WORKFORCE

How to successfully work in the
redefined world of work: Time-spatial
job crafting as a means to be
productive, engaged and innovative

CHRISTINA WESSELS | MICHAÉLA C. SCHIPPERS

NEW WORKING PARADIGMS

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WORKFORCE

ORGANIZATION

DEAR READER,

Welcome to edition 52 of the Capco Institute Journal of Financial Transformation.

Transformation has been a constant theme in our industry for several decades, but the events of 2020 have accelerated change in employee working patterns, and in the very nature of the workplace itself. This Journal examines three key elements of these new working paradigms – leadership, workforce, and organization.

As we explore in this edition, a key part of any firm's transformation agenda centers around digital leadership and how to tackle the novel challenges created by changes within organizations and society. Leaders need advanced organizational skills to build teams that use digital technologies, as well as to inspire millennial workers who have grown up in a digitally transformed world. They also need deeper technology skills to lead, and a broader understanding of the ethical paradigms introduced by the challenges created through new technologies such as AI. These enhanced skillsets will help today's leaders and their teams fully realize the benefits of new working models.

The topics reviewed in this Journal offer flexibility for employees, increased agility for teams, and a combination of both for organizations. When supported by the right technology, these can create collaborative, outcome-driven environments. Through the resulting remote or hybrid models, organizations can transform their workforce and operations to boost productivity, cost effectiveness and employee engagement, while enhancing resilience and customer experiences.

As always, our contributors to this Capco Journal are distinguished, world-class thinkers. I am confident that you will find the quality of thinking in this latest edition to be a valuable source of information and strategic insight.

Thank you to all our contributors and thank you for reading.

Lance Levy, **Capco CEO**

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY WORK IN THE REDEFINED WORLD OF WORK: TIME-SPATIAL JOB CRAFTING AS A MEANS TO BE PRODUCTIVE, ENGAGED AND INNOVATIVE[1]

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has proven to be a catalyst for the adoption of new ways of working. During the lockdown, numerous knowledge workers fulfilled their work obligations from home on a full-time basis. Previous research on new ways of working has demonstrated that time-spatial flexibility can have both positive and negative effects on wellbeing, performance, and work-life balance. As organizations are preparing for the "new normal" with greater flexibility regarding where and when to work (i.e., time-spatial flexibility), we argue that it is of utmost importance to make employees' working behavior future-proof. We argue that "time-spatial job crafting" can be considered as a future work skill where employees reflect on specific work tasks and private demands, actively select work locations and working hours, and then potentially adapt the location of work and working hours or tasks, and private demands, to ensure that these still fit to each other. Thus, the successful utilization of time-spatial flexibility requires proactivity on the part of the employee in the form of time-spatial job crafting, a concept we review in this article.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has accelerated the adoption of new ways of working and has had major implications on the way employees lived and worked during the lockdown. To slow down the spread of the virus, social distancing measures were adopted across numerous countries, resulting in a significant proportion of employees working from home on a full-time basis. According to early estimates from Eurofound (2020), almost 40 percent of those currently working in the E.U. began to telework full-time as a result of the pandemic, as compared to 15 percent who had done so prior to the outbreak [European Commission (2020)].

The term "telework", coined by Jack Nilles in 1976 [Nilles et al. (1976)], implies working away from the central office location with the help of advancements in information and communication technology (ICT) [Becker and Steele (1995), Vos and van der Voordt (2001)] and can be regarded as a central element of "new ways of working".

Although demands for increased teleworking have been around for years (e.g., in Germany), the prevalence of teleworking among employees in the E.U. has only slightly increased over the last 10 years, from 7.5 percent in 2009 to 11 percent in 2019 [Eurostat LFS (2020)]. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, greater flexibility over where and when to work is gaining momentum.

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[1] This article is a summary of two articles: Wessels and Schippers (2018) and Wessels et al. (2019).

