their autonomy to manage these demands by proactively adjusting tasks and taking the initiative to meet sales and service expectations. This aligned with De Jonge and Schaufeli (1998), who found that high autonomy helped reduce exhaustion. According to SDT, autonomy helped offset the lack of contextual support and facilitated employees staying engaged despite unfavourable conditions. In this case, this autonomy in job crafting acted as a buffer and helped employees cope with the challenges posed by poor HR practices. This illustrated how autonomy mitigated excessive workload pressure.

While autonomy supported daily functioning, inefficient HRM practices also contributed to disengagement, leading to frustration with meaningless work and unfair treatment. One staff member experienced disengagement due to repetitive manual tasks, while another raised fairness concerns about the higher pay for newcomers. These cases mirrored findings from the literature on inefficient work processes and pay inequity concerns (Aslam et al, 2018; Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001), leading to low engagement.

Cognitive crafting also played an important role in Company C. Employees reframed their roles as 'shop owners' and felt empowered to manage the shop's operations independently, which increased their accountability and personal investment amidst high workloads. As noted by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), cognitive crafting allows employees to shape their perceptions of their tasks, aligning them with their values.

Relational crafting existed in Company C but remained on a surface level. Employees cooperated with each other on day-to-day tasks, yet the lack of strong emotional bonds limited deeper relational crafting. Limited caring HRM practices failed to create an environment of trust and connection, resulting in a transactional work environment. At the shop level, frontline staff depended on their own competence and autonomy to manage tasks (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005)

Although autonomy and task crafting sustained a moderate level of engagement in Company C, the absence of contextual support systems, such as effective HRM practices, made it difficult to nurture stronger long-term job crafting and engagement (Deci and Ryan, 2012).

These contrasts suggest that the three companies differed not only in engagement outcomes, but in the organisational conditions that promoted or constrained job crafting. Company A's supportive climate appears rooted in a people-centred HR philosophy with consistent development structures and team-based norms that made crafting safe and meaningful. Company B operated within a structured, top-down and policy-driven culture, where engagement was treated as a procedural and measurable activity rather than a developmental or meaningful experience. Management prioritised standardisation and task execution, which limited autonomy and relationship building. This, in turn, constrained proactive job crafting. Company C's autonomy emerged from operational strain and labour shortages rather than an empowerment strategy, resulting in job crafting functioning mainly for coping instead of a developmental process. The variation in these organisational foundations explains why job crafting led to meaningful engagement in A, while leading to adaptive survival in B, and strain-buffering in C.

### **5.2.3.2 Impact of Contextual Factors on Job Crafting and Employee Engagement by Case Analysis**

Company A demonstrated high POS through strong leadership and a strategic HRM system within a caring climate, fostering proactive job crafting and high engagement. In contrast, Company B showed weak POS due to inconsistent transactional HRM practices, which limited autonomy and led to adaptive motives in job crafting and lower engagement. Company C, despite minimal POS and ineffective HRM practices, achieved moderate engagement by providing high autonomy.

This section provides a cross-case comparison showing how contextual factors in Companies A, B, and C shaped job crafting and engagement outcomes. Taking POS as an analytical lens, it first examines how organisational trust was experienced and strengthened across the three company cases. Then, it explores how employees interpreted key contextual factors, such as organisational climate and leadership, coworker support, HRM practices, and management's perceptions of job crafting.

#### **a) Perceived Organisational Support**

POS serves as the lens for understanding how employees interpreted support across the three companies. Through this lens, leadership, coworker relationships, HRM practices, and managerial attitudes are understood in relation to how trust developed.

#### **Organisational Trust**

Organisational trust reflects employees' confidence in the organisation's intentions, believing it will act in their best interests (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995). In this thesis, organisational trust is strengthened by perceived organisational support, reflected in everyday leadership behaviour, HRM consistency, and coworker connection.

In Company A, trust developed through both impersonal and interpersonal channels. Impersonal trust was strong due to fair, transparent HRM systems, such as consistent appraisals and well-structured career development programs, which enhanced psychological safety and encouraged job crafting (De Jong, Kroon, and Schilke, 2017; Kahn, 1990). High-quality interpersonal trust stemmed from positive leadership styles that appreciated employees' contributions and personal development. This combination established a trustworthy, caring, and supportive organisational climate where employees felt genuinely valued and supported proactive job crafting. It aligned with Colquitt, Greenberg and Zapata-Phelan's view (2013) that a strong organisational climate, with a positive perception of HR policies and practices, resulted in organisational trust.

Regarding impersonal trust, Companies B and C faced significant trust deficits due to unstructured HRM practices and minimal developmental support (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003; Tan and Tan, 2000). Both Companies B and C struggled with infrequent appraisals, limited career planning, and inconsistent feedback. In Company C, unfair salaries eroded distributive justice and organisational trust (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). This weakened employees' motivation to engage, leaving them focused mainly on completing tasks for immediate results, which is consistent with SET.

Regarding interpersonal trust, Company B's transactional leadership prioritised short-term goals over meaningful relationships, which weakened employer-employee trust. Employees' unmet relatedness needs reduced their proactive relational crafting, leading to lower engagement (Hussain et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Although Company C offered occasional operational support from supervisors, the overall laissez-faire culture failed to deepen interpersonal trust, limiting engagement and meaningful job crafting. The lack of relational crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and insufficient support for intrinsic motivators (Grant, 2007) left employees in both companies focused on transactional survival rather than proactive engagement.

## **b) Organisational Climate, Leadership and Coworkers**

### **i) Organisational Climate and Leadership**

Organisational climate reflects how employees collectively perceive workplace procedures, practices, and behavioural norms (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2011). In Company A, the organisational climate was defined by strong trust and caring leadership, where transformational and servant leaders supported participation and reinforced a collaborative approach to job crafting and engagement. Transformational leadership motivates employees by empowering them, boosting their confidence, and promoting person-job fit (Bass, 1985; Hetland et al., 2018; Wang, Demerouti, and Le Blanc, 2017). Together, servant leadership prioritises employees' well-being and development, supports Millennials' need for care and mentoring, and strengthens emotional ties for relational crafting (Greenleaf, 1977; Harju, Schaufeli and Hakanen, 2018). Leaders in Company A cultivated high-quality LMX, which reinforced relational ties (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). These ties strengthened not only relational and collaborative crafting, but also organisational trust (Vanhala and Tzafir, 2021). Leaders also encouraged TMX to promote mutual learning and cooperation within teams (Lee, 2020). Collectively, these leadership approaches created a supportive climate that strengthened collaborative exchanges and fulfilled SDT's three basic psychological needs, leading to proactive job crafting and meaningful engagement.

In Company B, transactional leadership operated within a rigid hierarchical environment, forming a restricted organisational climate. Since transactional leaders arbitrarily allocated job-related resources, prescribed tasks without flexibility, and invested less in staff development (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Esteves and Lopes, 2017). Millennial

employees felt disconnected and undervalued, negatively impacting their engagement. Further, the opportunities for job crafting depended on how leaders perceived employees' intention to craft. In Company B, where the LMX quality was low, leaders often viewed job crafting with suspicion, limiting crafting opportunities (Wang, Demerouti and Bakker, 2016). In sum, although transactional leaders effectively drove short-term results, they often neglected employees' needs for relatedness and growth, lowering engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Although some direct supervisors in Company C offered support, the overall climate could be described as low-supportive and self-reliant. Employees had high autonomy due to labour shortages and a laissez-faire management style, leading them to manage tasks independently with limited guidance, support, and feedback. They engaged in adaptive task crafting out of necessity rather than proactive initiatives, which limited job crafting. This hands-off approach left competence and relatedness needs unmet, lowering work meaningfulness and engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

To conclude, the positive leadership in Company A facilitated job crafting and engagement, while the transactional and laissez-faire styles in Companies B and C limited these outcomes.

## **ii) Coworker support**

Coworker support was a key attribute in Company A, built on family-like bonds and strong team-member exchange (TMX), which fostered trust and proactive job crafting. This bonding promoted relational and collaborative crafting, with coworkers providing both physical and emotional support that helped align individual values with team goals. The supportive climate strengthened meaningfulness and psychological safety (Grant, 2007; Kahn, 1990). Coworker support in Company A exemplified relational crafting and high engagement, driven by altruistic and collaborative interactions (Sias, 2005; Berman et al., 2002). This synergy allowed Company A to outperform competitors in team bonding and organisational performance.

In contrast, Company B sustained functional coworker interactions that lacked emotional depth, which limited relational crafting and engagement. Similarly, in Company C, coworker relationships were primarily focused on operational support rather than building meaningful team relationships, resulting in a lack of emotional connection and relatively lower engagement.

### **c) HRM Practices**

In this study, HRM practices act as signals of organisational care, shaping how employees perceive POS. Differences in HRM practices across the three companies influenced the degree of job crafting and engagement.

### **i) Caring HRM System**

The caring HRM system in Company A facilitated employee engagement by facilitating job crafting within a climate of trust and care. This system integrated eight strategies to fulfil SDT's basic psychological needs for growth and well-being (Saks, 2022). Supported by positive leadership, these practices encouraged task and relational crafting aligned with organisational goals. This discretionary approach illustrated the organisation's commitment to employees, encouraging reciprocal job crafting and engagement as outlined by SET (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003; Blau, 1964).

The caring HRM practices in Company A formed an integrated framework, providing both tangible support and reinforcing trust. Employee-centric HRM caring initiatives, such as health programs, career paths, and work-life balance, strengthened organisational trust and signalled genuine organisational care (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). This holistic support cultivated greater engagement through job crafting.

For Millennials, work-life balance, meaningful work roles, and autonomy were highly valued. Company A's wellness holiday during COVID-19 served as an exemplary benefit, supporting health, safety, work-life balance, and flexibility. These initiatives met employees' physical, psychological, and social needs, which aligned with Millennials' values (Wayne et al., 2017). Employees often experience positive emotion after feeling 'care-felt' within the organisation. In return, they may reciprocate with higher engagement (Emerson, 1976).

In contrast, HRM practices in Company B lacked continuity, limiting career support and creating a transactional, task-focused environment. Company C provided minimal HR support, which confined employees to basic task fulfilment, leaving little room for engagement or proactive crafting (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003).

The caring HRM system in Company A demonstrated the effectiveness of a cohesive HR strategy in sustaining engagement and job crafting. This was achieved through trust and

holistic support from management, with HR practices characterised by distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

## **ii) Appraisal, Feedback and Fairness**

In Company A, appraisal, feedback, and justice systems (procedural, distributive, and interactional) were well-established, which aligned with Millennials' need for immediate and constructive feedback. These justice systems built organisational trust, facilitating task and relational crafting. Formal feedback through appraisals created a fair process (procedural justice), providing a structured way to assess performance and reinforcing employees' trust in leadership integrity (Colquitt, 2001). By applying fair rewards (distributive justice) and open communication (interactional justice), Company A promoted transparency in HR processes, which enhanced employees' perception of fairness. This supported trust building and allowed employees to reinterpret their roles more positively through cognitive crafting (Katou, 2013). Informal feedback from managers gave Millennials the immediate guidance they preferred, allowing quick adjustments and encouraging task crafting (Cheung et al., 2009; Ashford, 1986). This feedback also enhanced relational crafting by creating interpersonal bonds since recognition from leaders added meaning to their work (Bishop, 1987).

In contrast, Companies B and C lacked structured appraisal and feedback systems, which constrained job crafting and engagement. Infrequent appraisals weakened fair processes (procedural justice), reducing organisational trust. In Company B, although employees viewed appraisal outcomes as fair (distributive justice), (R7) claimed that the lack of transparency in the appraisal process negatively impacted his perception of HR capability. By concentrating on routine tasks instead of growth, managerial feedback limited opportunities to craft as well as employee engagement (Seijts et al., 2004). Similarly, in Company C, the absence of formal appraisals weakened fair processes (procedural justice) and interactional communication (interactional justice), diminishing organisational trust. Employees raised concerns about salary differences for newcomers (distributive justice), which further lowered trust in fair rewards. Without regular appraisal, justice and feedback systems, employees tended to prioritise immediate tasks over proactive relational crafting, directly impacting the level of engagement (Gruman and Saks, 2011).

### **iii) Training and Development**

Training played a key role in signalling organisational support to employees, directly impacting job crafting and engagement (Guan and Frenkel, 2018; Frenkel, Restubog and Bednall, 2012). In Company A, structured training programs, such as product knowledge sessions and virtual training during COVID, consistently met employees' competence needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These programs reinforced person-job fit and supported task and cognitive crafting by helping employees adapt their knowledge to their roles (Lu et al., 2014). According to SET, this investment encouraged reciprocal behaviours.

Employees interpreted the training as the organisation's commitment to their career development, leading to higher engagement and more meaningful work through job crafting (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Kahn, 1990; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

In Company B, employees viewed training as transactional and driven by operational needs rather than personal development and failed to satisfy competence needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Participants expressed frustration with impractical sales techniques and the absence of product-focused training, which they felt had little relevance. Insufficient training restricted competence growth, which reduced their self-efficacy and proactivity over time. The lack of developmental opportunities in a hierarchical setting and the focus on extrinsic tangible rewards could reduce employees' intrinsic motivation and meaningful engagement (Deci and Ryan, 2000). This gap hindered proactive job crafting and limited employees' capability to pursue higher career development, preventing them from aligning with long-term organisational goals.

