

**Non-preferred work tasks, job crafting and organizational citizenship  
behaviour: A preliminary analysis**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Job design encourages interesting jobs, however, all jobs have tasks we prefer not to do. At the same time, there is high expectation from organisations that their employees should engage in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). We do not know how employees' performance of non-preferred tasks affects their organisational citizenship behaviour. In this study, we examined the relationship between employees' non-preferred work tasks (NPWT) and their OCB by focusing on the mediating role of job crafting. Our study used a sample of 136 participants and found that task (but not relational) crafting mediated the relationship between NPWT and OCB. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed and future research directions are presented.*

113 words

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For many years now, organisational researchers and practitioners have had a great interest in understanding the characteristics of jobs that make jobs more meaningful and effective for employees (Grant & Parker, 2009). Job design over the years has been shown to affect important behavioural outcomes such as performance, turnover, and absenteeism (e.g., Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1976), psychological outcomes such as job satisfaction, internal work motivation, stress, and burnout (Parker & Wall, 1998) and physical outcomes such as blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and even mortality (Ganster, Fox, & Dwyer, 2001; Grant & Parker, 2009; Melamed, Fried, & Froom, 2001). Most of this work, until recently, has focussed on the broader aspects of job design with little consideration of the individual tasks that make up those jobs. In this paper, we outline a study to examine the impact of non-preferred work tasks on the subsequent behaviour of employees.

The most prominent and widely used model of job design is the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) which focuses on five positive characteristics of jobs namely task significance, task identity, skill variety, autonomy, and job based feedback. Although the intention of

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

the job characteristic model is to create interesting jobs at an organisational level, all jobs consist of individual tasks, some of which employees prefer to do and some which employees prefer not to do. Oldham and Hackman (2010) asserted that job design is organized as a linked set of specific jobs, each set up to be performed by individuals who work mostly independently of one another in bounded and stand-alone organisations. This view leads to a new perspective on job design in which employees seek a way to change the individual tasks that comprise a job to better fit their abilities and preferences (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Accordingly, changes in the structure and content of jobs do not necessarily have to wait for managers to take the initiative (Oldham & Hackman, 2010).

Recent studies have begun exploring an understanding of how employees take proactive initiatives in managing their tasks in the jobs (Campbell, 2000; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; Frese, Garst, & Fay, 2007). We understand that in every job, employees are required to undertake a wide range of tasks that they need to manage effectively. Some tasks employees enjoy and prefer to do, but others, they enjoy less and would not do them or avoid them if possible. However, limited studies have investigated employees' behaviour when they are required to undertake non-preferred tasks. Recently, Rana, Jordan, and Tse (2015) proposed the need and importance of studying the negative aspects of job tasks because the current studies have largely focused on the positive aspects of tasks underpinned by the job characteristics model. In reality, however, each job consists of both positive (preferred) and negative (non-preferred) tasks, which serves as foundation of cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes in the workplace. Rana and his colleagues define non-preferred work tasks (NPWT) as specific work tasks that may not require skill variety and lack task significance and/or task identity for the employee but are seen as essential to complete the job.

For example, in a modern university setting, one academic may perceive the marking of essays/reports/exam papers a non-preferred task whereas another academic may have a non-preferred task of attending meetings or even teaching. Despite these preferences, however, all these tasks are considered an essential part of an academics' job. The noteworthy element of NPWT is that it takes into account all the discrete tasks that employees do within their jobs and not just the meaningful tasks. These less preferred aspect of the job are likely to affect the way the individuals perform their overall job. We acknowledge that although positive characteristics of job are crucial for various

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

outcomes, however, it would be naïve to neglect the negative aspects of job, especially when we know that the tasks individuals are required to complete as a part of their job are known to affect the cognitive and emotional processes in the work place. These cognitive and emotional processes have also shown to affect various important outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Those behaviours that employees demonstrate by going out of the way to help others, raise concerns through voice and their in role behaviour are considered as OCB (Morrison, 1994).