As curbs on social life had started to be lifted in numerous European countries, organizations also began to slowly reopen their offices and are preparing for a "new normal way of working". For larger corporations, the transition between the "old" and "new normal way of working" may not be that pronounced, as many corporates had already adopted some elements of new ways of working pre-pandemic (e.g., Microsoft Netherlands, Accenture Germany). However, for numerous small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and governmental organizations, the shift towards the "new normal way of working" is much more difficult. Overall, the "new normal way of working" means that employees will have a greater choice of work locations and working times and thus need to make informed choices about which work location is best suited for a particular work day.

Considering that only 15 percent of those employed in the E.U. had ever teleworked prior to the advent of the outbreak [European Commission (2020)], the resulting lockdown forced both employees and employers to find ways to telework effectively. Blurring the lines between work and private life, IT not working properly, and reduced productivity levels have been among the few reported challenges. Indeed, prior research on new ways of working has found that working from home leads to opposing outcomes. On the one hand, there are employees who regard working from home as something highly beneficial for their work. They feel that they are more productive and happier and have a greater work-life balance. On the other hand, however, there are also employees who struggle with working from home. Blurring boundaries between work and private life, no possibility for detachment, and reduced productivity are the outcome; corroborating the findings of De Menezes and Kelliher (2011), that flexible working practices can lead to both positive, negative, and null effects for employee outcomes.

As many organizations are moving towards a "new normal", where employees either no longer can work five days a week in the office and are thus forced to work from home/work remotely due to capacity limits in the office, or are able to choose for themselves whether they want to work from home/remotely or not, we argue that what is needed is to equip employees with tools that enable them to work successfully in such a new world of work.

In fact, Wessels et al. (2019) introduced "time-spatial job crating" as a future work skill that enables employees to stay productive, engaged, and to become innovative in the new world of work. In this article, we will review the research on time-spatial job crafting and explain how employees can use time-spatial job crafting to work successfully in this new world of work. We underscore the importance of employees' uptake of time-spatial job crafting, in which they reflect on specific work tasks and private demands, actively select work locations and working hours, and then potentially adapt the location of work and working hours or tasks and private demands to ensure that these still fit to each other.

2. DEFINITION OF NEW WAYS OF WORKING

New ways of working are characterized by time-spatial flexibility. Time-spatial flexibility within the new world of work describes the context in which knowledge work employees have the ability to decide when, where, and for how long to work on a daily basis [Hill et al. (2008)]. Employees who have the freedom to determine when and how long they work, have scheduling or time flexibility. A common form of time flexibility is flextime, which gives employees the freedom and control to adjust working hours to their personal needs [Baltes et al. (1999)]. Spatial flexibility allows work tasks to be carried out away from the office (e.g., at home, at a client's premises, on the train, or in a coffee shop), and working away from the central office location is often referred to as teleworking [Nilles et al. (1976), Nilles (1998)]. Advances in information and communications technology have enabled the uptake of this flexible work practice [Becker and Steele (1995), Vos and van der Voordt (2001)] and the introduction of the smartphone in the last decade has made remote working even more accessible.

Wessels et al. (2019) have argued that despite the relative popularity of the uptake of this practice across the E.U. and the U.S., and claims for better performance, wellbeing, and work-life balance, a real business case for flexible working cannot be made as yet [De Menezes and Kelliher (2011)]. Indeed, numerous studies have examined the effects of flexible working practices on various outcome variables and the results have been inconclusive. While some studies have found that flexible working practices do, in fact, have positive implications on performance and wellbeing [Gajendran and Harrison (2007), Kelliher and Anderson (2008)], others have either found none [Staples (2001)] or even negative effects on employees [Kelliher and Anderson (2008), ten Brummelhuis et al. (2012)]. Hence, according to Wessels et al. (2019) and Wessels (2017), despite 40 years of flexibility research it is still not possible to make a strong case for flexible working