In Company C, the absence of training support prevented employees from achieving person-job fit, especially for needs-supplies fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000). High autonomy paired with minimal HRM support led to an adaptive approach to job crafting, keeping employees focused on daily operations instead of long-term growth. This setup failed to fulfil competence needs and hindered meaningful engagement (Deci and Ryan, 2012). With limited training investment from the organisation, employees might hesitate to reciprocate, which is consistent with SET's view on reduced commitment (Blau, 1964).

### **iv) Total Rewards**

This analysis examines total rewards ranking patterns from both management and retail staff (Armstrong, 2010). This comparison helps identify whether their views align. If reward decisions follow managerial assumptions rather than Millennials' actual reward

preferences, the misalignment reduces the effectiveness of rewards as a motivational tool.

Well-being emerged as Millennials' highest valued reward across the three organisations, emphasising their need for intrinsic motivators. Compensation was also highly valued for balancing intrinsic and extrinsic needs, which was essential for sustaining engagement.

Recognition ranked third, reflecting Millennials' desire for acknowledgement and aligned with SET's principle of reciprocity (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock and Wen, 2020).

Although well-being was not the first choice in management's perspective, Company A's caring HRM system addressed employee mental and physical needs by integrating intrinsic rewards into its trusting and caring organisational climate, which supported proactive job crafting and sustainable engagement (Saks, 2022).

Management in Company B assumed that frontline sales preferred compensation and growth over well-being in rewards' ranking, yet this contradicted employees' top preferences of well-being. This misalignment weakened the impact of intrinsic rewards on Millennials. An overemphasis on extrinsic rewards reduced the motivational value of well-being and recognition, which aligns with Cognitive Evaluation Theory's (CET) argument that intrinsic motivation declines when external rewards dominate (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In contrast, Company C presented a more balanced reward ranking outcome. Employees in Company C ranked compensation and well-being equally, reflecting a need for balance between financial security and personal quality of life. Interestingly, management in Company C ranked compensation first and well-being second, which partially aligned with their employees' preferences. However, the lack of caring HRM practices, weak organisational trust, and inadequate focus on intrinsic rewards in both companies led to lower engagement.

These reward preference trends across the three companies provide the basis for interpreting how intrinsic motivators sustain engagement. Millennials' preference for well-being aligns with SDT, where intrinsic motivation plays a more prominent role in fostering sustainable engagement (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Twenge et al, 2010). Recognition also ranked highly across the companies, further demonstrating the importance of acknowledgement as a key intrinsic motivator. This result is consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which identifies well-being and recognition as key engagement

drivers, while extrinsic rewards like compensation primarily serve to prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968).

#### **d) Management Perceptions on Job Crafting and Employee Engagement**

Management's perspectives on job crafting and employee engagement were important in this study. If they considered job crafting as integral to engagement, they were more likely to promote policies that support autonomy and team relationships. Conversely, limited understanding could restrict job crafting opportunities and apply it as a tool for task completion rather than a meaningful engagement driver.

The management in Company A was open to exploring job crafting, driven by a people-centric approach that prioritised employee well-being and recognition. This reflected a commitment to cultivating a supportive environment where Millennial employees felt valued and meaningful. Although management had not formally linked job crafting with engagement, their HRM practices created an environment where employees felt empowered to engage in job crafting. Based on SET, employees reciprocated through higher engagement.

Conversely, management in Company B viewed engagement as a measurable outcome rather than a motivational strategy, revealing a limited understanding of the intrinsic connection to work. In Company B, engagement practices largely followed parent company directives rather than addressing internal needs, causing management to treat engagement as a compliance task rather than a developmental approach. This lack of authentic investment likely reduced employees' willingness to invest in their roles. Similarly, management in Company C perceived job crafting as incompatible with operational demands, given labour shortages and heavy workload pressures. These views framed job crafting as impractical in retail. The focus on operational efficiency and demands in Company C limited opportunities to cultivate autonomy, competence, and relatedness at work. According to SDT, this reduced intrinsic motivation and weakened engagement (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Across the three companies, POS shaped whether job crafting acted as a pathway to engagement or merely a coping response. When HRM systems were consistent and caring in the workplace, employees viewed support as a genuine investment and reciprocated through proactive crafting. In contrast, when HRM consistency was weak or absent, job crafting became adaptive and served as a short-term day-to-day coping

function rather than long-term personal work meaning. These findings highlight that perceived organisational support (including organisational trust and care) and employees' perception of HRM practices determined whether job crafting could be transformed into genuine engagement.

In sum, job crafting begins with the individual, but its impact depends on the contextual environment surrounding it. In other words, organisational context determines whether crafting becomes a path to engagement or only a coping response.

### 5.3 Summary

This chapter discussed how the three themes explained Millennials' job crafting and engagement across the three organisations. The first theme showed that task, relational, cognitive, and collaborative crafting allowed employees to adjust their roles and developed closer relationships to support meaningfulness and strengthen engagement. The second theme illustrated that Millennials' aspirations and challenges were linked to the role of POS and HRM. This included their expectations for trust and care, recognition, leadership support, and meaningful work, and how these needs contributed to their interpretation of organisational support. The third theme highlighted that job crafting and engagement relationships were not uniform; the influence of job crafting on engagement was conditional, as high workload, inconsistent practices, and limited autonomy made it harder for employees to satisfy their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Taken together, these themes indicated that job crafting enhanced engagement under supportive conditions but functioned mainly as a coping response when support was weak.

Across the findings, SET and SDT defined why certain organisational conditions supported engagement for Millennials while others limited it. The two theories highlighted how organisational conditions shaped employees' responses to support, relationships, and HR practices. Caring HRM practices strengthened POS, which aligns with SET's concept that fair, caring, and considerate HRM practices encourage reciprocal commitment. Trust and a positive organisational climate also reinforced employees' willingness to engage, as supportive relationships reduced uncertainty and helped employees interpret managerial intentions more positively. HRM practices that were employee-focused, facilitated communication, offered development opportunities, and were well-executed contribute to autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, reflecting how SDT links these psychological needs to sustain engagement.

The original conceptual framework proposed a linear relationship in which organisational support facilitated job crafting, which in turn enhanced employee engagement. The findings refined this model by showing that job crafting occurred across all three companies, but its impact on engagement depended on the organisational environment. SET explains how perceptions of reciprocity and organisational support guided employees to view their crafting as valued and to respond with stronger engagement. SDT shows

that crafting felt motivating when autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs were satisfied. The original framework was adjusted to reflect that job crafting contributed to engagement only when organisational conditions provided sufficient support and allowed employees to meet core psychological needs; under weaker conditions, crafting still occurred but served mainly as a short-term coping response. These findings shifted the original model from a simple directional pathway to one that is contingent on organisational context and employees' interpretations of support.

From a theoretical perspective, three emergent themes can be interpreted through SET and SDT. Building on these insights, Table 5.3 illustrates how empirical findings, using an example from Company A, connect with SET and SDT. It also shows how the themes related to intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of engagement and how SDT and SET guided the analysis, reflecting the lived experiences of retail frontline staff. The following table provides an illustrative example, using selected extracts from Company A, to show how these themes align with SET and SDT and how they inform and refine the conceptual framework.

**Table 5.3 Alignment of Themes and Codes with Theoretical Frameworks (SDT and SET)**

Contextual Themes/ Subthemes	Codes	Theoretical Lens	Related Concept within SDT or SET	Empirical Insight
Positive Leadership	Supportive Leader; Feel Valued	SET	Reciprocity: employees respond to care and support with trust and commitment	Leaders' supportive actions and recognition of employees' contributions promote fairness and reciprocity
Reframing Tasks for Meaningful Work	Workplace Friendship; Identity; Reframing Tasks	SDT	Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence: intrinsic needs that shape engagement and feel meaningful	Employees reshape their perception of work through friendships, identity, and self-driven motivation
Preferred HRM Practices	Caring HRM; POS, PHRM	SET and SDT	Organisational care for reciprocity (SET) and competence/relatedness support (SDT)	HRM practices that show care, support growth, and promote fairness reinforce employees' trust and intrinsic motivation

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1 Overview

This chapter is organised into seven sections. Section 6.1 outlines an overview of the study. Section 6.2 explores the theoretical contributions of the study. Section 6.3 elaborates on practical implications. Section 6.4 presents recommendations for the retail industry. Section 6.5 elaborates on the limitations of the study. Section 6.6 identifies areas for further research, and Section 6.7 concludes the chapter with a summary.

This qualitative study explored the intricate relationship between job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail frontline staff in Hong Kong, focusing on gaining insight into how Millennials perceive and engage in job crafting, and how these actions impact their experience of meaningful work and motivation at work. This chapter draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Self Determination Theory (SDT) to examine the influence of organisational and HRM factors on job crafting and engagement among Millennial employees.

In this study, the three organisations demonstrated distinct work environments, where varying levels of support, autonomy, and workplace challenges shaped employees' job crafting approaches.

In Company A, job crafting developed within a supportive, trust-based environment. The organisation's caring HRM practices, combined with strong team cohesion, facilitated relational crafting while employees built meaningful connections with colleagues and customers. Millennials, who valued relational bonds and purpose-driven work, actively crafted, resulting in a highly engaged and committed workforce. This supportive climate enhanced well-being, promoted psychological safety, and demonstrated how organisational care fostered proactive job crafting behaviours.

Company B, in contrast, operated with a hierarchical structure that limited autonomy and organisational support. Employees relied on cognitive and relational crafting as an adaptive strategy, reframing tasks to create personal meaning despite restrictive conditions. Millennials viewed customer interactions as opportunities for positive impact, which reflected their desire for meaningful work even in a constrained environment. However, engagement remained low due to the challenges of low autonomy and limited opportunities for relational crafting and task personalisation.

Company C operated in a more challenging context, where autonomy empowered task crafting but was offset by challenging work conditions. Millennials used autonomy to reshape tasks, develop skills, and sustain engagement, yet in a poorer working environment, job crafting served mainly to buffer burnout and disengagement. This showed how they adjusted their use of autonomy under strain so that job crafting could still support engagement.

The discussion in Chapter 5 was structured around three themes: a) Leveraging Job Crafting to Strengthen Engagement, b) Understanding Challenges and Aspirations for Millennial Crafters, and c) Exploring the Potential Impact of Job Crafting on Employee Engagement. Overall, this study concluded that autonomy, relationships, and meaningfulness collectively shaped meaningful work experiences, which enhanced engagement among Hong Kong's millennial retail employees. Through job crafting, employees integrated these elements into their roles, while their engagement depended on the degree of contextual support available. The findings indicate that Company A exemplified a job-crafting-friendly environment, with HR practices and leadership jointly promoting care, trust, autonomy, and collaboration. By aligning personal meaning with organisational goals, this holistic approach presented how job crafting effectively enhances engagement and demonstrates a strategic model for retail organisations.

## **6.2 Theoretical Contributions**

This thesis contributes to the theoretical perspective of job crafting and employee engagement by integrating SET and SDT to explain how perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived human resources management (PHRM) factors shape proactive behaviours and engagement among Millennial employees in Hong Kong's retail sector.

**Pioneering Qualitative and Contextual Studies of Job Crafting in Hong Kong.** This analysis contextualises job crafting theory through a qualitative perspective drawn from the Hong Kong retail industry, an area that has rarely been examined in previous research. This research was conceptualised in early 2020, at a time when qualitative, context-specific studies on job crafting were still limited and before most calls for such approaches emerged. It shows that cultural values such as collectivism and hierarchy shape how employees adapt relational and cognitive aspects of their roles and how task-level autonomy is exercised only when managers support discretion. Through this qualitative research, the study captures how job crafting and engagement occur within real

organisational settings rather than through fixed quantitative constructs. This addresses the methodological gap identified by Park and Park (2023), who noted that most research on contextual factors has relied on quantitative approaches with limited exploration of broader work environment impact. By examining how Millennials in frontline retail settings actively reshape their work to find meaning, maintain relationships, and manage constraints, this study enriches existing job crafting theory and extends cultural and industrial boundary conditions for frameworks developed mainly in Western contexts. While Lazazzara et al. (2020) synthesised contextual influences across occupations, this study identifies how generational expectations and collectivist cultural norms further shape these contextual processes in the Hong Kong retail environment.

**Integrated Framework of SET and SDT.** The researcher extends theoretical understanding by integrating SET (Blau, 1964) and SDT (Deci and Ryan, 1985) to explain how contextual reciprocity in POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and PHRM (Wang et al., 2020) practices, together with need fulfilment processes, shape job crafting and engagement. Within this integration, caring HRM practices serve a dual role in this study: they fulfil SDT needs and activate SET reciprocity through trust and obligation, and these create a motivational and relational process that links organisational care to job crafting and engagement. The findings demonstrate that POS develops trust and reciprocity, while caring HRM practices provide contextual resources to satisfy intrinsic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). From this integration, SET is extended by showing that Millennials tend to reciprocate through relational rather than purely transactional exchange, while SDT is refined through the findings of a close linkage between autonomy and relatedness in collectivist retail contexts. This analysis also extends SDT and job crafting theory from an individual to an organisational perspective. It illustrates that personal motivation and crafting behaviour depend on contextual factors such as granted autonomy, managerial trust, and supportive HRM systems. Collectively, these insights explain how POS and PHRM jointly stimulate Millennials to craft their jobs and sustain meaningful engagement in the Hong Kong retail context.

