



# Job Carving & Job Crafting: New Approach to Solve Old Problems<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Entering the labour market is a growing challenge in Europe especially for people facing barriers such as the low-skilled and those with disabilities, many of whom are long-term unemployed. To provide some numbers: in 2018, 7.2 million people or 43% of all unemployed people in the EU were unemployed for more than a year (Eurostat, 2019). Since long-term unemployment can reduce productivity (Edin & Gustavsson, 2008), the EU calls for holistic, individualised support and for the involvement of employers.<sup>2</sup>

Job carving and job crafting can be effective strategies to overcome the challenges of labour market (re)integration and to keep workers employed by creating meaningful and productive employment. Both approaches aim to match the needs of enterprises with people's individual talents, needs and interests. Activities of this kind can benefit the individuals concerned, the companies, and society in general. These strategies can also contribute to the humanisation of work and may well gain importance due to digitalisation and automation processes that drive the changes in the world of work.

**Keywords:**  
**Labour market,**  
**European Social Fund,**  
**Long-term**  
**unemployment,**  
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**disabilities,**  
**Employment policies**

This Policy Brief aims to raise awareness and promote job carving and job crafting activities within the EU. It provides insights into current activities implemented in EU Member States in the context of the European Social Fund (ESF). Promising practices in offering holistic support to employers, employees and unemployed people during job carving and/or job crafting processes are presented and recommendations drawn for policy designers interested in implementing these approaches and/or improving their practices.

- <sup>1</sup> The results presented here are based on the paper 'Job Carving and Job Crafting: A Review of Practices' (Scoppetta et al., 2019) that was commissioned by the Employment Thematic Network, a network of the European Social Fund/ESF Transnational Platform (on behalf of AEIDL) by order of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The opinions expressed in this Policy Brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the funding organisation. We are grateful for comments received from Sonila Danaj. We would also like to thank Willem Stamatou for the editing and layout of this Policy Brief.
- <sup>2</sup> Council recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, 2016/C 67/01

## Job carving and job crafting: definitions, differences and added value

**Contribution to the humanisation of work in times of streamlined processes and deteriorating working conditions**

Job carving and job crafting are new approaches that aim at solving an old problem: matching employers' and employees' needs. More specifically, the approaches aim at helping people not (yet) integrated into the labour market to find employment and at preventing job losses because of the changing economic and technological environment by adapting work tasks.

More recently, these activities have also been discussed under the headings "*Job design*", "*Job enrichment*", "*Job satisfaction*" and "*Work customisation*". Ideas of this kind are grounded in the recognition of the legitimate needs and interests of both the worker and the employer. They are strongly linked to the concept of humanising work by resizing the job so that it suits the capacity of the worker. This is of great importance as an approach to address problems which can emerge from the intensification of work, the pace of work, and the fact that many jobs become burdensome and physically demanding or cause workers to operate under acute pressure with subsequent risks for their health and well-being.

**Job carving refers to the practice of rearranging work tasks within a company to create tailor-made employment**

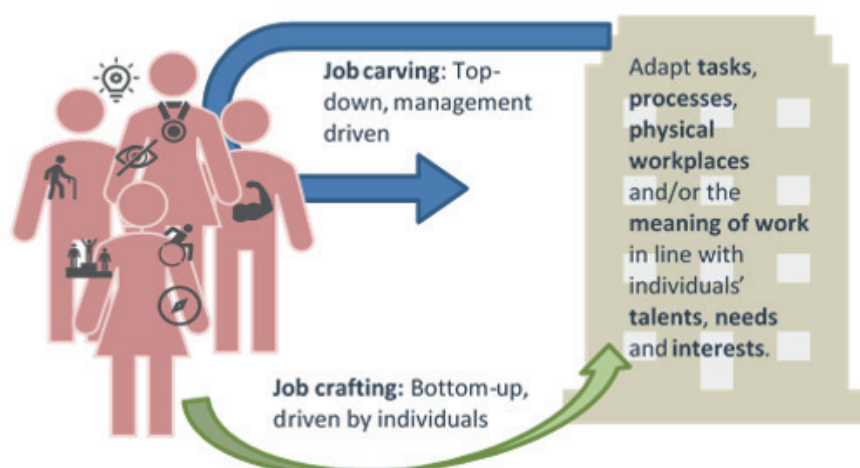
*Job carving* refers to the practice of rearranging work tasks within a company to create tailor-made employment opportunities for all people, but especially for people with reduced work capacities or for people who for other reasons are constrained in the tasks they carry out (Griffin et al., 2007; LWL-Integrationsamt Westfalen, 2017). Carving activities can result in customised employment opportunities for new employees, but it also refers to the rearrangement of existing workplaces and tasks. Usually, carving is done by managers, often together with specialised consultants. Areas are identified in which tasks and processes can be rearranged to create new positions within firms. The process can be accompanied by training, ongoing support measures to advance people in their further careers, and by specific offers to enterprises (e.g. workplace adjustments).