In our study, we posit that there is a mechanism that explains how employees manage their NPWT to achieve better organisational and personal goals through job crafting. Job crafting is way by which employees find ways to make their jobs more meaningful (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). According to Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski (2013) job crafting theory elaborates on classic job design theory that focuses on the top- down processes of managers designing jobs for their employees. Job crafting is a means of describing the ways in which employees utilize opportunities to customize their jobs by actively changing their tasks and interactions with others at work. There are essentially three ways through which employees craft their jobs. The first type of job crafting is task crafting which refers to altering the boundaries of their jobs by taking more or fewer tasks, expanding or diminishing the scope of tasks, or changing how they perform their tasks. The second form of job crafting is relational crafting where employees can change their relationships at work by altering the nature or extent of their interactions with other people. Finally, the third way employees craft their jobs is through cognitive crafting, where employees cognitively change their jobs by altering how they perceive tasks, or thinking about the tasks involved in their job as a collective whole as opposed to a set of separate tasks (Berg et al., 2013). Therefore, we propose to examine the effect of NPWT on OCB through job crafting. The next section provides the theoretical justification for each of the hypotheses.

### **Job Tasks and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour**

OCB has been defined variously within its extensive literature (e.g., Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Organ, 1997). Central to all definitions, however, is the idea that OCB are employee behaviours that, although not critical to the task or job, serve to facilitate organisational functioning. OCB in the

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

recent years is seen as an expectation in organisations. It is known that employees who actively engage in OCB have a higher likelihood of growing further in the organisation in comparison to those who do not (Okurame, 2012). However, more recently, OCB have become a crucial component of jobs and are considered more of a necessity than a luxury (Jafari & Bidarian, 2012). Examples of OCB include helping co-workers, attending functions that are not required and putting in extra effort. Over the years, there have been many attitudinal predictors of the OCB such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, perceived fairness, and leader supportiveness (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Further, job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) have been shown to influence OCB in organisations (Farh, Podsakoff, & Organ, 1990). In their study on the direct relationship between task characteristics and OCB, Farh and colleagues found task characteristic affects the psychological states of individuals such as meaningfulness of work and sense of responsibility.

A meta-analysis by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Bommer (1996) reported three characteristics of job design that had strong relationship with OCB, task significance, task variety and skill variety. In addition, Drago and Garvey (1998) found skill variety (one of the job characteristics) was positively related to OCB. Further, a study by Parker and Wall (1998) showed strong correlations between two dimensions of job characteristics (skill variety and feedback) and OCB. More recently, Krishnan, Ismail, Samuel, and Kanchymalay (2013) conducted a study in Malaysia where they confirmed that all dimensions of task characteristics showed significant correlations with OCB. Based on this evidence, there is a clear link between the jobs employees undertake and their OCB.

Most studies from a job characteristics perspective, however, have focused on the motivational aspects of the tasks when testing OCB as an outcome. We argue that this overlooks the fact that jobs often contain essential tasks that individuals have a non-preference toward performing (Rana et al., 2015) and we argue further that these NPWT have an impact on employee behaviour and in particular their potential to engage in OCB. We believe that the more employees perform NPWT, then the less likely it is they will engage in less OCB. As OCB requires going beyond expectations in performing a job, we argue that the individuals who perceive they have to engage in performing NPWT on a regular basis are less likely to find the energy to perform OCB.

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

To be clear, our analysis of these relationships is at a task level. We expect that those employees who perceive themselves as being constantly involved in performing NPWT in their jobs will most likely engage in less OCB as NPWT may trigger displeasure or frustration at work (Rana et al., 2015). On the basis of this argument, we propose:

**Hypothesis 1:** *There will be a negative relationship between NPWT and OCB, such that the stronger the perception of non-preferred tasks, the weaker the OCB.*