**Contextualising SET in Hierarchical Retail Settings.** This analysis moves beyond prior applications of SDT and shows that autonomy satisfaction can emerge through managerial discretion in hierarchical retail environments, where employees interpret such discretion as a signal of trust and confidence. In the hierarchical retail environment of Hong Kong, employees perceive discretion and flexibility as managerial recognition, and this

experience nurtures intrinsic motivation to develop within a controlled environment. In SDT, autonomy is self-endorsed and expressed through voluntary actions. The findings suggest that employees can still experience autonomy satisfaction when discretion is externally granted (from leaders), provided that they internalise it as autonomy supportive intent (Baard, Deci and Ryan, 2004; Gagne and Deci, 2005). Consistent with Lazazzara et al. (2020), this analysis indicates that perceived autonomy stems from contextual conditions rather than formal job features. The findings contextualise SDT for collectivist and service-oriented workplaces and show how intrinsic motivation and extrinsic processes can coexist when organisational support and managerial trust transform workplace constraints into motivation for proactive job crafting behaviour.

**Millennial Preferences Exploration.** This study examines Millennial employees in the Hong Kong retail sector, focusing on engagement patterns and work expectations that have received limited attention in prior generational research. Millennials in the Hong Kong retail sector place greater value on organisational care, meaningful work, and relational bonds than on material rewards alone. These priorities reflect work values and expectations that differ from those of other cohorts. In this study, Hong Kong Millennial frontline staff showed similar preferences to those mentioned in prior literature but expressed them in a locally distinctive way. Unlike older cohorts who emphasise stability and loyalty (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Lyons and Kuron, 2014), Hong Kong Millennials seek supportive HRM practices, autonomy, and continuous feedback in everyday work. Their engagement and job crafting increase when these expectations are met through visible and voluntary organisational care, trusting relationships with peers and leaders, management that shows fairness and respect, and opportunities that allow personal meaning at work. This behaviour reflects relational reciprocity and extends SET (Blau, 1964) by showing that Millennials reciprocate organisational care and emotional support rather than purely transactional exchange. It also extends SDT (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000) by illustrating that in collectivist retail settings, autonomy becomes meaningful only when supported through strong relatedness. In sum, these findings offer a generational cultural interpretation of SET and SDT in Hong Kong retail and explain the conditions that sustain Millennial engagement.

**Contingency View of Job Crafting.** This study advances a contingency view by showing that job crafting, while self-initiated, also depends on organisational context for its effectiveness. Across three cases, restrictive environments foster cognitive crafting as a

coping strategy, while supportive climates allow all forms of crafting to develop. This context-sensitive view aligns well with Lazazzara, Tims and De Gennaro (2020) and Park and Park (2023), who highlighted that job crafting dimensions are shaped by workplace context and called for qualitative approaches to capture such complexity. The findings show that supportive and constraining elements can coexist within the same organisational setting, and this extends contextual approaches to job crafting. These dual situations show how contextual factors, such as managerial discretion and organisational practices, influence proactive behaviour in collectivist service work environments. Job crafting theory is further extended through comparative insights across different organisational climates, cultural values, and managerial practices.

Taken together, these theoretical contributions provide a clearer understanding of how job crafting and engagement operate within different organisational and cultural contexts. By integrating individual motivation, reciprocal relationships, and organisational conditions, this study explains how the established theories function in hierarchical and service-oriented settings. These insights strengthen the theoretical basis for studying job crafting and offer a foundation for future research across different work environments and cultural settings.

### **6.3 Practical Implications**

The following implications highlight the importance of HR strategies and the need for retail management in Hong Kong to adopt similar approaches to improve employee engagement and address labour shortages.

#### **6.3.1 Integration of Job Crafting for Engagement**

The findings support the view that job crafting through relational, task, or cognitive crafting plays a key role in helping employees experience meaningfulness in their work, which in turn drives employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). Relational crafting, such as building meaningful connections with colleagues and customers, as well as task crafting by reframing or modifying tasks, directly contribute to meaningful work experience. By encouraging employees to take an active role in crafting their work, organisations can cultivate a job-crafting-friendly workplace and strengthen alignment between individual values and job roles for a more engaged workforce.

Autonomy is crucial for fostering job crafting and engagement, especially in Millennials who value independence (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). A strong and trusting relationship between the management and the employees supports job crafting. When management grants autonomy, employees feel empowered, trusted, and valued. Based on SDT, autonomy not only allows employees to modify their roles but also encourages them to take responsibility for outcomes, develop new skills, and experience mastery. This alignment between autonomy, accountability, competence, and growth enhances intrinsic motivation for engagement (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2013). A high level of organisational trust enhances psychological safety, which promotes job crafting and risk-taking in challenging jobs. This supports the view that autonomy and trust are mutually reinforcing, with autonomy functioning as a foundation for a trusting climate. HR and line managers need to recognise that autonomy support strengthens job crafting and organisational trust. Management may also proactively promote job crafting by enhancing work meaning and engagement (Guan and Frenkel, 2018). To achieve this, regular and transparent communication between managers and employees can enhance person-job fit and support job crafting.

Relational crafting plays a defining role in enhancing engagement among frontline retail employees, including their relationships with team members and customers. Company A was an illustrative case that showed high engagement was achieved through interpersonal relationships among colleagues, managers, and customers. While task crafting also contributed, relational crafting created meaningful connections in retail roles. Even in Company B, where autonomy was limited, relational crafting still enhanced employees' connection with customers, which drove work engagement.

Heavy workloads, lack of autonomy, and poor communication lead to disengagement in the workplace. Caring HRM practices and job crafting mitigate disengagement by providing a supportive and empowering work environment. Through effective HR strategies that emphasise autonomy, person-job fit, and job crafting opportunities, organisations can address disengagement proactively and build a more engaged workforce by better aligning employees' aspirations with the organisation's goals.

### **6.3.2 Strategic HRM Practices and Organisational Alignment**

Company A's holistic approach to caring HRM system (Saks, 2022) demonstrates the importance of multidimensional care. Rather than relying on one or two strategies,

Company A implemented a system of caring HRM practices that consistently showed support for employees across various aspects of their work lives. This comprehensive approach shows that a caring HRM system is essential for building a sustainable and engaged workforce. It also promotes a job-crafting-friendly environment where employees feel supported and psychologically safe in crafting their tasks and building relationships, leading to better well-being and higher engagement.

In Company A, HR professionals implemented low-cost or no-cost HR practices that served team-building and caring purposes. Practices such as Wellness holidays or strategic incentives not only showed care and support but also encouraged team cohesion and employee well-being. These initiatives highlight that HR practices do not necessarily require significant financial investment; they can be strategically designed to promote job crafting, engagement, trust, and collaboration with minimal cost. Further, Millennials in the three companies ranked well-being as a top rewards preference, which reinforced the relevance of such practices.

The findings show that intrinsic rewards such as well-being and recognition are key drivers of engagement, especially for Millennials. Well-being emerged as the most preferred reward, while extrinsic rewards such as fair compensation remained important to maintain satisfaction. According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) within SDT, it is essential to balance intrinsic and extrinsic rewards so that external incentives support intrinsic motivation rather than weaken it (Gagne and Deci, 2005). This demonstrates that a balanced reward system is vital in fostering an engaged workplace environment.

This chapter extends the discussion by connecting the findings with broader HRM implications in the retail sector. The findings suggest that Hong Kong retail managers should prioritise creating environments characterised by high autonomy and organisational trust to facilitate job crafting and engagement. These implications are reflected both in the practices of Company A in this study and in examples from leading global retailers. For instance, Zappos, an online retailer, empowered its customer service employees with considerable autonomy to 'WOW' customers without supervisor approval, and this trust in employees directly contributed to engagement and organisational success (Hsieh, 2010). Similarly, Starbucks China demonstrated the impact of deeply caring HRM practices by supporting and caring for employees' lives beyond work. Its Parent Care Program, which addressed a key cultural concern regarding parents'

health needs, was shown to strengthen retention and support organisational expansion (Hincks, 2017). These examples show that the findings from this study are not isolated but align with proven strategies from global retail leaders.

In conclusion, job crafting strengthens employee engagement by empowering employees to shape their roles in meaningful ways. This process increases job satisfaction and reduces the risk of disengagement among employees in demanding environments. These dual impacts demonstrate its strategic value in high-pressure industries like retail.

## **6.4 Recommendations for Management and HR professions**

### **6.4.1 Current Practices and Challenges**

Retail management in Hong Kong faces significant challenges due to labour shortages and high staff turnover. Millennial employees prioritise meaningful work, supportive environments, and strong team connections, which indicates the need for new strategies to engage and retain them. However, the current situation resembles a chicken-and-egg problem, where quick fixes are applied to labour shortages without addressing the underlying issues. Traditional solutions, such as monetary rewards, do not meet Millennials' aspirations for work-life balance and a caring workplace. Industry stereotypes often attribute the challenges to poor working conditions and limited career prospects in retail; yet this perspective overlooks the root cause and the critical role that management should play in creating a supportive and engaging work environment for frontline sales staff.

HR departments often place the responsibility for staff motivation entirely on shop managers, even though these managers are already burdened with managing sales targets, operations, and manpower issues. Without adequate support from the HR department or proper leadership training, shop managers struggle to handle the added responsibility of people management, leading to increased work pressure and role strain.

Consistent and fair performance management practices are essential for maintaining employee trust and engagement in retail settings. Inconsistent execution of HR practices, including appraisals, regular communication, and training, weakens employees' perception of HR systems and reduces engagement. In Companies B and C, poor appraisal processes contributed to disengagement, and frequent turnover in retail may be one of the reasons for this inconsistency. Effective performance management depends on

fairness, communication, and timely feedback, which help strengthen expectations and maintain a stable employment relationship.

There is a significant misalignment between top management's perceptions and the day-to-day retail operational needs of frontline staff, as observed in Company B. This disconnection arose partly due to the hierarchical structure and the physical separation between office-based management and the retail floor, which limited leadership visibility and understanding of the daily operational challenges. This issue is exacerbated when HR has minimal involvement at the shop level, as seen in Companies B and C, where this reduced employees' support and belonging.

These structural and communication barriers prevent HR and senior management from fully understanding the operational pressures faced by frontline employees. When these gaps remain unaddressed, they erode engagement and make it difficult to build a supportive work environment.

To build an engaged company culture, a paradigm shift at the top management level is needed. This shift requires a genuine commitment to creating a trusting and caring work environment in which the well-being and development of staff are prioritised. When this dedication is established, organisational policies and practices are more likely to align with and reinforce this approach.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for HR Initiatives**

Based on the empirical findings, several recommendations are proposed for HR practitioners.

**Promoting Job Crafting and Caring HRM to Management.** Job crafting has emerged as a key approach to enhance employee engagement, especially among millennial employees who seek autonomy, meaningful work, and strong connections in their roles. Despite its benefits, job crafting remains underutilised in many organisations. HR departments could provide an environment that nurtures job crafting in the workplace.

Task crafting can be facilitated through HR initiatives such as skill-stretching training and task rotation, which empower employees to align tasks with personal strengths and career aspirations. Cognitive crafting can be enhanced by highlighting employees' roles to broader organisational goals, such as recognition of individual contribution through peer recognition platforms, customer impact sharing, or town hall meetings that strengthen

employee connections to the brand and the organisation. Relational crafting is best supported through mentorship programs and cross-store collaboration projects, fostering connections that build trust and engagement. Since different crafting dimensions are suitable for various types of job roles and situations, this multifaceted strategy is a powerful tool for making work more meaningful and boosting engagement.

To address low engagement, HR in retail can mirror Company A's caring HRM system as a model for fostering a climate of trust and care. Through implementing an array of caring strategies and programs, it signals to Millennials that the organisations care about their needs for purpose, growth, and well-being, which are critical in high-turnover retail settings (Bal and De Lange, 2015; Saks, 2022). Collectively, this HRM approach fosters an environment where Millennials feel valued and motivated and reciprocate the investment by providing better customer service and proactive job crafting and engagement (Blau, 1964; Chuang and Liao, 2010).

Job crafting can be enhanced by implementing practical strategies such as workshops and job reallocation. HR departments can introduce workshops to educate both management and employees on the principles and benefits of job crafting, fostering a shared understanding of its strategic role in engagement. Management could further facilitate job crafting through reassigning tasks within teams, allowing individuals to take on responsibilities that align more closely with their skills and interests. By adopting this approach, organisations promote stronger alignment between employees' roles and their personal strengths, enhancing job satisfaction and engagement.

**Improving Empowerment and Autonomy.** Empowerment and autonomy are key factors that influence employee engagement, especially in environments where frontline employees must handle customer interactions independently. HR should work closely with shop managers to foster a culture of empowerment. This includes providing employees with autonomy to take ownership of their roles and make on-the-spot decisions, particularly in customer-facing roles. This culture should be supported by transparent performance appraisals, clear promotion guidelines, and meaningful job roles that align with a fair reward system. Since autonomy also reflects a sign of trust from management, and SET explains that such trust encourages reciprocity, employees are more likely to respond with higher engagement and commitment.

**Fostering Relational Crafting through Technology.** This study shows that relational crafting is a crucial factor in enhancing employee engagement in retail, particularly in environments where team bonding and customer relationships play a key role in daily work. To build on this insight, retail HR departments could promote relational crafting through team-building activities and customer service training. For Millennial employees, integrating technology appeals to their preferences for tech-savvy workplace experiences. Through AI-driven customer service tools, social media interaction training, and the development of online customer communities, organisations can create more opportunities for retail staff to connect closely with both customers and colleagues. Such initiatives not only promote relational crafting but also strengthen engagement, customer satisfaction, and overall organisational performance.