**Job crafting refers to the practice of employees designing their tasks and work processes themselves**

*Job crafting* refers to the practice of employees designing their tasks and work processes themselves. It is defined as "*the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work*" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001: 179). In contrast to carving, job crafting describes a bottom-up process: employees are granted the freedom to decide on how they work, which allows them to change their work identity and the meaning of their work. This can help employees increase job satisfaction and decrease the risk of burnout (Tims et al., 2013).

Hence, different actors drive the processes. As shown in Figure 1, job carving is a top-down process driven by management to adapt tasks, processes or workplaces based on the talents, needs and interests of current or future employees. By contrast, job crafting is a bottom-up process driven by employees.

**Table 1: Understanding job carving and job crafting**



Source: Own illustration.

### Differences in drivers, target group, and focus of the approaches

Based upon the drivers, the target group varies (see Table 1 regarding the key features of the concepts): the primary target group of crafting initiatives are employees, while job carving can be conducted with and for both the unemployed *and* the employed. Amongst potential beneficiaries are male and female low-skilled, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, older male and female workers, migrants, and carers. The focus of crafting is on increasing the match between employees and the work they are tasked to perform, while carving is a process of creating new positions, roles or jobs. Finally, there are also differences regarding the role of public funding within the EU: while public financial support for crafting activities seems to be very limited, job carving activities receive public funding, especially from the ESF in some EU Member States.

**Table 1: Understanding job carving and job crafting**

Field of Activities/ Features	Job Crafting	Job Carving
<b>Drivers</b>	Employees (Bottom-up)	Management-driven (Top-down)
<b>Target group</b>	Employed	Employed & Unemployed
<b>Focus of the approach</b>	Adapt job tasks to individual needs	Create new positions/ roles/jobs
<b>Funding</b>	Little/no public funding	Partly ESF-funded (trainings, consultancy, etc.)

Source: Own illustration.

**Benefits are gained  
for the firms, the  
employees and  
society in general**

What both concepts have in common is that they show clear economic benefits for the companies, the employees and society in general. Job carving and job crafting can add value by enhancing productivity and by increasing the health of workers and their job satisfaction (Tims et al., 2013; Van Wingerden & Poell, 2017).

## Relevance, challenges and opportunities

**Do we have to be  
'close to perfect' for the  
world of work?**

People with significant barriers to employment are frequently excluded from labour market integration. Callahan (2002), for instance, has noted that services and programmes relying on traditional methods do not result in sustainable employment outcomes for people with complex support needs. Other scholars found these people as often *"unable to successfully complete the complex variety of responsibilities associated with existing jobs"* (Condon et al., 2004: 1). In response, Griffin et al. (2007) challenged the view that one must be 'close to perfect' before entering the world of work.

Work customisation generally, whether through job carving or job crafting, can help employers to overcome recruitment difficulties. This is of growing concern in many advanced economies because of the ageing workforce. The increasing focus on service sector employment changes traditional employment models, resulting in raising opportunities to promote work customisation. As competition for workers increases, employers are recognising the need to be more flexible. They can benefit from help to address current employment dynamics (e.g. labour shortages, high turnover rates), enhance business organisation and increase efficiency and productivity by using the skills of all employees to their best advantage. This can be done through re-assigning jobs to match skills, re-organising workflows to increase productivity, identifying unmet needs in the workplace through negotiating customized jobs, increasing customer satisfaction, and helping employers to better reflect the existing diversity in their communities.

Job carving and job crafting thus can add enormous value to the economy. However, there are not only opportunities but also potential risks, as we will see in the following:

**Potential risks  
include a downgrading  
of salaries**

- Job carving can lead to a *downgrading of salaries* when identifying and carving out easy or elementary tasks. To avoid developing positions of lower value, consultants should ensure that the talents and the benefits the new employees will bring to the companies are in the focus of all concerns. Moreover, the engagement of and dialogue with social partners should be fostered.

Meaningful,  
productive and  
sustainable  
employment can be  
created for all people

- There are several *practical challenges* associated with job carving. Guidance is needed on how to better connect companies' resources with potential workers (see Griffin et al., 2007) and identify the areas where people's talents best fit. Thus, target group-specific approaches are required.
- At a more general level, there are *negative stereotypes* which need to be addressed. As is well-known, one challenge to employment is what has been called the "*vicious circle of low expectations*" (Rinaldi & Perkins, 2005): employers believe that, for example, people with disabilities cannot work and therefore do not employ them. The low employment rate of members of this group confirms that they are unlikely to find work. Consequently, they are disheartened and do not apply for jobs.
- In taking the *gender perspective*, opportunities include, amongst others, the detection of gender discrimination during the process of job carving and the targeted approach for women facing barriers to entering employment. Consequently, the challenges are reducing barriers without reinforcing stereotypes associated with target groups, such as concentrating on offering low-paid or part-time jobs (Wuiame, 2019).
- *Opportunities* include the prospect of providing meaningful work, increasing the productivity and health of individual workers, increased engagement, job satisfaction and decreased burnout. Hence, job crafting can be regarded as an important strategy for improving workers' health.
- Job carving can offer people the opportunity to fully integrate into open working environments, reducing the tendency for people with limited capacity and disabilities to rely on segregated sheltered workplaces. These are sometimes associated with low wages, isolated social environments, and very little or non-existent prospects for advancement.
- Finally, the approaches can lead to improved employer-employee relations for the benefit of both the employer and the employee.