### **The mediating role of job crafting**

We further believe that as employees are more aware of the expectations of organisation and their supervisors to perform OCB, they will find a mechanism that can help them find a way to engage in OCB despite of their performing NPWT and we see this moderating influence to be provided by job crafting. A job consists of a series of tasks and interpersonal relations allocated to an individual in the organisation (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Job crafting theory is an alternate perspective to job design theory (Berg et al., 2013). Job crafting theory suggests that employees are active architects, not merely passive recipients of jobs. The job crafting concept integrated different views of how employees proactively take initiative to alter their own jobs, roles, and tasks, and invites a broader consideration of the ways in which employees complete their jobs and provide meaning and identity to work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Black and Ashford (1995) recognized the role that employees play in the design of their jobs. Organisations design jobs and in turn select people with the right knowledge, skills and abilities for jobs (Campion & McClelland, 1993). Managers may decide to change something in the jobs, tasks or roles of their employees, in frame of job redesign process (Campion, Mumford, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Therefore, job design and job redesign are top-down processes, while the job crafting is a bottom-up process where employees themselves shape their jobs. Hence, job crafting is considered an important transformation in job design theory (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2015).

Job crafting is a change process, which is conducted by employees to alter the task and relational boundaries of their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski (2008), job crafting as a process may occur at the physical and/or cognitive level. Physical level refers to changes made by employees in the shape or

ambit of job tasks, whereas cognitive level refers to employees changing their perceptions about their jobs (Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014).

Job crafting may lead to many positive employee outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, work engagement and employees' perceptions of wellbeing (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010) as well as improved outcomes for the organisation (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Further, Tims and Bakker (2010) showed that job crafting enhances the job-employee relationship, which is more likely creating high levels of job satisfaction and positive organisational outcomes, such as organisational commitment and employee's retention.

Job crafting has three dimensions, cognitive crafting, task crafting, and relational crafting. As explained earlier, cognitive crafting suggests we change the way we look at the tasks we are undertaking. Task crafting refers to changing the way we do the tasks and relational crafting deals with who we involve in those tasks (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). We propose that task and relational crafting are likely to be the most appropriate mediators (Tims & Bakker, 2010) on the effect of NPWT on OCB. As we know that employees do not work in isolation, but are actually embedded in social networks, it is likely that the employees might look toward their network of relationships to seek assistance when they perceive that they are performing NPWT. For example, if an academic perceives a non-preference toward marking essays, the academic might engage in relational crafting by finding someone else to help complete this task and offering them to help them complete their tasks. By using relational crafting to complete the non-preferred task of marking, the academic may have additional time to then go beyond his job profile and help those that have helped them or others by engaging in OCB. On this basis we propose that:

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Relational crafting will mediate the relationship between NPWT and OCB.*

We also argue that employees, who have NPWT, are likely craft their non-preferred tasks and engage in task crafting to make their job more meaningful. We continue the same example of an academic who perceives marking as a non-preferred task. Task crafting means to change the task boundaries by changing the number, scope, or type of job tasks done at work. By choosing to do fewer, more, or different tasks than prescribed in the formal job, employees create a different job

(Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The academic might mark in such a way that he/she monitors the amount of time it takes for them to mark and instead of giving comments to students on every single line, they can give an overall comment and alter the scope of the task. This can then free the academic some time to engage in OCB. We note that this type of task crafting can impact on the quality of performance, however, as long as this action is within the parameters for this task provided by the organisation, it is unlikely to be considered to be poor performance. Indeed, it may be an acceptable way to complete the task by the organisation. Therefore, we argue that:

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Task crafting will mediate the relationship between NPWT and OCB.*

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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## **Method**

### **Study Design and Sample**

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an experimental study asking the respondents to provide their responses to set of cognitively boring and generally non-preferred tasks. Data were collected using a paper-based survey from undergraduate students enrolled in a Business course in an Australia university during one semester. All students belonged to various groups as part of a group assessment in their coursework. There was no reward offered to the students in return for their time for taking part in the survey and a university ethics committee approved the collection. At the start of the survey, all participants were given a scenario, which was related to the group assessment they did during the semester. The scenario asked them to consider how they would respond if given a set of least desirable tasks as a part of their role as a team member. An example of a least desirable task is to proof read the submission and make sure the referencing was strictly in American Psychological Association (APA) citations style.

Out of the 180 enrolled students in the course, 145 students volunteered to take part in the survey, however, after cleaning the data and removing uncompleted responses, we were able to use 136 surveys, which gave us a response rate of 75 per cent. The male respondents for this study were



67 and female respondents were 69 with a mean of 21.87 and standard deviation of 4.24, with minimum age of 18 and maximum age of 46.