**Leveraging Technology to Reduce Workload.** Technology plays a crucial role in reducing manual tasks and aligning with Millennials' tech-savvy expectations. Advanced technologies, such as virtual fitting rooms, AI-driven sales analysis, and automated stock management, improve efficiency, reduce physical workload, and free frontline staff to focus on more meaningful and engaging tasks. HR departments should lead the change in adopting and integrating these technologies to align with Millennials' preferences in the workplace.

**Building a Supportive Team Environment.** A collaborative and supportive team environment is important for Millennials working in retail. Shop leaders play a critical role in team bonding and collaboration. The remuneration system in Company A also exemplifies how HR practices can reinforce a strong team climate by strengthening interpersonal connections. This suggests that a supportive team environment, cultivated by both leaders and HR, is a key driver of relational crafting and employee engagement, particularly among Millennials.

**Introducing Creative HR Initiatives.** HR departments should develop creative HR practices and promote caring HRM that go beyond standard practices to actively engage employees. HR professionals are also encouraged to think creatively about HR initiatives that cater to employees' well-being preferences. Programs such as wellness initiatives, flexible work policies, and incentive-based rewards in Company A demonstrated genuine concern for employee well-being and helped build trust between the employer and employees. These initiatives also create a supportive environment that promotes

employees' job satisfaction, sense of belonging, and opportunities for crafting. For example, task crafting encourages task modification and expansion for better person-job fit, while relational crafting fosters stronger connections with colleagues and customers. These examples provide creative solutions for employees to mitigate job demands and improve job satisfaction.

**Empowering and Elevating the Status of Shop Managers.** Shop managers in retail play a foundational role in motivating and engaging frontline staff. To enhance their leadership capacity, HR should offer training programs focused on coaching, team building, and positive reinforcement. Further, HR should empower shop managers by recognising their contributions and granting them greater authority, elevating their roles from operational supervisors to key leaders. This empowerment allows them to actively foster a more engaged workforce, which positively impacts the organisation's overall performance.

**Enhancing Career Development Opportunities.** Career development is a key driver of engagement for Millennial employees. Providing clear career paths is essential for retaining ambitious Millennials who are often motivated by career advancement and skill development in their roles. HR departments can meet this need by offering continuous learning and development programs, as well as promoting internal mobility, from retail to office, within the company. These initiatives not only enhance career development for younger Millennials but also appeal to older Millennials seeking more advanced roles. By offering these career paths, companies can better meet the aspirations of this generation and enhance employee loyalty.

In summary, organisations can enhance employee engagement by integrating job crafting into their HR strategies and creating a job-crafting-friendly workplace. HR departments may also reference Company A's caring HRM system to formulate caring and voluntary initiatives for employees' well-being and growth. Further, practices such as leadership development, clear career advancement paths, and technology integration for relational connection and support across all aspects of work are necessary to satisfy Millennials' evolving needs in the retail industry.

## 6.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged.

**Generalizability of Findings.** The study focuses on Millennial retail frontline staff in Hong Kong, which limits the broader application of the results to other populations and contexts. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research could broaden the scope by including a more diverse sample across different geographical locations, varied cultural backgrounds, diverse demographic characteristics, and organisational settings.

**The Sample.** The study was based on a small participant sample, consisting of 24 interviews conducted in three organisations. Although participants were selected from diverse backgrounds, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not capture the full range of perspectives and experiences presented in the wider Millennial retail workforce. Future studies should consider expanding the scope of inquiry to include a wider range of companies from different retail sectors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of job crafting and employee engagement in the industry.

**Reliance on Self-Reported Data.** The study relies on self-reported data obtained through interviews, which could introduce possible response biases. To mitigate these biases, the researcher employed strategies such as probing and triangulating the findings with multiple data sources to enhance the credibility of the results. However, future research could incorporate additional data collection methods, such as observations and surveys, to validate and enrich the findings.

**Researcher's Background.** The researcher's extensive background in the retail industry provides valuable contextual understanding. However, this experience may introduce bias or preconceived impressions that could influence the interpretation. To address this limitation, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal and engaged in critical self-reflection throughout the research process, ensuring transparency and minimising the influence of personal biases.

To conclude, these limitations provide opportunities for future researchers to build upon the existing work and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of job crafting and employee engagement in the retail industry.

## 6.6 Areas for Further Research

Considering the limitations and findings of this study, several areas for further research are recommended:

**Expanding Research Method and Theoretical Perspectives.** This study employed a cross-sectional design. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2013), to explore the relationship between job crafting behaviours and employee engagement among Millennial retail frontline staff over an extended period. By examining multiple time intervals, future studies could uncover and identify key turning points in job crafting practices and their long-term effects on sustaining employee engagement. Furthermore, daily diary methods (Demerouti, Bakker and Halbesleben, 2015) could also be considered to provide a more nuanced and multi-faceted analysis of job crafting and engagement on a day-to-day basis.

A mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, could be adopted in the future to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of job crafting and employee engagement in the Hong Kong retail industry. This approach would contribute to theoretical expansion and provide a more comprehensive analytical perspective.

**Technological Impact.** With rapid technological advancements and the increasing prevalence of AI, future research could explore how Millennials use technology to redefine their roles and to establish job boundaries in the retail industry while maintaining engagement. Understanding, balancing, and prioritising the interplay between technology, job crafting, and employee well-being can help organisations better develop their workforce and improve customer experiences.

**Cross-Cultural Comparisons.** As this study focuses exclusively on the context of Hong Kong, future research could examine cross-cultural differences in job crafting and employee engagement among Millennial retail frontline staff. This would help understand how cultural values and societal norms influence job crafting practices and employee engagement. Related to this, the common differences between collectivism and individualism could also be explored to contribute to a broader understanding of these dimensions in cultural and workplace behaviours.

**Demographic Expansions.** Future research could expand the demographics from Millennials to other generations, such as Gen Z and Gen X, for comparative studies.

Alternatively, researchers can also explore how different genders or education levels react differently to job crafting and employee engagement in various work environments.

**Expanding to Different Retail Contexts.** To further enrich the understanding of employee engagement and job crafting, researchers could expand their focus beyond the sports retail sector and examine a variety of retail environments, such as luxury products, electronics, groceries, and even online retailing. This would help uncover how industry-specific factors, such as customer interaction levels, product complexity, management leadership, and organisational structure, shape job crafting practices and employee engagement.

**Investigating Job Crafting in Relation to Workplace Behaviours in a Qualitative Approach.** While much of the existing research on job crafting has been quantitative, a qualitative approach could reveal richer insights into how job crafting interplays with other workplace behaviours, such as leader-member exchange, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour. This gap in organisational behaviour remains under-investigated and offers valuable opportunities for deeper insight into job crafting behaviour.

**Exploring the Potential Negative Consequences of Job Crafting.** Although some studies have examined the counterproductive or negative aspects of job crafting, future research should explore these consequences within specific demographics or compare potential negative outcomes of job crafting across different cultural contexts.

**Integrating Job Crafting with Caring and Trusting Cultures.** Future research could explore how job crafting, though self-initiated, could be integrated with caring and trusting organisational cultures to align individual efforts with strategic goals. Investigating how organisations can foster environments that support job crafting without weakening autonomy would provide valuable insights into the evolution of job crafting as a company-wide initiative.

By addressing these areas, future studies can extend the current findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of job crafting and employee engagement. This approach can also help improve workforce management practices and organisational outcomes in the retail industry.

## **6.7 Summary**

This study aims to direct management's attention to understand what Millennial frontline employees seek in their roles, how to motivate them, and how to apply these insights in practice. Theoretically, this thesis extends the integration of SET and SDT by illustrating how POS and PHRM practices jointly promote job crafting and engagement among Millennial frontline employees in Hong Kong's retail. It clarifies how trust, care, and need fulfilment operate together in this study and presents a conceptual model that links organisational support to crafting behaviours and engagement outcomes.

A key generational insight is that Millennial frontline employees valued autonomy, meaningfulness, and close relationships with leaders and peers, preferring workplaces that demonstrate care and offer recognition. These preferences align with research showing that Millennials emphasise meaningfulness, personal growth, and autonomy (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010) and teamwork (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Conversely, earlier generations placed greater weight on loyalty, job security, and stable roles (Rani and Samuel, 2016). Within Hong Kong's Confucian and hierarchical retail culture, Millennials still respect authority, but expect managers to show care, grant autonomy, and build trust rather than exercise control. The findings suggest that job crafting among Hong Kong Millennials becomes most effective when relational support and autonomy coexist within caring organisational systems.

The findings show that engagement requires sustained commitment from senior management to establish a climate of trust, care, and psychological safety, rather than relying on isolated corporate policy adjustments. Moreover, this study reveals that a supportive environment directly empowers employees to craft their roles, which creates a 'win-win' situation of higher engagement and performance. In retail, frontline employees often receive limited managerial attention because their roles are perceived as entry-level and their turnover rates remain high. This often leads to undervaluing their contributions compared to higher-level positions. This research addresses this gap by demonstrating how organisational support and contextual signals shape Millennials' motivation to craft their jobs and remain engaged.

To conclude, maximising engagement requires an integrated approach that links organisational support, effective HRM practices, and employees' job crafting efforts. By combining positive leadership, caring support, trust-building actions, and well-aligned HR

systems with opportunities for crafting, retail companies can build an engaged and committed Millennial workforce that supports long-term organisational success.

## Appendix 2.1 Key Literature of Employee Engagement

Scholars	Summary
Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001)	This study identified burnout as a psychological syndrome comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Their work significantly contributed to engagement theory by highlighting burnout as the opposite of engagement. This led to the development of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which measures the positive aspects of employee well-being. Use of the scale has shifted from diagnosing burnout to promoting engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002).
May, Gilson and Harter (2004)	May, Gilson, and Harter's study examined the psychological conditions necessary for employee engagement, explicitly focusing on meaningfulness, safety, and availability. All three conditions were significantly related to engagement, with meaningfulness showing the strongest relationship. They found that job enrichment and work-role fit were strongly associated with psychological meaningfulness, while supportive relationships with coworkers and supervisors were crucial for psychological safety. Psychological availability, crucial for engagement, depends on sufficient physical, emotional, and cognitive resources. These findings support Kahn's framework, which states that meaningfulness, work-role fit, and workplace relationships in work engagement are highly related to this research.
Saks (2006)	<p>Alan Saks's empirical study sampled 102 private industry employees and was the first to apply the social exchange theory concept to examine engagement antecedents and consequences. He found that perceived organisational support and job characteristics were key antecedents, while job satisfaction, organisational commitment, employee retention, and organisational citizenship behaviour were positive engagement outcomes (Saks, 2006). Saks's model was the first to segregate employee engagement into two streams: job engagement and organisational engagement. He hypothesised that individuals reciprocate their organisation's support through factors such as autonomy, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice, and distributive justice (Saks, 2006). The findings from Saks on organisational support reference this research, whereas perceived organisational support was used in this study to examine job crafting and employee engagement among frontline retail staff. This enhances the understanding of employee behaviour within distinct organisational settings.</p> <p>Jin and McDonald conducted another study related to organisational support. They showed that positive relationships with organisations and supervisors foster employee engagement by providing opportunities for learning and growth, emphasising the importance of supportive relationships for organisational success (Jin and McDonald, 2017).</p>

<p>Macey and Schneider (2008)</p>	<p>Macey and Schneider describe employee engagement as a progression that begins with trait engagement, reflecting an enthusiastic perspective on life and work, where individuals are optimistic about their environment and jobs. This trait engagement then evolves into state engagement, characterised by energy and absorption resulting from involvement, commitment, empowerment, and job satisfaction. Upon achieving both trait and state engagement, individuals will reach behavioural engagement. In this stage, employees are willing to use discretionary effort to accomplish tasks and organisational goals and exhibit positive organisational citizenship behaviour. Macey and Schneider believe that employee engagement is influenced by various interconnected factors that lead to distinct outcomes. They highlight the critical role of transformational leadership in promoting engagement through its unique characteristics in motivating employees, fostering innovation, nurturing personal development, and creating an environment that supports positive attitudes and proactive behaviours toward achieving organisational goals (Macey and Schneider, 2008). This framework aligns with this study on job crafting and employee engagement in retail frontline staff, where perceived HRM and organisational support play crucial roles in facilitating engagement.</p>
<p>Shuck, Reio and Rocco (2011)</p>	<p>Shuck surveyed 283 participants from diverse industries and found significant associations between job fit, affective commitment, and the psychological environment with employee engagement, subsequently influencing discretionary effort and turnover intentions. Moreover, the study emphasised the significance of employee engagement in organisational outcomes, suggested strategic implications for human resources practices and highlighted the influence of affective commitment and engagement in mitigating turnover intentions. It explained critical attributes of job crafting attributes such as proactivity, person-job fit and employee engagement, within the context of retail staff.</p>
<p>Shuck, Rocco and Albornoz (2011)</p>	<p>The article explores the intricacies of employee engagement within a multinational corporation, mainly focusing on themes like workplace relationships, organisational climate, and learning opportunities. It highlights the critical role of managers in shaping workplace culture and influencing engagement levels and also examines the impact of individual personality traits. Shunk's study aligns with this thesis on job crafting and employee engagement in frontline staff, explaining how these concepts are demonstrated within organisational settings. In addition, the study proposed an integrated model that sheds light on the interplay between environmental factors, managerial influence, and individual dispositions in fostering engagement, providing practical implications for this study.</p>
<p>Petrou et al. (2012)</p>	<p>Petrou et al. 's quantitative study examined daily job crafting and its impact on work engagement, focusing on contextual determinants such as job autonomy and pressure. Job crafting, defined as seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands, can vary from day to day. Their study of 95 employees</p>