Figure 1: A model of time-spatial job crafting
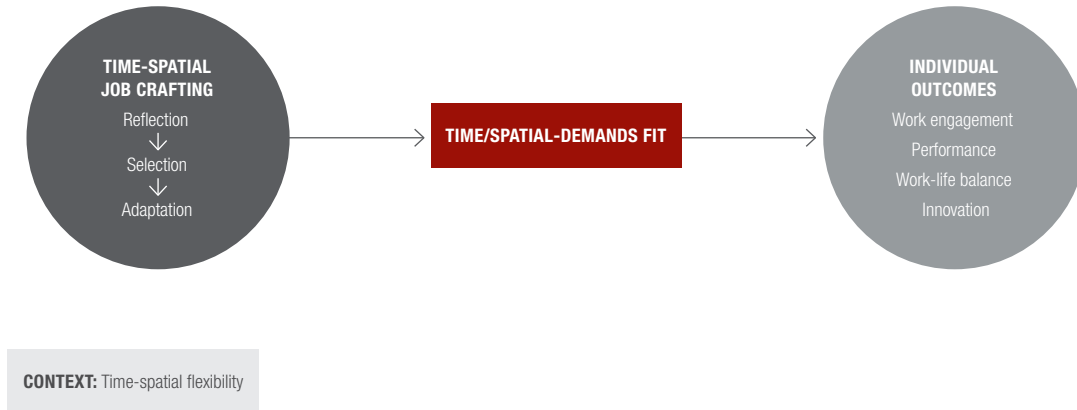
Adapted from Wessels et al. (2019)

practices. Yet, with the preparations currently underway for the "new normal way of working", and with the increase in time-spatial flexibility, it is of utmost importance for both employers and employees to have a better understanding of how to benefit from this increased flexibility.

3. HOW CAN EMPLOYEES PROFIT FROM NEW WAYS OF WORKING? THE CONCEPT OF TIME-SPATIAL JOB CRAFTING

According to Wessels et al. (2019), as knowledge workers are able to execute their work activities anywhere and anytime in the new world of work, but that these practices have led to both positive and negative outcomes for employee wellbeing, performance, and work-life balance, it is important that employees proactively craft changes to the location and timing of work to remain engaged, productive, and to retain their work-life balance on a daily basis.

In the job crafting literature, employees are considered active agents of their own work, which is considered to be a bottom-up approach of work design [Morgeson and Humphrey (2008)]. While early job crafting research looked at job crafting in terms of making changes to the quantity of working tasks and frequency of social interactions [Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001)], more recent studies have shifted focus and defined job crafting in terms of altering job demands and job resources [Tims et al. (2012)]. According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), employees engage in job crafting because they want to exercise some form of control over their work, want to

produce a positive self-image of themselves in their work, and aim to build and manage their social relationships at work. Tims et al. (2012) argue that employees proactively increase structural job resources, social job resources, and challenging job demands and decrease hindering job demands. While job crafting has traditionally been defined in terms of work, it has more recently also crossed over to other domains outside of work, including life crafting [e.g., Schippers and Ziegler (2020), De Jong et al. (2020)] or leisure crafting [Petrou and Bakker (2016)].

To include the time and spatial dimensions of work, Wessels (2017) and Wessels et al. (2019) have recently extended the notion of job crafting and denoted it "time-spatial job crafting". Time-spatial job crafting is defined as a "a context-specific type of job crafting in which employees (a) reflect on specific work tasks and private demands; (b) select workplaces, work locations, and working hours that fit those tasks and private demands; and (c) possibly adapt either their place/location of work and working hours or tasks and private demands to ensure that these still fit to each other thereby optimizing time/spatial-demands fit" [Wessels et al. (2019)].

3.1 Time/spatial-demands fit

Wessels (2017) and Wessels et al. (2019) suggest that whether time-spatial flexibility turns out favorably or unfavorably depends on how each individual uses the flexibility and the extent to which they manage to optimize the time/spatial-demands fit. Thus, it is not a good or a bad thing per se.