### **Measures**

*Non-Preferred Work Tasks.* NPWT were measured using a 6 item scale developed by Rana et al. (2015). The scale was shown to be both reliable and valid. Participants were asked to indicate their views on the tasks that they were given in the scenario. Items that were asked to the participants were: “This role involves a great deal of tasks that I don’t like”; “There are certain tasks in this role that I would prefer not to perform”; “This role involves tasks that I have to perform but I do not enjoy”; “This role involves performing tasks that I find boring”; a reverse coded item was “I enjoy doing all of the given tasks”; and “This role involves most tasks that I do not prefer to perform”. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha reliability was 0.85.

*Organisational Citizenship Behaviour.* OCB was measured using an adapted measure by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Participants were asked to self-report on 7 items of helping behaviour, 6 items of voice and 4 items of in role behaviour. Sample items for each scale included: “I will volunteer to do things for my work group” (helping); “I will speak up and encourage others in this group to get involved in issues that affect the group” (voice); and “I perform tasks that are expected as part of being a group member” (role behaviour). After the factor analysis, we had to drop two items from the helping behavior scale to improve reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability for helping behaviour was 0.78, for voice was 0.75, and for in role behaviour was 0.83. For this study we combined the scale together and the Cronbach’s alpha for the whole scale was .85.

*Job Crafting.* For task crafting and relational crafting, we adapted the measures from Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013). There were 5 questions for task crafting. A sample item was “I introduce new approaches to improve our group report”. Factor analysis resulted in deletion of 1 item. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability for task crafting scale was 0.75. Relational crafting was measured using 5 items. A sample question was “I make an effort to get to know people well within the group”. Factor analyses resulted in deletion of 2 items. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability for relational crafting scale was 0.78.

**Results**

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, correlations and alpha reliabilities for the variables collected in our study. Results showed that NPWT has a significant negative correlation with OCB and task crafting but was not found to be related to relational crafting. We also found a positive correlation between NPWT and task crafting ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ).

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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Hypothesis 1 was supported as NPWT was significantly and negatively correlated with OCB ( $r = -0.23, p < 0.001$ ). In order to test the mediation hypothesis, we conducted a mediation analysis by estimating the indirect effect of NPWT on OCB through job crafting. We followed Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) procedure for testing mediation using PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). The only critical finding is whether  $ab$  is significant; where  $a$  is the regression coefficient of the independent variable (NPWT) on the mediator (task crafting and relational crafting) and  $b$  the regression coefficient of the mediator on the dependent variable (OCB). We examined the mediating roles of task crating and relational crafting separately. Table 2 shows mediation results of task crafting and Table 3 shows the mediation results of relational crafting. Results showed that the bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $a_1b_1 = -.04, se = .02$ ) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely under zero (-.08 to -.0005). Thus, H2b was supported. Using the same procedure, we examined relational crafting as a mediator. Results suggested that the direct effect was significant, but not indirect effect (see Table 3). Thus, H2a was not supported. Therefore, the relationship between NPWT and OCB was mediated by task crafting but not relational crafting.

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INSERT TABLE 2 & 3 ABOUT HERE  
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**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the mechanism fostering OCB when employees are asked to complete non-preferred work tasks. The results provide support for the significant direct

effect of NPWT on OCB. In other words, employees who engage in non-preferred tasks are less likely to engage in OCB within their work role. However, the findings also suggest that employees who crafted their non-preferred work tasks are likely to engage in more OCB. This result supports previous findings by Sussha (2014), who found a direct relationship between job crafting and OCB but extends this literature in several ways. First, our study uniquely focuses on the tasks within a job that are not preferred by employees. Our study confirms that task crafting is an important mechanism that mediates the negative effect of NPWT on OCB. That means employees who are aware of their NPWT and change their task boundaries tend to engage in more OCB than those employees who did not engage in crafting their tasks.