	<p>using a 5-day diary survey found that high daily autonomy and pressure increased seeking resources and decreased demands. Further, they also identified that seeking challenges positively affected work engagement, while reducing demands had a negative effect. These findings highlight job crafting as a daily behaviour with implications for employee motivation and organisational practices, especially relevant in volatile retail environments.</p>
<p>Jenkins and Delbridge (2013)</p>	<p>This research investigates different managerial approaches to employee engagement in two organisations, categorising them as 'hard' and 'soft'. It explores how these approaches reflect external contexts and influence supportive internal environments. The study emphasises managerial concerns from the psychological literature on job features while considering organisational context. It highlights the complexities and constraints of promoting engagement, drawing from organisational and HRM literature to understand varied employee engagement applications. The analysis provides a critical perspective on the challenges of fostering engaged employees. The exploration of 'hard' and 'soft' managerial approaches to employee engagement aligns with this qualitative study as it delves into varied leadership styles and incorporates insights from perceived HRM practices.</p>

## Appendix 2.2 Types of Leadership

Leadership Style	Key Attributes
1. Servant Leadership	<p>Servant leadership is a relationship-focused, people-centred style where trust acts as both a foundation and an outcome (Greenleaf, 1997). Trust facilitates leader-member exchange and enhances organisational trust (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Karatepe, Ozturk and Kim, 2019). Servant leadership values and prioritising followers' well-being. In job crafting, they focus on facilitating employees' job fit. They prioritise employees' well-being over personal interest, focusing on process and relationship rather than outcome. (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008; Spears, 2010).</p> <p>This leadership style motivates job crafting through empowerment and bottom-up approaches (Slemp, Kern and Vella-Brodrick, 2015; Liden et al., 2014), enhances engagement via trust and person-job fit to promote psychological safety through care and empathy (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016).</p>
2. Transformation Leadership	<p>Among the positive leadership styles, transformational leadership is the most well-known for engagement and job crafting (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1999; Salanova et al., 2011; Wang, Demerouti and Le Blanc, 2017). They question existing norms and offer inspiring visions that motivate employees to exceed expectations, which enhance job crafting and boost employee engagement (Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006).</p> <p>They demonstrate four core qualities: a) inspiration by motivating employees with visionary goals, b) intellectual stimulation for creative problem-solving and critical thinking, c) idealised influence by serving as role models, d) individual consideration by offering personalised coaching.</p> <p>Some studies suggest that transformational leadership might be less focused on nurturing team relationships compared to servant leadership, which could affect engagement levels differently depending on the organisational context (Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko, 2004).</p>
3. Transactional Leadership	<p>Transactional leadership focuses on monitoring and the achievement of results. They motivate employees to meet objectives through a system of rewards and penalties, prioritise procedural tasks and adopt a directive and action-oriented approach (Avolio, 2010). With Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transactional leaders concentrate on addressing the lower tiers of the hierarchy through their leadership strategies (Abuorabl, 2012).</p>
4. Laissez-faire Leadership	<p>Laissez-faire leadership applies passive leadership behaviour to provide high autonomy. The leaders are characterised by minimal intervention and avoid decision making. They allow followers to make decisions independently and take</p>

	<p>responsibility, which is also described as non-leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1990). This style of leadership fails to support followers in feedback, motivation and workplace support, particularly in challenging work situation. It also increases detrimental effects to followers by burnout, interpersonal workplace conflict and decreases job satisfaction (Schyns and Schilling, 2013)</p>
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## Appendix 2.3 Summary of Job Crafting History

Stage	Key Activities
2001 – 2010:	<p>In this early stage, job crafting was mainly qualitative, focusing on theoretical foundation (e.g. Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2008, Berg, Grant and Johnson, 2010; Fried et al., 2007; Lyons, 2008; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and studies across different occupational background such as teachers (Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk, 2009), blue-collar workers (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012), and manufacturers (Ghitulescu, 2007).</p>
2010 - 2016	<p>Another major development was the Job Demands-Resources model of job crafting. A three-factor scale of job crafting was developed in 2010 (Tims and Bakker, 2010). The scale was refined to a four-factor 21-item scale (JCS) in 2012 (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012) for JD-R model job crafting measurement. This stage primarily involved quantitative research across various areas, such as organisational outcomes, performance, and personality. For instance, studies explored variables related to work engagement (Petrou et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Rudolph et al., 2017), team performance (McClelland et al., 2014), in-role performance (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012), and personality (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012), among others.</p> <p>The Job Crafting Questionnaire (JCQ) was developed to measure Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) three dimensions (task, relational, and cognitive crafting).</p> <p>Additional forms of job crafting were introduced and presented in qualitative studies. Different types of crafting, such as leisure crafting (Berg et al, 2010), environmental and resources crafting (Ko, 2011), and temporal crafting (Sturges, 2012).</p>
2017 onwards	<p>This stage marked the flourishing of meta-analyses that grouped and integrated studies into specific themes. Rudolph et al. (2017) organised the quantitative job crafting literature based on proactive work behaviour, personality differences, job characteristics, and work outcomes. Lichtenthaler and Fischbach (2019) applied regulatory focus theory, differentiating between promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting.</p> <p>Bruning and Campion in 2018 integrated two streams of theories by distinguishing between approach and avoidance behaviours in both role (task, relational, cognitive) and resource (structural, social resources and challenging, hindrance demands) crafting. Zhang and Parker (2019) proposed a three-level hierarchical model categorising job crafting by approach or avoidance into behavioural and cognitive crafting, focusing on job demand and resources. This framework clarified how job crafting behaviours operate at different levels and facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of their impacts. Lazazzara, Tims and De Gennaro (2020) also developed a qualitative meta-analysis and will be discussed separately.</p> <p>In 2020, Lazazzara and colleagues presented a qualitative meta-synthesis based on 24 studies. They developed a job crafting model to demonstrate how proactive and reactive motives, shaped by individual and organisational contexts, influence job crafting behaviours. The study</p>

	<p>introduced a categorisation of job crafting into approach, avoidance, and spatial/temporal crafting, emphasising the role of organisational climate and personal factors in shaping these behaviours. This comprehensive model helped explain the complex relationship of job crafting and its varied outcomes (Lazazzara, Tims and De Gennaro, 2020).</p> <p>Recent Trends in Job Crafting Research: Increased research on contextual and social factors, e.g. (Guan and Frenkel, 2018); Kim and Beehr, 2018; Wang, Li and Chen, 2020)</p> <p>Expanded in leadership as antecedents, e.g. servant leadership (Harju, Schaufeli and Hakanen, 2018), transformational leadership (Wang, Demerouti and Le Blanc, 2017), and empowering leadership (Kim and Beehr, 2018)</p> <p>An increasing body of collaborative-crafting research has attracted growing attention, e.g. (Mäkikangas, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2017; Hu et al., 2019; Llorente-Alonso, and Topa, 2019)</p>
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<b>Appendix 2.4 Relevant Motivational Theories</b>		
<b>Theory</b>	<b>Major Characteristics</b>	<b>Relationship with Job Crafting and Engagement</b>
Maslow's Theory	Maslow's Motivational Theory proposes that humans are motivated by five categories of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation. These needs are arranged hierarchically, with basic needs requiring fulfilment before higher-level needs. Self-actualisation, the highest level, involves realising one's potential, seeking personal growth, and experiencing self-fulfilment (Maslow, 1970).	Job crafting allows employees to fulfil higher-level needs such as esteem and self-actualisation by adjusting their roles, responsibilities, and relationships. This personalisation of work aligned with Maslow's theory, leading to increased job satisfaction and fulfilment by providing opportunities for personal growth and recognition. Employee engagement is closely related to Maslow's hierarchy. Engaged employees have their basic needs met (physiological and safety), feel social support (love and belonging), receive recognition (esteem), and have opportunities for growth (self-actualisation). The fulfilment of employees' needs motivated them to become more engaged, leading to greater enthusiasm and commitment to their work. When employees are deeply engaged in their work, they achieve meaningfulness through self-actualisation.
Two-Factor Theory	The Two-Factor Theory, developed by Frederick Herzberg in the 1960s, factors that affect employee satisfaction and motivation. Herzberg (1968) suggests that job design should be human-centred, emphasising psychological aspects of work, which marks a shift in job design approaches. The theory distinguishes between hygiene factors and motivators: hygiene factors, such as salary, benefits, and working conditions, prevent dissatisfaction but do not increase motivation, while motivators, such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility, enhance satisfaction and drive productivity (Lundberg, Gudmundson and Andersson, 2009).	Herzberg's (1968) insights provide a basis for designing roles that minimise dissatisfaction and increased motivation. Job crafting aligns with these principles as a self-motivating process where individuals reshape work to fit their values and needs, enhancing satisfaction. The hygiene and motivation factors also relate to job crafting concepts, such as Bakker and Demerouti's (2010) job resources and Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) task and relationship crafting, contributing to employee engagement through meaningful work.

	Major Characteristics	
Job Characteristics Theory	The Job Characteristics Model (JCM), developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), emphasised five core job characteristics: task variety, autonomy, feedback, significance, and identity. These characteristics are designed to enhance motivation, satisfaction, performance, and engagement by fostering critical psychological states such as experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). The impact of these characteristics is moderated by factors like growth need strength and individual skills. This model aligns well with job crafting studies, where employees actively modify job characteristics to better suit their needs and motivations.	Most job crafting studies use JCM as a foundation, often employing quantitative methods like Tims and Bakker's JD-R model to assess job dimensions and motivation (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Although initially advocating top-down management strategies, Hackman and Oldham later acknowledged the importance of social factors, particularly as economies shifted to service-based sectors (Grant and Parker, 2009; Oldham and Hackman, 2010). With this study's focus on an organisational perspective, incorporating SDT provides a more holistic understanding. SDT's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness complements JCM by addressing both individual needs and social interactions. It also aligns with current workplace norms that prioritise collaboration and social support.
Theory X and Theory Y	Theory X and Theory Y, developed by Douglas McGregor in the 1960s, present contrasting models of workforce motivation. Theory X assumes employees are unmotivated and require supervision, similar to transactional leadership that uses performance-related rewards and penalties. Conversely, Theory Y suggests employees were self-motivated and responsible (McGregor, 1960).	Theory X creates a controlled and low-trust climate that limits employees' ability to craft their jobs and weakens engagement. Theory Y provides more autonomy and trust, so employees have room to shape their roles. This environment supports job crafting and helps them sustain engagement.

## Appendix 2.5 Human Resources Management Practices (HRM)

HRM Practices	Supporting Literature
<b>Total Rewards</b>	<p>Hoole and Hotz (2016) found that total rewards are motivating and associated with work engagement. Between 1990 and 2000, the concept of total rewards gained increasing attention from scholars as an exchange relationship for extra effort and hard work. Rewards could be classified as direct or indirect, financial or non-financial, and intrinsic or extrinsic (Armstrong, 2010; Mahaney and Lederer, 2006). The traditional compensation system emphasised extrinsic rewards, while total rewards adopt a holistic view incorporating both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects (Allen and Helms, 2001; WorldatWork, 2007). To achieve an effective result, organisations should align rewards with their organisational goals and recognise that non-monetary drivers, such as work-life balance, leadership, development opportunity, quality of work and work culture, are more important than monetary rewards (Macey and Schneider, 2008). There are many versions of the total rewards system. This study applies the WorldatWork 2020 total rewards framework, which enhances effectiveness when total rewards align with company strategy and the work environment.</p> <p>The WorldatWork 2020 version of the Total Rewards Model includes both financial and non-financial rewards, such as Compensation, Well-Being, Benefits, Development, and Recognition (WorldatWork, 2021). Kahn (1990) argued that tangible rewards (e.g. compensation, benefits, and recognition) promote meaningfulness by signalling that employees' time, effort, and energy are valued, thereby affirming the significance of their role.</p> <p>Reward design should also reflect generational differences. Millennials' preferences resemble those of Gen X but differ from Baby Boomers (Bussin, Serumaga-Zake and Mohamed-Padayachee, 2019). Understanding these preferences is essential for motivating this cohort.</p> <p>Among five components in total rewards, this study emphasises well-being and recognition as prior research links them to intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness, which are key to engagement (Kahn, 1990; Deci and Ryan, 2020). These components help interpret Millennials' reward preferences in the findings, while compensation, benefits, and development are discussed where relevant to HRM practices.</p>
<b>Performance Appraisal</b>	<p>Performance management is key to influencing employees' perceived HRM practices and their engagement. Whittington et al. (2017) highlighted that this process impacts engagement by setting performance expectations, providing feedback on progress, and evaluating performance. Effective performance planning aligns individual goals with organisational objectives to clarify and strengthen employee contributions (Macey et al., 2011). Feedback is a component of this process, where its motivational and developmental functions are</p>

	discussed separately due to its specific relevance to job crafting and engagement.
<b>Justice</b>	<p>Organisational justice is essential in HR practices for shaping employee outcomes such as employee satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and motivation. It also reduces negative work attitudes and behaviours by fostering trust among employees. A climate of fairness is essential in building trust within organisations. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes, such as pay, rewards, and promotion, whereas procedural justice refers to fair processes in allocating outcomes that incorporate transparency, consistency, and unbiased procedures. Interactional justice focuses on relationships concerning employees' respect and dignity (Colquitt, Greenberg and Zapata-Phelan, 2013).</p> <p>When employees perceive fair rewards and HR processes, they are likely to report high levels of distributive justice (Tyler 2001a). Trust and organisational identification are strengthened (Tyler and Blader, 2003). When HR practices consistently and equitably regulate management behaviour to uphold employees' dignity, employees tend to perceive decision making processes as fair, perceive the organisation as trustworthy, and feel valued as members of the organisation (Tyler 2001b; Hodson 2004). As noted in POS literature, procedural justice is strongly linked to OCB through social exchange and social identity theory.</p> <p>In this research, organisational justice was incorporated into PHRM because fairness concerns, particularly in salary, promotion, recognition and appraisal processes, were managed through HR systems in all three companies. This positioning also provides a theoretical basis for the 'Fairness and Transparency' category used in the Findings chapter.</p>
<b>Training and Development</b>	<p>Training enhances employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities to address different demands and challenges at work, making work more meaningful by supporting growth and fulfilling needs (Noe, Tews and McConnell Dachner, 2010). In HR literature, training and development have been shown to positively correlate with employee engagement (Bakker, Emmerik and Euwema, 2006; Salanova, Agut and Peiro, 2005), self-efficacy (Axtell and Parker, 2003), job satisfaction (Chiang, Back and Canter, 2005), and organisational commitment (Ahmad and Bakar, 2003). Training also significantly impacts organisational performance by improving employee effectiveness and promoting organisational growth (Ng and Siu, 2004).</p> <p>Gordon et al. (2015) suggested that job crafting may be facilitated and stimulated by training. Learning boosts competence and self-confidence, supporting self-actualization and intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Maslow, 1970), which also enhances psychological availability (Kahn, 1990). Effective training drives organisational development by fostering continuous learning and enhancing individual capabilities. Organisations that foster a learning culture produce</p>