To conclude, the challenges and opportunities of job carving and job crafting can be summarised as follows: win-win situations are created where enterprises benefit from the talents of people and where people add value to firms and society at large.

Job carving and  
job crafting are new  
practices that await  
their implementation in  
many EU countries

## Promising practice

During the Employment Thematic Network on 14-15 May 2019 in Malta, representatives of EU Member States presented their approaches in implementing job carving and job crafting. Some Member States clearly stated

that this is a new practice which has not yet been implemented by them. Amongst the EU frontrunners for job carving implementation are Malta and Belgium. Please see a brief description of the promising Maltese practice in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Promising practice implemented in Malta**

<b>Job carving for job-seekers with disabilities</b>	
<b>Country</b>	Malta
<b>Rationale</b>	As a consequence of the enforcement of the 2% employment quota for persons with disabilities in Maltese enterprises, a substantial number of enterprises wanted to integrate persons with disabilities. Due to the gap between the “requirements” of existing vacancies and the “preparedness” of the disabled job-seeker, job-carving was adopted.
<b>Specificities of the approach</b>	Jobsplus, the Maltese Public Employment Service, entered into a partnership with the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF), which is an entity specialising in the labour market integration of job-seekers with disabilities. LSF set up a corporate relations unit to support enterprises in the recruitment of persons with disabilities. The Corporate Relations Executive identifies existing occupations within the enterprise which are potentially suitable for job-seekers with disabilities. The “carving” exercise is driven by the enterprise requirements and the existing competencies and skills of the registered job-seekers with disabilities. This is coupled with pre-employment efforts such as training and work exposure schemes offered by Jobsplus to improve the employability and preparedness of the registered disabled job-seeker.
<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the labour market integration of job-seekers with disabilities; and</li> <li>• Change the perspective of employers on the employment of people with disabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Corporate Relations Executives encountered difficulties in finding suitable jobs for job-seekers with disabilities given that enterprises willing to integrate persons with disabilities often offer jobs requesting complex qualifications, competences and/or tasks that, overall, cannot be met by disabled job-seekers. By carefully analysing the enterprise requirements and operation/workflow, the Corporate Relations Executives identify elements, tasks and outcomes from existing jobs in the enterprise to design a new job or a workflow that can integrate a person with a disability or a mixed-ability group of persons with disabilities.
<b>Impact</b>	As of April 2018, it was possible to create 278 jobs suitable to job-seekers with disabilities by making use of the job carving approach.

Source: European Commission, 2018.



Other promising practices of job carving implemented within the EU include the Flemish/Belgium projects “WEB+”, “Road 67” (see Scoppetta & Aparicio Jodar, 2019) as well as actions taken by *Mooi Werk Makers* and the Lithuanian project “Active and Needed”.

## Recommendations and conclusion

### Win-win situations are created

Although promising practices are still rare within the EU, job carving and job crafting can be effective strategies to overcome the challenges in labour market (re)integration facing people with barriers to (re)employment, and to keep workers employed by creating meaningful and productive employment. Win-win situations are created where enterprises can benefit from the talents of people and where people can add value to firms and society at large. The approaches also contribute to the humanisation of work in times of streamlined processes and the deterioration of working conditions. Job carving and job crafting even may gain importance due to digitalisation and automatisisation processes that drive the changes in the world of work and may help combat the growth of precarious employment.

### Job carving and job crafting require support to be effective

Within the EU, job carving and job crafting activities, however, are rare. In some EU Member States such as Malta, Belgium and Lithuania, job carving activities are already supported by the ESF. Still, activities of this kind are often not identified as such (some projects are described under general headings such as Job Design), and holistic implementation approaches are frequently absent. Support is needed in helping employers to identify possible areas for job carving, offering preparatory training to people, matching the demands of enterprises and employees/the unemployed, and building well-established cooperation with enterprises linked to outreach activities. In order to enable widespread implementation, guidance must be provided not only to employers and the unemployed and their families, but also to labour market institutions (ESF bodies, Public Employment Services, NGOs, etc.). Advice should be offered based on findings from practices already implemented such as those applied in Malta.

Implementing job carving and job crafting adds value to policy implementation within the EU, particularly supporting the agenda to reduce long-term unemployment, due to their potential for achieving enhanced social inclusion. To minimise the risk of a potential downgrading of salaries for the new jobs, roles or positions created, an individual’s talents must be put at the centre of all policy concerns. In this regard, job carving and job crafting require holistic support and a wider impact on related policy areas such as social insurance/

assistance, employment legislation, and minimum wage legislation. Sufficient resources must therefore be made available to support firms and individuals to realise meaningful, productive and sustainable employment for all groups of our society.

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