Wessels et al. (2019) postulate that large parts of the negative outcomes of time-spatial flexibility are likely to be caused by a misfit between working hours, work locations, and workplaces and task and private demands. As can be seen in Figure 1, if employees want to stay productive, engaged, innovative, and keep a good work-life balance in the context of time-spatial flexibility, flexible workers should ideally optimize a time/spatial-demands fit. Time/spatial-demands fit is defined "as the fit between work tasks and work locations, workplaces, and working hours on the one hand and private demands and work locations, workplaces, and working hours on the other hand" [Wessels et al. (2019)].

3.2 Components of time-spatial job crafting

In defining the original time-spatial job crafting concept, Wessels et al. (2019) drew from reflexivity research. Reflexivity as a self-regulatory concept at the team level consists of three elements: reflection, planning, and action [Swift and West (1998), for reviews see Konradt et al. (2016), Schippers et al. (2014), Schippers et al. (2017), Widmer et al. (2009)]. These three elements are intertwined as an iterative cycle of reflection, planning, and action [Schippers et al. (2017)]. Similar to this cycle, the time-spatial job crafting concept is composed of a reflection, a selection, and an adaptation component. Reflecting about working tasks, private demands, and working hours and work locations represent the cognitive part, while the actual selection of work locations and the potential adaptation are regarded as the behavioral element. Reflection can be considered as a deliberate process of thinking about the tasks, private demands, working hours, places, and locations of work available on any particular day. Employees are likely to base their decision on past experiences when examining the different work location/working hours alternatives and reflect on the benefits/drawbacks of this choice.

Examples of reflection are: what are my working tasks today? (e.g., I have two meetings, I have to prepare a presentation); what are my private demands today? (e.g., I have to bring my kids to school, doctor's appointment); or which work locations are available today? (e.g., home, train, office).

The second element, selection is deemed as the actual choice of working hours, work locations, and workplaces, which plays a vital role in reaching the best time/spatial-demands fit. The actual choice of a workplace, work location, or working hours is the result of the conscious consideration of and choice between alternatives [Vohs et al. (2008)]. For example, an employee decides to work from home since he or she needs to work in silence to finish a presentation. Hence, selection represents the actual choice of the work location, which stems from scrutiny of the different alternatives [Vohs et al. (2008)].

The last component, adaptation is understood as "performing adaptive behaviors that address changing conditions." [Hirschi et al. (2015)] and Wessels et al. (2019) argue that adaptation of work locations may for instance occur because of a suboptimal work location decision in the first place. Together, these three elements represent a chain in which reflection leads to selection, which is likely to lead to adaption.

3.3 Outcomes of time-spatial job crafting

The time-spatial job crafting model suggests that employees need to take on an active role if they want to reap the benefits from flexible working practices [Wessels et al. (2019)]. The three components of time-spatial job crafting, namely reflection, selection, and adaptation allow for this active role. Reaping the benefits from flexible working is based on the assumption that once flexible workers consciously choose a work location or working hours, they are able to fit the work location/working hours to their own preferences, which is likely to foster engagement, innovation, and productivity. Seeking out work locations that fit to one's task needs and/or private demands should enable employees to invest their capabilities fully at work. Consequently, this should give them more energy and make them more productive. Thus, by proactively modifying spatial and time aspects of the job so that they fit an employee's own task and private preferences, employees are able to increase their own engagement and performance. In addition, consciously choosing work locations should foster innovation, as employees will most likely perform their work tasks in a work environment that fits their own needs. Hence, the work environment can also become a source of inspiration.