A review of the literature shows our study is the first to consider negative characteristics of jobs such as employees' non-preferred work tasks and find a mechanism such as task crafting to encourage employees to engage in OCB. An interesting finding from this study was that the mediating role of relational crafting between NPWTs and OCB was not supported. This is a contrast to the results reported by Sussha (2014), however, as we noted earlier, the Sussha study only conducted an examination of the direct relationship between job crafting and OCB. Our experimental design prompted responses in relation to a negative task and examined if relational crafting influenced the respondents' OCB. There are two possible explanations for our finding. The first is that NPWTs are generally allocated and required for the completion of the overall job role. On this basis, there may be little room for employees undertaking specific tasks to use relational crafting as a response. The second explanation emerges from our experimental design. The respondents were informed that the NPWT had to be completed by themselves and on this basis relational crafting may not have been considered. In future research, it would be useful to examine these relationships in a work setting to see if our findings can be maintained in respect of relational crafting. We also note that a reason why relationship crafting may not have shown any mediation effects could be due to small sample size. We believe that future studies should test the model with a larger sample size. We note, however, that according to Green (1991) our sample size is sufficient to give robustness to our analyses.

### **Implications for Practice**

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

Besides theoretical contributions, we believe that there are practical implications. We note that most jobs consists of at least some tasks that employee would prefer not to perform, and we note that this may have an effect on other behaviours at work. We note that managers who are able to give their employees some autonomy in how these NPWT are completed in a way that allows scope for task crafting may end up with better performance from their employees. Most organisations these days expect their employees to go beyond their job description and demonstrate their OCB (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). If the managers allowed some scope for task crafting, the results from this study suggest that the employees will engage in more OCB when provided with some flexibility about how to complete NPWT than when they are not allowed scope for task crafting. Enabling employees to craft their tasks themselves by asking others to assist with their non-preferred tasks may be an OCB in itself. We believe that when the managers allow some scope for crafting through mechanism like autonomy, this could result in employees indulging in relational crafting.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite being set up as an experimental design, we note that a major limitation of this study was the cross sectional design nature of the data collection with a single administration that has the potential to introduce common method bias. To address this we followed steps from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) to reduce the common method bias. In particular, we developed the survey to allow respondents to alter the format of their responses with the use of different likert type scales. We also note that the non-significant results in relation to relational crafting for our independent and dependant variable suggests that common method bias may not have had a major influence on our results. In future research, a split administration or the introduction of objective measures of performance or peer rated OCB may overcome this limitation.

Our second limitation is around the use of a small student sample in our study. To compensate for the low sample size, the adjusted R square values were used when reporting the regression analyses, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Power analysis revealed that the sample size was sufficient to support the analysis we used. We note in future research it would be good to test our findings using a work sample.

## 11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETITIVE SESSION

Although there is much interest recently amongst scholars on researching job crafting as a predictor of job performance, we noted that much of this work has ignored the types of tasks being completed. Our study introduces a new antecedent to consider when researching job crafting, the type of tasks being completed and in particular, the NPWT being completed. We believe that researchers in the area of job design should explore and test this construct further with various different outcomes, through using job crafting as a mechanism (Berg et al., 2008).