	<p>beneficial outcomes in employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Huselid, 1995; Lee and Bruvold, 2003).</p> <p>Although training does not appear as an individual component in Wang et al.'s (2020) PHRM model, extensive research shows that learning and development activities enhance engagement and encourage job crafting. On this basis, training is treated as part of the HRM analysis in this study.</p>
<b>Feedback</b>	<p>Feedback provides direct information about one's performance effectiveness through reviews or informal mentoring and coaching (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). It can be categorised as job feedback, a dimension of the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976), or feedback from coworkers or customers (Ashford, 1986). According to Kahn (1990), feedback facilitates psychological meaningfulness. Constructive comments from supervisors, coworkers, or customers can motivate employees to engage in job crafting by helping them align their capabilities with job requirements for a better person-job fit (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). It encourages self-development, learning, and strengthens competence, supporting employees in seeking higher work meaning and engagement (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004). Researchers have found that constructive feedback enhances engagement across various professions, including dentists (Gorter et al., 2008), teachers (Bakker et al., 2007), and customer service representatives (Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2003). Overall, feedback fosters a culture of continuous improvement and shared responsibility, reinforcing both personal growth and organisational engagement. Same as 'training and development', feedback is not explicitly outlined in Wang et al.'s (2020) PHRM model. However, prior studies support that performance and developmental feedback influence engagement and facilitate proactive behaviours such as job crafting. Therefore, it is included in the HRM category for analysis.</p>

Appendix 3.1

Teresa Chow

The University of Wales Saint David

Sept 15, 2021

Dear Jade,

RE: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

I am writing to request your voluntary participation in a research study titled ' Job Crafting and Employee Engagement Among Millennials in Retail.' I am conducting this study as part of my Doctorate in Business Administration at the University of Wales Saint David.

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the impact of job crafting on work engagement among Millennials in the retail industry. By sharing your experiences, this research may contribute to improving employee well-being and management practices in the retail industry.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your decision to participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the organisation or any other parties involved. During the interview, we will discuss your work experiences, job crafting activities, and factors influencing your work engagement.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly maintained throughout the research process. All data collected will be treated as highly confidential, and your identity will be kept anonymous. Only the research team will have access to the data, and results will be reported in a way that ensures no individual can be identified.

The collected data will be used solely for research purposes and will not be used for any other commercial or non-research-related activities. If there is a need to share any identifiable information in the research findings, your explicit consent will be sought separately. Your anonymity and privacy will be respected at all times.

There are no known risks to participating. Your input is valuable and may help advance understanding of employee engagement in retail.

If you have any questions, please contact me via email at [1812884@student.uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:1812884@student.uwtsd.ac.uk). By signing below, you confirm that you have read this information, understand the terms, and agree to participate in this study. You also confirm you are at least 18 years old.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Jade Wong (Assistant Retail Manager)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Teresa Chow, [1812884@student.uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:1812884@student.uwtsd.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3.2: Interview Guideline

### Interview Guideline for Frontline Retail Staff

<p>Core Questions</p>
<p>Employee Engagement: Vigour, Dedication and Absorption</p> <p>Show examples when someone is working with energy and enthusiasm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The person wants to get up in the morning and go to work every day.</li> <li>- The person wants to improve the quality of the job and the shop's performance.</li> <li>- The person is willing to invest effort in work with enthusiasm, inspiration, significance, and pride.</li> <li>- The person experiences a lot of satisfaction and happiness on the job.</li> <li>- The person is proud of the company and the job.</li> <li>- The person is persistent and resilient in the face of difficulties.</li> <li>- The person is frequently in a state of full concentration and happily engrossed in their work.</li> </ul> <p>Employee engagement occurs when the employee is so immersed in the job that they forget about the time, and then wholeheartedly invests themselves in work by exerting great energy and effort.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you experienced any situation similar to the above in your job? If yes, can you share and describe your experience? And, are you experiencing it in your current job?</li> <li>• What motivates you to work engaged? Probes: Can you recall previous experiences and share them with me</li> <li>• What did you feel in such a situation?</li> <li>• Compared with normal work situations, would you handle the difficulties at work differently when you work under the above situation? Probes: How important of co-workers' support when you have difficulties at work?</li> <li>• Can you think of some incidents in which you are disengaged in your work and why?</li> <li>• From your perspective, how is this situation related to your performance at work?</li> </ul>
<p>Perceived Organisational Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your organisation in terms of respecting your opinion and appreciating your value and contribution? Please provide examples.</li> <li>• How do you think of the organisation in terms of caring for your well-being and your satisfaction at work? Any examples?</li> <li>• What do you think of the communication and transparency of the company policy?</li> <li>• How do you describe your supervisor demonstrating these types of support?</li> <li>• How do you describe the support from your co-workers?</li> <li>• How important is the above organisational support in affecting your job crafting and engagement at work?</li> <li>• How do you describe the environment of trust and cooperation between i) the supervisor and you; ii) the colleagues and you</li> <li>• Would you recommend the company to your friends?</li> </ul>
<p>Perceived Human Resources Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of the human resources policy and practices of your company in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helping you to develop your knowledge and skills to build confidence in doing the job well and prepare for your career trajectory.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- execution and fairness of HR policy, such as selection process, rewards and promotions, and the encouragement to participate in decision making
- frequency in formal and informal performance feedback
- How important are the HR policy and practices relating to the job crafting practices and your engagement at work? Any examples?
- Do you have a clear understanding of what you can do and what is important to your job performance so that you can see an increased reward for your job?  
Probes: If yes, how do you get that information? From a formal appraisal or informal feedback from your supervisor?
- How significant are the rewards given to you for your engagement at work?  
Probes: Do you think you are fairly rewarded?
- What are the three most valued rewards that can help facilitate your engagement in work?
- Reference from WorldatWork 2020 model:
  - Compensation (fixed and variable pay)
  - Well-being (programs to support a happy and healthy state of mind, including physical, emotional, financial, and environmental factors)
  - Benefits (pay leaves, retirement scheme, medical insurance, company coupons, etc. provided to the employees and their families.
  - Development (learning opportunities to build their skills, competencies, and support career growth)
  - Recognition (formal advancement or informal appreciation for contribution)

#### Job Crafting

Task, relational and cognitive crafting

Show examples when someone is doing job crafting:

- Changing the way and the process of your job tasks to make it fitter to your interests, values, and skills, e.g. taking on additional jobs proactively
- changing the ways you think about the meaning and significance of your job.
- shaping the relationship with others to fulfil the goals of your job
- What do you think of the above examples? Do you have any similar experiences? If yes, can you share some incidents with me?
- What motivates you to do job crafting?
- Why do you want to do the job crafting?  
Probes: How did you feel upon completing this job crafting?
- What challenges have you encountered when you practice job crafting, and how did you overcome them?
- Do you have the autonomy to take on additional work or change your job scope that is initiated on your own (i.e. performing job crafting)?  
Probes: If no, how do you handle the job crafting practices if you are not officially allowed?
- Does your supervisor notice that you take on extra duties proactively or change your job scope?  
Probes: If yes, have you received a reward (tangible or intangible) or penalty after taking this type of initiative?
- Can you describe any situation in which your role and work process are highly interdependent with your team?

- Regarding shaping the relationship with others in job crafting, can you share how the changes in the relationship with others affect the outcome of your work? (for relationship crafting)
- How important is the meaningfulness of your job to your work behaviour?
- How important is job crafting in relation to your engagement at work?

Core Questions

- In your perspective, do millennials have specific characteristics that are different from other generations? If yes, what are they?

Probes: Do they have any special needs and expectations in the work environment that vary from other generations?

- What do you know about employee engagement?

Probes: a) From your perspective, how to motivate millennial employees to work with energy and be engaged in their jobs? b) Does your company have regular monitoring and measuring processes at the engagement level to foster an engagement culture?

- How do you describe teamwork in your work environment? Is teamwork being encouraged in your company?

Probes: How does it help employee engagement and organisational performance?

Explain examples of job crafting:

- Changing the way and the process of your job tasks to make it fitter to your interests, e.g. taking on additional jobs proactively
- changing the ways you think about the meaning of your job.
- shaping the relationship with others in order to fulfil the goal of your job crafting practices

- What do you think of job crafting work behaviour in frontline employees? Have you experienced it, and can you share your incidents?

Probes: If you think it is important, how would you support this proactive behaviour from the management's perspective? Can you provide examples?

- To what extent do you allow your staff to redesign their job scope? For example, they tend to do certain kinds of tasks more frequently and are less in other kinds of tasks that they dislike.

Probes: At the operational level, what are the challenges you encounter if the frontline staff is allowed to redesign their job scope? How do you handle these challenges?

- How regularly will you do performance appraisals with your staff?

Probes: Do they know how to get rewarded and promoted?

- What do you think about the execution of human resources policies and practices of your company in the following aspects?

- develop knowledge and skills of the staff to build their confidence in doing the job well
- execution in communication, transparency, and fairness of HR policy
- frequency in formal and informal performance feedback

- What do you think are the most 3 most valued rewards perceived by your frontline staff, especially Millennials?

- Compensation (fixed and variable pay)
- Well-being (programs to support a happy and healthy state of mind, including physical, emotional, financial, and environmental factors)
- Benefits (pay leaves, retirement scheme, medical insurance, company coupons, etc. provided to the employees and their families.
- Development (learning opportunities to advance their skills and competencies)
- Recognition (formal career advancement or informal recognition to thank for the contribution)

- How do you communicate the total rewards system package to your staff?

- What do you think of the organisational support to the frontline staff?

- How do you describe the trust AND relationship between the frontline staff and the management? In what aspects?

Core Questions

- In your perspective, do millennials have specific characteristics that are different from other generations? If yes, what are they?  
Probes: Do they have any special needs and expectations in a work environment that vary from other generations?
- What do you know about employee engagement?  
Probes: a) From your perspective, how to motivate millennial employees to work with energy and be engaged in their jobs? b) Does your company have regular monitoring and measuring processes at the engagement level to foster an engagement culture?

Explain examples of job crafting:

- Changing the way and the process of your job tasks to make it fitter to your interests, e.g. taking on additional jobs proactively
- changing the ways you think about the meaning of your job
- shaping the relationship with others in order to fulfil the goal of your job crafting practices
- What do you think of job crafting work practices among frontline staff?
- In your perspective, how important is job crafting in affecting the work performance and employee engagement of your frontline staff, especially Millennials?
- Do you know if your staff are practising job crafting at the shop level now?
  - If yes: a) what work environment will you provide to facilitate this job crafting work behaviour? Please provide examples. c) In your perspective and observation, are there any negative consequences in job crafting practices? If yes, what suggestion do you have to avoid such consequences? If not, may I know the reason? Please provide examples.
- What do you think about the execution of human resources policies and practices of your company in the following aspects?
  - develop knowledge and skills of the staff to build their confidence in doing the job well
  - execution in communication, transparency, and fairness of HR policy
  - frequency in formal and informal performance feedback
- What do you think are the 3 most valued rewards perceived by your frontline staff, especially Millennials?
  - Compensation (fixed and variable pay)
  - Well-being (programs to support a happy and healthy state of mind, including physical, emotional, financial, and environmental factors)
  - Benefits (pay leaves, retirement scheme, medical insurance, company coupons, etc. provided to the employees and their families.
  - Development (learning opportunities to advance their skills and competencies)
  - Recognition (formal career advancement or informal recognition to thank for the contribution)
- How do you communicate the reward system package with retail staff?
- Based on your existing reward system, any extra reward to create a better place for employees to increase their engagement level?
- What do you think of the organisational support for the frontline staff?
- How do you describe the trust AND relationship between the frontline staff and the management? In what aspects?

Appendix 4.1

Profile of Participants

Company	Participant No.	Title	Age (as of 2021)	Gender	Employee Tenure (No. of years)	Education Level / Country of Study and Work	Shop Code	Company Business Scope
A	A1	Line Manager	>40	Female	>5	Universtiy level / HK		Multi-national, brand owner
A	A2	Assistant Shop Manager	29	Femaie	3	Secondary / HK	Shop A1	
A	R1	Senior Sales	27	Male	1	Teritary / HK	Shop A1	
A	R2	Senior Sales	28	Male	3	Secondary / HK	Shop A2	
A	R3	sales	27	Female	3	Secondary / HK	Shop A1	
A	R4	sales	28	Male	2	Secondary / HK	Shop A2	
A	R5	Sales Assistant	26	Female	2	Secondary / HK	Shop A3	
A	R6	Sales Assistant	25	Male	1	Secondary / HK	Shop A1	
B	B1	Line Manager	>40	Female	>5	Universtiy level / HK		Foreign-owned distributor with a local management team
B	B2	Shop Manager	32	Female	7	Teritary / HK	Shop B1	
B	R7	Senior Sales	29	Male	5	Secondary / HK	Shop B1	
B	R8	sales	28	Female	2	Secondary / HK	Shop B1	
B	R9	sales	28	Female	2	Secondary / HK	Shop B2	
B	R10	sales	27	Male	1	Secondary / HK	Shop B3	
B	R11	Sales Assistant	26	Male	1	Secondary / HK	Shop B2	
B	R12	Sales Assistant	25	Male	1	Grade 9 / HK	Shop B3	
C	C1	Line Manager	>35	Female	>5	Secondary / HK		Local retail chain,
C	C2	Shop manager	30	Female	7	Secondary / HK	Shop C1	
C	R13	Senior Sales	32	Male	2	Grade 9 / HK	Shop C2	
C	R14	Sales	27	Female	1	Grade 10 / HK	Shop C1	
C	R15	Sales	26	Male	2	Secondary / HK	Shop C2	
C	R16	Sales	26	Female	1	Grade 9 / HK	Shop C3	
C	R17	Sales Assistant	25	Male	1	Grade 9 / HK	Shop C1	
C	R18	Sales Assistant	24	Female	1	Grade 9 / HK	Shop C3	

## Appendix 4.2

### (Summary of Participant Data – Company A)

<b>4.2.1 An Integrated Approach to Job Crafting Job Crafting Practices in Company A</b>	
<b>A) Task Crafting</b>	Participant Quotes
1) Job expansion and Personalisation	<p>Apart from selling and customer service, I've crafted my tasks to become the ambassador of the brand. I actively discuss sports-related information with customers, aiming to foster connections and promote 'A Sport' and the brand. While this might not lead to immediate sales deals, it adds value to the customer experience and contributes to our brand image (R2).</p>
2) High Autonomy	<p>I don't like facing customers because I am not good at conversation, but passionate about tidying things up. I have taken on inventory management responsibilities. I like this kind of duty because my brothers and sisters can find stock more efficiently, which facilitates the business (R6).</p> <p>I frequently engage in lengthy discussions with customers. She allows me to do that but reminds me to maintain a balance because we also need to achieve sales targets (R2).</p>
<b>B) Relational Crafting</b>	
1) Social Connections and Networking	<p>I understand the importance of guanxi (relationship building). I always connect to other shops whenever we have joint shop training meetings. We need to exchange stock sometimes, and a good relationship is significant (R4).</p> <p>A man in his mid-50s came into our shop looking unwell. I listened and comforted him without selling anything. He bought items for his kids and now returns with chocolates. Helping him was satisfying, and as a global brand, we should help those in need (R1).</p>
2) Strong Collaboration and Teamwork	<p>We support each other in meeting targets, so I work diligently and rarely take days off. I find meaning in helping my colleagues as a team. In my previous job, I took leave often, focused only on my salary (R2).</p> <p>I trust the people here and it makes me feel safe even though I have made mistakes. They help me to learn from the mistakes but not blame (R3).</p> <p>I covered my friend's shifts for fourteen consecutive days and even helped out on my days off. It's exhausting, but bonding with my team makes it worthwhile. My boss and the team also regularly checked on me and shared my work when I got sick for a week. Our team spirit and hard work led us to become Asia's No.1 performance shop (R2).</p>
<b>C) Cognitive Crafting</b>	
1) Meaning-Making:	<p>It's not just selling. When customers trust me, my work feels meaningful because I can help them boost self-confidence with personalised mix-and-match suggestions (R2).</p> <p>When you ask me what the meaning of my job is, it is my colleagues and our friendship we share (R6).</p>

2) Personal Value Alignment	<p>I was very satisfied when customers became friends. I love making friends, and this job aligns with my interests (R4).</p> <p>I feel like I'm the brand ambassador in my shop because I'm into 'A Sport'. I want to promote the sports activity at the same time during customer interaction. It's like I represent the brand's lifestyle and values firsthand (R5).</p>
<b>D) Collaborative Crafting</b>	<p>During monthly joint-shop meetings, our team are always asked to demonstrate sales techniques. The other shops either call us the Asia No. 1 or Superheroes. I like these names because they represent our team and our family (R2).</p> <p>Even though there was some pressure at work during the period of competition, such as higher sales targets, attentive stock management, and expanded customer outreach. Yet, we liked the challenges and learned a lot at that time. We supported each other even closer. Our team spirit helped us become Asia's No. 1 sales performance shop, and I'm so proud of that (R4)</p>
<b>4.2.2 Challenges in Practicing Job Crafting in Company A</b>	
<b>A) Job perspective faced by frontline staff</b>	
1) Autonomy and Leadership Support	Sometimes, my immediate boss does not fully agree with the way I sell the products, especially not pushing expensive items on days when the business is slow. Yet, most of the time, she respected my decision as my aim was to sell the right product and promote the brand (R2).
2) Work Intensity and Customer Engagement	When immersed in serving customers and other retail duties, I barely have time to focus on building strong customer relationships (R1).
<b>B) Management's Perception of Job Crafting</b>	
1) Managerial Knowledge of Job Crafting Practices and the Benefits	<p>Job crafting may suit Western countries, but its effectiveness in Hong Kong retail is uncertain. Many retail staff may lack extensive education, making the concept of job crafting less straightforward. Balancing the pros and cons will take time, and it's unclear if training alone will help. If not managed properly, it could lead to chaos (A1).</p> <p>In retail, we wear many hats. If everyone only focuses on customer interaction and neglects paperwork, who is gonna to handle those tasks? (A2).</p>
2) Leadership and Empowerment	<p>Our retail management team builds strong bonding and trust with the retail staff, showing in financial returns and staff retention. Millennials like their space and being their own bosses, so we trust them and give them autonomy to develop their strengths. But retail is demanding, and adding job crafting is a new challenge. I'm also curious what job crafting will bring to u (A1).</p> <p>Job crafting sounds interesting to me, especially in reframing the job. Yet, I doubted if it would turn into chaos if everyone started moving their job lines all willy-nilly (A2).</p>
<b>4.2.3 Organisational Characteristics</b>	
<b>A) Organisational Support</b>	
1) Supportive Leadership:	The shop manager spoke highly of me to senior management and emphasised that the shop's operation relies on my contributions. This recognition makes me feel truly valued within the company (R4).

	During our daily pre-opening meetings, we brainstorm fresh sales ideas. We appreciate having a boss who empowers us to experiment with creative ideas, making these collaborative moments enjoyable (R5).
2) Team Collaboration and Commitment:	If I ever miss my target, my colleague steps in to help me reach it, and I do the same for them. In my experience in retail, it's the first time I've come across this kind of mutual assistance (R3).
3) Caring Work Atmosphere	<p>Our shop manager, whom we call mom, will have dinner with us after work two or three times a month, and we go shopping together on holidays (R3).</p> <p>My boss buys me small gifts on and off and gives us some life advice and investment tips. She even bought us a microwave so we can save money on lunch. We share our emotions and personal goals with her as she makes us feel supported and understood (R6).</p> <p>We support our shop manager and assistant manager in achieving their monthly shop targets. Whenever we struggle with daily targets, they reallocate their sales orders to help us. As a closely-knit team, we coordinate schedules and even return on days off to assist each other (R1).</p>
4) Eroded Trust in Brand Identity	A lot of staff truly love the brand that celebrates individualism. Yet, the way that the organisation handled the PR crisis disappointed those who own strong brand identity. Some of them even left the company after the incident (R1).
<b>B) Human Resources Management Practices</b>	
1) Total Rewards	
a) Compensation:	The incentive scheme is tied to individual accomplishments rather than collective goals. Whenever someone falls short of the target, the manager would ask other sales staff to distribute their excess orders to those who require assistance, making everyone feel supported (R6).
b) Nurturing Well-being, Caring HRM Initiatives, and Benefits:	<p>I appreciate the Wellness holidays for the flexibility they offer. I can take half a day off when I'm tired or when it's unsafe to go to work, especially during COVID-19. These holidays stand out in the industry also make me feel that our company genuinely cares about our health and safety (R2).</p> <p>The medical plan includes coverage for family members at the managerial level is quite uncommon in the retail industry. This shows that the organisation truly cares about the health of employees' families (R1).</p>
c) Performance Appraisal, Recognition, and Feedback:	<p>For appraisal, the manager and I set goals at the beginning of the year and then review them every six months together with the area manager. I got promoted once, and my manager's appreciation of my effort made me feel being recognised (R1).</p> <p>We have lots of chances to get feedback from the managers informally, so more or less we know what our appraisal looks like (R2).</p>

	We are encouraged to voice concerns to senior levels, such as area managers. Our area manager regularly interacts with us and participates in appraisal meetings (R5).
d) Training and Development Opportunities	Even during COVID, we still received product training via Zoom. Each shop is required to submit a daily product features report to the area manager to ensure the staff thoroughly understands product functions. Customer service training is also excellent, covering practical sales strategies and handling difficult customers (R2).
2) Fairness and Transparency	I would say the promotion system is quite fair. People who got promoted are those we also think that they deserve (R3).  The company is transparent. We know each person's individual target, and important notices are posted in emails (R1).
<b>4.2.4 Employee Engagement</b>	
<b>A) Motives for Employee Engagement</b>	
1) Community and Support	I trust my family here and feel safe even though I make mistakes. They help me to learn from my mistakes (R3).  I appreciate my managers who allow me to work on my interest in helping out with the administrative work. I am not good at selling, and my sales target was mostly covered by my teammates (R6).
2) High Leader-Member Exchange	I want my shop manager and assistant manager to achieve their monthly target, that's why I come back to assist them during my day off. We are a team, like a family. Whenever any of us struggles to meet our individual daily targets, they generously reassign their sales orders to help us out. Their altruistic and caring leadership energises me and makes me more engaged and enthusiastic (R2).
4) Meaning and Purposeful Work	Ensuring customers choose the right products is crucial, especially since I am deeply involved in 'A Sport.' When introducing new products and promoting 'A Sport', my job is more than a sales role. It is about maintaining the brand's reputation and providing quality gear for serious athletes like me (R5).
5) Autonomy and Proactiveness	Due to strict company policies, I took the initiative to use my own funds to issue a cash refund to the customer and was later reimbursed with my manager's support. The customer expressed appreciation for my efforts (R3).
6) Work-life balance and Wellbeing:	I experience work-life balance, as returning to work feels like reuniting with my second family. Besides, I appreciate holidays, which grant me the flexibility to manage my work schedule according to my needs (R5).
7) Job Satisfaction:	I really enjoy being part of the team here because I'm a big fan of the brand. The brand's vision of embracing creativity and individualism aligns perfectly with my personal interests, which is awesome. I am blessed and get lots of satisfaction in this job (R2).
<b>B) Experiencing Engagement Through Psychological States</b>	Vigour: When the shop got extremely busy, I stayed calm and kept helping customers efficiently without getting overwhelmed (R2).  Dedication: I am so proud to tell people that I am working here, as this is the brand for our generation (R6).

	<p>I like sharing the news and first-hand product information related to our brand and our athletes, and I feel meaningful for doing this, especially if they buy the shoes I recommend (R2).</p> <p>Absorption: I like the feeling of absorption when I am losing track of time. I hate standing there alone and doing nothing at work. Time flies especially when you have friends working together (R5).</p>
<b>C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement</b>	<p>We've long practised employee engagement strategies. Being a global company with advanced HR practices, we fully recognise and understand the importance of employee engagement. Our HR policies aim to foster a supportive and engaging work environment for employees, resulting in higher productivity and job satisfaction (A1).</p>
<b>4.2.5 Disengagement from a PR Crisis in Company A</b>	
<b>A) Decline in Employee Morale</b>	<p>I know that several people who left because they felt the company betrayed its own values (R1).</p>
<b>B) Mitigating the Fallout through Positive Team Climate</b>	<p>Our team's strong bonds are what held us together and kept us going during that crisis (R3).</p>

## Appendix 4.3

### (Summary of Participant Data - Company B)

<b>4.3.1 Restricted Opportunities for Job Crafting in Company B</b>	
<b>Job Crafting Practices in Company B</b>	
<b>A) Task Crafting</b>	Participant Quotes
1) Skill Expansion for task significance	The majority of my customers are dedicated to their daily sports routines, often requiring new gear every 3-6 months. Many of them are retired and share personal stories. I've read about aging issues to better understand seniors' behaviour and want to be their friendly support and companionship during their visit (R7).
2) Task Modification	I enjoy designing window displays to boost customer engagement, but my manager prefers I focus on sales (R8)
<b>B) Relational Crafting</b>	
1) Social Connections and Customer Engagement	We aim to differentiate our shop through friendly service to build a loyal customer base and encourage repeat purchases (R10).  I enjoy talking with customers to learn from their unique experiences (R12).
2) Team Cooperation	By encouraging passive part-time employees to join team tasks, I help them overcome shyness and participate in tasks together. This gives my work meaning as I am guiding them as a coach. This also helps strengthen our friendship and build a collaborative atmosphere (R9).
<b>C) Cognitive Crafting</b>	
1) Meaning-Making:	Providing mentorship to customers by guiding them through their purchases with personalised advice makes me feel like I am their life guidance, and my work experience is meaningful (R11).  While my role is sales-oriented, I always reframe my work purpose to satisfy customer needs. This way, I feel I'm providing value beyond just meeting sales targets, which makes the job more meaningful (R9).  Our store is like a neighbourhood grocery where we know each customer by name, and they share personal issues with us, making my job incredibly meaningful (R8).  Making money for my future study is the meaning and purpose of working here (R12).
<b>4.3.2. Challenges in Practising Job Crafting in Company B</b>	
<b>A) Employees' Difficulties on Job Crafting Practices</b>	
1) Autonomy Constraints	I often get discouraged by my boss's pushback on my ideas. For example, I suggested using social media to promote products, but my manager said it's the marketing team's job and told me to focus on sales (R11).  I tried to collaborate with accounts to simplify the refund process for a better customer experience, but my manager insists on adhering to company policy (R10).

2) Lack of Perceived Opportunity to Craft	My shop manager complains that I should focus on big sales instead of building customer trust. The main issue is my boss's boss-worker attitude (R8).
<b>B) Management's Perception of Job Crafting</b>	
1) Scepticism and Concerns	Job crafting could lead to employees focusing too much on tasks they enjoy while neglecting essential responsibilities, which could disrupt shop operations and affect team performance (B2).
2) Perception of Millennials	I haven't seen much of the job crafting behaviour happening among our frontline staff. They tend to stick to assigned tasks and avoid taking initiative beyond that (B1).  Nowadays, the younger Millennials do not quite respect the working system. The norm for them was to call in sick frequently (B2).
3) Leadership's Perception in Empowerment	The frontline staff often propose things like rearranging displays or offering bigger discounts, but I believe we need to strictly adhere to company policies, especially in the shop level, to maintain consistency and ensure centralised control(B2).  Our training focuses on shop operations, crucial for operational efficiency. Millennials need clear guidelines and quick promotions. We use digital tools and gamification to accommodate them (B1)
<b>4.3.3 Organisational Characteristics</b>	
<b>A) Organisational Support</b>	
1) Leadership in Diverse Management Style	My boss frequently ignores my suggestions, even though I believe the suggestions would benefit the shop, he either did not respond or did not take any action(R10).  After I asked several times, my manager allowed me to deliver a product to a customer, despite it was against company policy. This made me feel trusted and valued for my commitment to customer satisfaction(R8).  My manager lets me do visual merchandising when business is slow, although company policy usually doesn't allow retail staff to change the display (R9).
2) Team Dynamics	The rapid staff turnover makes it difficult to establish a strong team spirit. I often wish to develop sales strategies with teammates, but relationships here are less cohesive (R7).
3) Organisational Constraints and Hierarchical Structure	Supervisors focused on meeting sales targets urge us to avoid lengthy conversations and close deals, but I believe understanding customer needs is crucial, which frustrates me (R8)  This company doesn't care much about my job satisfaction; no one asked if I was satisfied (R10).
<b>B) Human Resources Management Practices</b>	
1) Total Rewards	
a) Employee Well-being Initiatives	I value work-life balance, especially during the pandemic. My generation dislikes tough jobs with overtime. I seldom work overtime here, which is why I've stayed for a year (R8).
b) Training and Career Development Opportunities:	The training in selling skills was very basic and did not contribute to the practical business situation (R9).

	We did not have training for almost a year. It makes the new staff get fed up (R7).
c) Performance Appraisal, Recognition, and Feedback:	There is not much feedback received from the management of this company, but I think it's very important to understand if I am on the right track (R9).  My supervisor seldom talks about my career advancement plan, and I am uncertain about what more I should do to secure a promotion (R7).
2) Fairness and Transparency	I discovered my promotion through an email, which felt quite informal, as it didn't come directly from my supervisor (R7).
<b>4.3.4 Employee Engagement</b>	
<b>A) Motives for Employee Engagement</b>	
1) Meaningful Customer Interaction:	I feel meaningful and engaged at work when I find the right products and establish trusting relationships with customers as a sales professional (R8).
2) Power of Autonomy	When the shop was understaffed after my manager left, I took over the retail operation. The decision making autonomy and new challenges provided learning opportunities, energised me and fully engaged me at work (R7).
4) Limited Autonomy and Proactiveness	Normally, my manager wouldn't allow me to modify the display despite my interest. While the manager was on leave, I updated it to enhance the presentation. I feel satisfied and engaged when customers buy products because of my display (R8).
<b>B) Experiencing Engagement Through Psychological States</b>	Vigour: I am a big fan of the brand I work for, so I always introduce the product with enthusiasm. My supervisor said my passion and energy are contagious, positively influencing customers' perceptions of the brand (R9)  Dedication: I feel my work is meaningful when the customer comes back for a return purchase and wears the products that I recommended (R12).  I feel proud after helping the customers and seeing their smile of satisfaction upon purchase (R7).  Absorption: While analysing sales data for daily reports, I dive into the numbers and lose track of time because I am passionate about understanding sales trends and helping improve our shop's performance (R9).
<b>C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement</b>	We needed our staff to fill out the engagement survey forms from all levels of the company. The survey indicated the changes in our employment level (B1).
<b>4.3.4 Disengagement by Apathetic Leaders in Company B</b>	
<b>A) Trust in Leadership and Top-Down Culture</b>	When I called in sick, the shop manager only wanted a doctor's note to prove my illness. They didn't ask about my condition, showing a lack of empathy that made me feel mistrusted. It left me upset and questioning if this company was right for me (R11).

	<p>I appreciated the greeting training, but I don't think it's necessary to follow it step by step. The presence of mystery shoppers made me feel distrusted (R12).</p>
<b>B) Lacking Communication and Autonomy</b>	<p>I would say if our job doesn't have meaning, I would quit because it is wasting my time. And I derive the meaning from helping customers (R10).</p> <p>My suggestions are often not accepted, and my boss makes decisions independently without explaining the reasons (R11).</p>

## Appendix 4.4

### (Summary of Participant Data - Company C)

<b>4.4.1 High Task Crafting and Heavy Workload in Company C</b>	
<b>Job Crafting Practices in Company C</b>	
<b>A) Task Crafting</b>	Participant Quotes
1) Job Enrichment and Proactiveness	<p>I introduced an apparel corner and festive decorations for marketing purposes. I even bought decorations out of my own pocket and set up the display myself. I felt satisfied and contributed to the overall business outcome (R14).</p> <p>Due to the lack of operational support, I've taken on tasks in inventory management to streamline stock. While it's outside my usual responsibilities, I can enrich my knowledge in stock management (R16).</p>
2) Autonomy	<p>Since I am empowered to take charge of shop operation and daily business, even though the workload is demanding and heavy, I found myself thoroughly engrossed in the tasks to offset some hardship, as being a shop owner is my life goal (R13).</p>
3) Competency and self-identity:	<p>During my time off, I took the initiative to regularly review daily sales and closely oversee prepaid orders. My motivation stemmed from a desire to ensure customer satisfaction. Taking on this level of responsibility was a new experience for me, and it helped me see myself as a kind of shop-in-charge (R16)</p>
<b>B) Relational Crafting</b>	
1) Social Connections with Customer	<p>Most of the customers live in the nearby vicinity. When they passed by the shop, they would say hello to me. Sometimes, they even buy me afternoon tea. That makes me feel connected and satisfied (R16).</p>
2) Supportive Team	<p>My shop manager listens and guides me through problem-solving, leading me to find my own solutions. I like this approach because the decisions come from my ideas (R18).</p> <p>Working in the adjacent store, I felt supported by my manager and teammates in the larger shop. Managing the store independently would be challenging, but their assistance made me feel supported (R16).</p>
<b>C) Cognitive Crafting</b>	
1) Meaning-Making and Value Alignment	<p>The company's manpower shortage exhausts me daily, but the monetary compensation makes me feel that I have dual benefits. Apart from learning store operation, I also became my parents' bank. Although in a lower title, the pay here is even close to what supervisors earn in bigger companies, which makes me feel my effort is paid off (R18).</p> <p>I learned a lot from customers during the selling process, especially those who live nearby and share their stories. This connects with my dream of becoming a social worker to help and understand people (R15).</p>
<b>4.4.2. Challenges in Practising Job Crafting in Company B</b>	
<b>A) Overwhelming Workload from the Employee's Perspective</b>	
1) Work Intensity	<p>The workdays are crazy here with tons of manual work, and I don't bother to reframe my job (R18).</p>

<b>B) Management's Perception</b>	
1) Managerial Knowledge of Job Crafting Practices	<p>Job crafting sounds kind of idealistic to me, but allocating tasks can be a real challenge. We're dealing with a labour shortage, so we need our staff to handle different tasks to keep things running (C2).</p> <p>Job crafting isn't really a focus here. We're more about teamwork and getting everyone to pitch in wherever needed (C1).</p>
<b>4.4.3 Organisational Characteristics</b>	
<b>A) Organisational Support</b>	
1) Leadership	<p>My supervisor's support and trust in my abilities boost my confidence and make me feel genuinely valued (R17).</p> <p>My colleagues are accommodating when I need stock and support from other shops (R14).</p>
2) Organisational Constraints	<p>Heavy Workload: Many new hires didn't stick around for long, citing backbreaking manual labour and disorganised internal logistics (R13).</p> <p>Laissez-Faire Leadership in Senior Management: The lack of support in logistics and stock information makes me feel disappointed. The missing headcount in my shop was never filled, even though I requested many times to HR (R14).</p>
<b>B) Human Resources Management Practices</b>	
1) Total Rewards	
a) Compensation	<p>Money is what I am looking for in this company (R17).</p> <p>Although in a lower title, the pay here is even close to what supervisors earn in bigger companies (R18)</p>
b) Employee Well-being and Benefits	<p>I haven't had the chance to take any annual leave in the last six months due to constant turnover. I would value time off more than a small Christmas gift (R17).</p> <p>I want to have some work-life balance, especially after joining this company (R16).</p>
c) Performance Appraisal	<p>I don't know what's missing in my performance to get a promotion. This company never provides feedback information or guidelines (R16).</p> <p>I have never experienced an appraisal since I joined a year ago (R17).</p>
d) Lack of Training and Development Opportunities	I never joined any training here since I joined a year ago (R15).
2) Fairness and Transparency	Salary Disparity: Some newcomers receive higher salaries, likely due to their background in larger companies. This is unfair (R14).
<b>4.4.4 Employee Engagement</b>	
<b>A) Motives for Employee Engagement</b>	
1) Autonomy, Challenges and Job Satisfaction	<p>In this company, everything is through self-learning and observation with no training provided. Despite this, I enjoy the satisfaction of solving problems on my own (R14).</p> <p>I have the authority to decide product discounts and adjust their levels. This makes me feel like the boss (R13).</p>
2) Meaningful Work	Discounted items are usually in broken sizes. When I find the right size of shoes from other shops and meet the customers' needs, I feel meaningfulness (R13).

	The moments when customers remembered me, appreciated my recommendations or referred their friends to come to make purchases with me gave real meaning to my work (R15).
3) Person-job fit	I like dressing up the shop during festivals and changing display concepts for retail excitement. These activities aligned with my interest in visual merchandising and enhanced my job satisfaction and engagement (R14)
4) Social Connection and Engagement	My retail supervisor always supports me when I need help. On the retail floor, we need to support each other because we don't have support from the office side (R15).
<b>B) Feeling Engaged Through Vigour, Dedication, and Absorption</b>	<p>Vigour: As the only sales representative managing a small shop, I have to find ways to accomplish tasks and handle challenges. Despite the pressure, the empowerment fuels me with energy every day (R14).</p> <p>Dedication: Meeting high sales targets was tough, but the challenge and the opportunities to handle duties independently kept me engaged (R16).</p> <p>I feel a deep sense of satisfaction when I mentor new employees and see them grow and succeed. Knowing that I have contributed to their development makes my job very meaningful (R15).</p> <p>Absorption: When I am designing new displays, I get so absorbed that I become completely immersed in the creative process (R13).</p>
<b>C) Management's Perspective on Employee Engagement</b>	In our company, I think employee engagement is all about team passion and motivation. We believe that high salaries are crucial for our young frontline employees, so we offer competitive compensation. Besides, we also empower our shop managers to inspire their teams (C1).
<b>4.4.5 Disengagement Exacerbated by Heavy Workload and Unfairness</b>	
<b>A) Workload</b>	If you have ever worked in other branded sports retail with automated tools like barcode scanning for inventory, you will know I am wasting my life doing all the manual work here (R15).
<b>B) Unfairness</b>	There appear to be no established rules or policies governing the salary range, and transparency is lacking. I am aware that some newcomers with the same title as mine received a higher basic salary (R14).

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