4. EVIDENCE FROM STUDIES

Wessels and Schippers (2018) examined the idea of spatial job crafting and its implications for work engagement, productivity, and innovation. They expected that employees, who engage in spatial job crafting, are more likely to be productive, innovative, and engaged with their work. Their analysis has shown that if employees engage in spatial job crafting, they are able to be engaged and innovative. However, spatial job crafting did not increase feelings of perceived productivity. Hence, by reflecting and proactively choosing work locations, employees were able to reap the benefits

from flexibility but only for work engagement and innovation. The authors reasoned that proactively shaping work locations did not make employees more productive at the cross-sectional level and suggested that it might be that productivity implications of flexibility cannot be observed in the short time and, thus, for employees to profit from spatial job crafting for productivity a long-term perspective should be taken. This is indeed what Wessels (2017) found in her research on the long-term effects of flexibility.

While Richardson and McKenna (2014) did not test the idea of time-spatial job crafting directly, they demonstrated in their case study that flexible workers reordered their private lives. They reason that "flexworkers have to assume more responsibility for managing themselves and their whole lives" [Richardson and McKenna (2014)], and reported the case of a manager who stops working at 5pm to spend time with her child and then works after normal office hours. They considered this behavior to be one of a successful flexworker and Wessels et al. (2019) coined this type of behavior time-spatial job crafting.

5. TIME-SPATIAL JOB CRAFTING REQUIRES PERSISTENCY AND EFFORT

While the benefits of time-spatial job crafting seem straightforward, engaging in time-spatial job crafting on a routinized basis may require consistent effort. First, Wessels and her co-authors postulate that employees may resist reflecting at first since conscious reflection may be something that employees are often not used to and may provoke defense reactions. Hence, since time-spatial job crafting is a behavior that needs to be learned, resistance to reflect [Piderit (2000)] may hinder optimizing a time/spatial-demands fit and lead to positive work outcomes in the shortterm.

Second, the authors acknowledge that workdays may also include conflicting demands, exacerbating the selection of the right work location or working hours. For instance, even though an employee might want to work from home in perfect silence, they may also have several meetings that require them to be at the main office. Making choices turns out to be more troublesome whenever various needs, objective, or values, are in conflict [Brandstätter et al. (2006)]. Furthermore, even if employees consciously decide to work from home, unlearning the urge to go to the fridge, to lie on the sofa, or watch TV [Howgego (2019)], hence to procrastinate, can take some effort and time.

Third, there is evidence to suggest that employees base their work location choice on the decisions of their colleagues [Rockmann and Pratt (2015)]. While this is not a bad thing per se, it may conflict with private or task demands.

Consequently, being conscious about and actively managing contrasting demands is difficult and creates extra effort; effort in the form of more reflection, selection, and potentially adaptation. Consequently, Wessels et al. (2019) suggest that time-spatial job crafting can be a strenuous activity in itself, although one would also expect that over time "practice makes perfect", and choices can be made with less effort.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article, we presented evidence that proactively shaping one's workday helps employees work successfully in the new world of work. With the increased uptake of this practice as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, the question of how employees can be productive, engaged, and maintain their work-life balance has increased in relevance.

Our reflection/proactivity lens on new ways of working gave insights into how employees and their organizations are able to profit from flexibility, especially for innovation and work engagement. The review of Wessels et al.'s (2019) model of time-spatial job crafting presents it as a behavioral tool that organizations can use to derive benefits of flexibility. By promoting time-spatial job crafting inside the organization, flexible organizations are able to show employees how they can profit from time-spatial flexibility. Given that time-spatial job crafting is a skill that needs to be learned, organizations are well placed to offer in-house training to increase awareness of time-spatial job crafting among employees. It is important to show employees how they themselves can increase their own wellbeing, performance, and work-life balance in the new world of work. Against the backdrop of suptoptimal time-spatial choices or lack of awareness of a misfit, the importance of training is underscored. Even though training is key to increasing awareness for time-spatial job crafting, only a continuous assessment of one's own behavior by the employees themselves, managers, or colleagues helps make it possible to optimize time/spatial-demands fit over time. Consequently, since time-spatial job crafting is a behavior that needs to be learned, it is important that employees experience the benefits of reflection and learn this in training.

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