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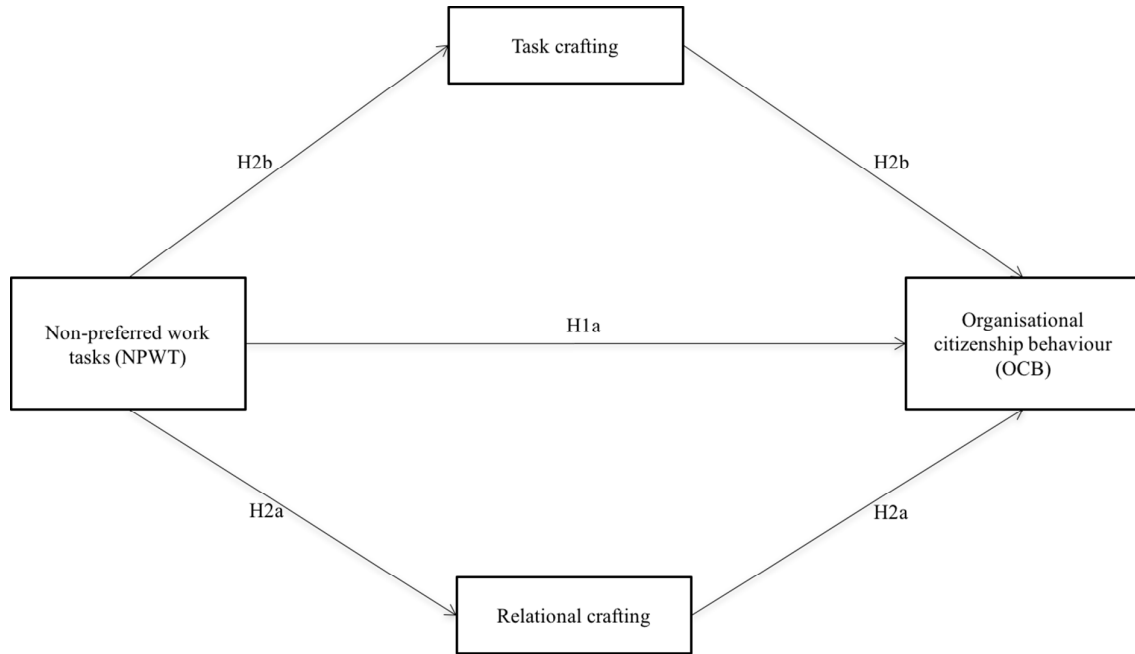
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**Figure 1. Proposed research model**

**Table 1.**

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.NPWT	3.04	.77	(.85)			
2. Task crafting	3.19	.65	-.18*	(.75)		
3. Relational crafting	2.51	.90	-.11	.24**	(.78)	
4. OCB	4.12	.40	-.23**	.42**	.15	(.85)

\*\* p < .01, \* p < .05.

11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR  
COMPETITIVE SESSION

**Table 2.**

Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with confidence interval results of mediation model (PROCESS, Model 4) (Hayes, 2013): Indirect effects of NPWT (X) on OCB (Y) through task crafting (M).

		Task crafting (M)		OCB (Y)	
		Coefficient	95% CI	Coefficient	95% CI
NPWT (X)	$a_{1 \rightarrow}$	-.16*(.07)	[-.30, -.01]	$c'_{\rightarrow}$	-.08(.04) [-.16, .0003]
Task crafting (M)				$b_{1 \rightarrow}$	.24***(.05) [.14, .33]
Constant	$i_{M \rightarrow}$	3.67***(.23)	[3.22, 4.12]	$i_{Y \rightarrow}$	3.61***(.22) [3.18, 4.05]
		$R^2 = .03$		$R^2 = .20$	
		$F(1, 134) = 4.68, p < .05$		$F(2, 133) = 16.30, p < .001$	
Indirect effect	$a_1 b_1 \rightarrow$	-.04*(.02)	[-.08, -.002]		

Note: Standard errors are in parenthesis; bootstrap sample size = 10,000; CI = confidence interval.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

11. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR  
COMPETITIVE SESSION

**Table 3.**

Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with confidence interval results of mediation model (PROCESS, Model 4) (Hayes, 2013): Indirect effects of NPWT (X) on OCB (Y) through relational crafting (M).

	Relation crafting (M)			OCB (Y)		
		Coefficient	95% CI		Coefficient	95% CI
NPWT (X)	$a_1 \rightarrow$	-.12 (.10)	[-.32, .07]	$c' \rightarrow$	-.11 (.05)	[-.19, -.02]
Relational crafting (M)				$b_2 \rightarrow$	.05 (.04)	[-.02, .13]
Constant	$i_M \rightarrow$	2.89 (.32)	[2.26, 3.52]	$i_Y \rightarrow$	4.32 (.17)	[3.98, 4.67]
		$R^2 = .21$			$R^2 = .07$	
		$F(1, 134) = 1.5, p > .05$			$F(2, 133) = 4.76, p < .001$	
Indirect effect	$a_1 b_2 \rightarrow$	-.007 (.008)	[-.03, .003]			

Note: Standard errors are in parenthesis; bootstrap sample size = 10,000; CI = confidence interval.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .