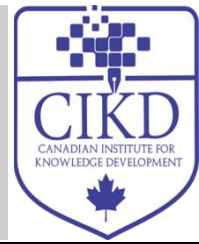


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Workplace Loneliness and Job Crafting among Employees: The Roles of Organization-Based Self-Esteem and Self-Rated Performance

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to telework have exacerbated workplace loneliness. Despite growing research on the effects of workplace loneliness on employee attitudes and performance, empirical studies on how lonely employees behave remain limited. This study proposes that workplace loneliness adversely affects employees through work redesign (i.e., job crafting) and develops a moderated mediation model to test this assumption. The findings demonstrate that workplace loneliness directly undermines job crafting and indirectly diminishes it by lowering employees' organization-based self-esteem. Lonely employees may question their competencies and worth within the organization, reducing their motivation to proactively reshape their tasks, relationships, and cognitive approach to work. Furthermore, self-rated performance moderates the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting. Specifically, when self-rated performance is high, the positive influence of organization-based self-esteem on job crafting becomes more pronounced. These findings suggest that workplace loneliness limits employees' ability to regulate negative emotions and improve their well-being through job crafting. In promoting employees' job crafting, organizations should not only highlight the importance of self-esteem among employees who feel loneliness but also implement fair and transparent performance evaluation systems. Moreover, maintaining both the quality and quantity of employees' workplace relationships is essential to preserving their organization-based self-esteem and supporting their proactive behaviors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made loneliness a widespread social issue, with approximately one-quarter of the global population feeling lonely (Maese, 2023). The expansion of telework declines face-to-face interactions among colleagues, which has diminished the frequency of informal communication and overall communication satisfaction, thereby hindering the fulfillment of employees' social needs in the workplace (Cacioppo et al., 2006; Özcelik & Barsade, 2018). Consequently, workplace loneliness is more common, and the associated risks to employee well-being have garnered attention (Basit & Nauman, 2023; D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023). However, researchers have given less attention to the negative impact that workplace loneliness has on employees' proactive behavior. Loneliness typically correlates with diminished psychological resources, negative self-evaluation, and social avoidance (Jin & Ikeda, 2023), which weakens employees' motivation to engage in job crafting. Lonely employees may be more inclined to passively adapt to their environment rather than actively adjust their work content and methods. This study aims to explore the mechanisms and pathways through which workplace loneliness negatively affects employees' job crafting.

Organizational effectiveness depends on employees' proactive behaviors, including voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), help seeking (Bamberger, 2009), and organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 2014). Proactive behaviors benefit individual career growth, team and organizational performance (Kim, 2023; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Segarra-Ciprés et al., 2019). Many studies have found that personality traits (such as openness and extraversion) and proactive characteristics are strongly associated with proactive behavior (Bennett et al., 1990; Major et al., 2006). Others claim that proactive behavior is mainly shaped by situational factors (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Proactive behavior is not universally exhibited across all contexts, but rather tends to manifest in particular environments (Miller & Jablin, 1991), such as when new employees initially integrate into an organization (Ellis et al., 2017). According to Crant (2000), job crafting, as a context-specific proactive behavior, is influenced more by situational conditions than by personality traits.

When confronted with work-related stress, employees frequently adopt proactive behavior to self-regulate negative feelings (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Ingusci et al., 2021). As a typical proactive behavior, job crafting not only helps employees alleviate emotional stress but also enhances their well-being, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Petrou et al., 2012; Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013; Tims et al., 2013). Therefore, job design may be effective in reducing negative feelings such as workplace loneliness (Hakanen et al., 2017). Nonetheless, although job crafting is an employee-initiated behavior, it is not entirely independent of other organizational members. Lonely employees feel disconnected and lack support from their colleagues (Wright et al., 2006), leading them to believe they are not trusted by their colleagues or leaders (Armenakis et al., 2007) and ultimately refuse job crafting. Research has shown that employees' subjective perceptions of how their leaders evaluate their job crafting affect their degree of job crafting (Fuller et al., 2015). Only when employees have good interpersonal relationships and positive attitudes are their proactive behaviors positively evaluated by leaders (Grant et al., 2009). Given that workplace loneliness is associated with unpleasant feelings and diminished social engagement (Mccarthy et al., 2025), the job crafting efforts of lonely employees are unlikely to be recognized. In summary, fragile interpersonal relationships and heightened sensitivity to evaluation may inhibit employees' job crafting behavior.

Besides workplace loneliness, employees' evaluations of their competencies also affect their job crafting behavior. As a mediating variable, self-efficacy indicates a significant positive association with outcomes such as performance and work engagement (Luthans et al., 2007; Rošková & Faragová, 2020; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Hence, employees who have a higher evaluation of their abilities are more likely to engage in job crafting (Miraglia et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2006). Self-efficacy and self-esteem both represent an individual's assessment of their abilities, yet they differ significantly in their definitions and functions. Self-efficacy refers to an employee's belief in their capacity to perform work-related tasks (Sherer et al., 1982), whereas self-esteem reflects a broader self-perception of one's overall competence and worth (Pierce et al., 1989). While both self-efficacy and self-esteem foster positive employee behaviors, self-efficacy is more closely associated with outcomes such as enhanced performance and work engagement. In contrast, self-esteem plays a crucial role during times of challenge, difficulty, or stress, and is negatively associated with loneliness (Al Khatib, 2012). Moreover, compared to general self-efficacy, organization-based self-esteem has a stronger positive impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Gardner & Pierce, 1998). Organization-based self-esteem helps employees feel valued and connected, encouraging them to engage in job crafting to relieve the stress of workplace loneliness.

Since loneliness leads to lower self-esteem (Vanhalst et al., 2013), workplace loneliness might reduce employees' organization-based self-esteem, as lonely employees tend to undervalue organizational recognition. Additionally, the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and work reorganization may be influenced by employees' self-rated performance. Performance reflects the outcomes of task completion and the degree of recognition employees receive from the organization. When employees feel that their efforts are not acknowledged, even those with high organization-based self-esteem may experience a lack of confidence or question their value within the organization, which then reduces their willingness to engage in job crafting (Schmidt & DeShon, 2010). Furthermore, the combination of high organization-based self-esteem and low self-rated performance may indicate a tendency toward perfectionism. Such perfectionistic strivings can intensify negative emotions and anxiety about performance outcomes, thus restricting job crafting (Ocampo et al., 2020).

In summary, this study examined (1) the negative impact of workplace loneliness on job crafting, (2) the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem in the relationship between workplace loneliness and job crafting, and (3) the moderating role of self-rated performance in the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting. All hypotheses were supported. This study complements existing research on the negative consequences of workplace loneliness. Workplace loneliness directly hinders employees' job crafting and indirectly reduces their job crafting by lowering organization-based self-esteem.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Workplace Loneliness and Job Crafting

Workplace loneliness arises from the gap between expected and real relationships in the workplace (Wright et al., 2006). Workplace loneliness negatively affects both individuals and organizations, including increased turnover intentions and emotional exhaustion, and reduced quality of leader-member exchange (Lam & Lau, 2012; Öztürk Çiftçi, 2021). Although many studies have identified the consequences of workplace loneliness, it remains unclear whether

employees actively adjust their work-related cognition and behavior in response to workplace loneliness.

Unlike traditional top-down approaches to work design led by managers (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), job crafting refers to employees' self-initiated behaviors aimed at shaping, modifying, or redefining aspects of their work (Tims & Bakker, 2010; Tims et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is a bottom-up form of work redesign (Grant & Parker, 2009). Despite increasing attention, theoretical perspectives on job crafting remain varied. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) conceptualized job crafting as the process by which employees proactively alter the boundaries of their tasks, relationships, and cognitive perceptions of work, identifying three forms: task, relational, and cognitive crafting. This study adopts the model proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) to explore the relationship between workplace loneliness and employees' job crafting.

Among different directions of job crafting, approach crafting involves expanding or enriching the scope of the job. This study focuses on approach crafting, which is more strongly associated with positive outcomes. Therefore, this study focuses on approach crafting rather than avoidance crafting. Beyond its known negative consequences for organizational and individual outcomes, we propose that workplace loneliness may also reduce employees' motivation to engage in approach crafting.

Previous research has confirmed the impact of loneliness on employees' cognitive and behavioral patterns (McCarthy et al., 2025). Loneliness has been shown to trigger cognitive biases in individuals' perceptions of themselves and others (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). Lonely employees often experience self-deprecation (Brown & Mankowski, 1993) and social anxiety (Lim et al., 2016). They tend to ruminate on negative social experiences and hold pessimistic expectations about future interpersonal interactions (Teneva & Lemay Jr, 2020). Behaviorally, lonely individuals are more likely to avoid self-disclosure at work (Cacioppo et al., 2002) and refuse to proactively expand their social networks (Solano et al., 1982). Thus, workplace loneliness may reduce employees' motivation to engage in cognitive and relational crafting. Recent evidence shows that workplace loneliness increases withdrawal behaviors (Zhu et al., 2024), but its impact on proactive behaviors remains unclear. Hu et al. (2025) have emphasized the role of self-worth in shaping innovative behavior; however, they do not place self-worth in an organizational context and primarily focus on performance-related proactivity. Little is known about how workplace loneliness affects proactive behaviors, such as job crafting, which this study aims to address.

In addition to affecting cognitive and relational crafting, workplace loneliness also weakens employees' work abilities and performance (Baumeister et al., 2002). Workplace loneliness decreases the ability to concentrate and focus on tasks (Park et al., 2020) and directly undermines task performance (Özcelik & Barsade, 2018; Tian et al., 2023). One possible explanation is that loneliness drains cognitive resources and weakens self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2005; Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009), making it more difficult for employees to engage in task crafting (Tims et al., 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1 : Workplace loneliness negatively affects employees' job crafting.

The Mediating Role of Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Loneliness is closely associated with self-esteem. Individuals who feel lonely may negatively expect future social interactions (Creemers et al., 2012). Loneliness is often accompanied by lower self-esteem (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). However, the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem in the workplace has received limited attention. Self-esteem refers to a person's overall evaluation of their competence and self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Organization-based self-esteem (Pierce et al., 1989) builds on this concept within the organizational context and reflects the extent to which employees see themselves as capable and valued members of their organization. The longer employees remain in an organization, the more stable their organization-based self-esteem tends to be. However, changes in the external work environment, such as shifts in work arrangements, role adjustments, performance, and work experience, continue to affect employees' perceptions of their organizational role and shape their organization-based self-esteem.

Organization-based self-esteem primarily develops through the internalization of others' evaluations at work (Korman, 1970; Korman, 1976) and through successes and failures in one's work experiences (Brockner, 1988). Lonely employees may receive more negative feedback from colleagues and supervisors (Peng et al., 2017). Such negative interpersonal experiences significantly decrease employees' organization-based self-esteem (Takhsha et al., 2020). Research has confirmed that organization-based self-esteem is negatively associated with negative emotional experiences such as workplace loneliness (Mohapatra et al., 2023; Stark et al., 2000). We hypothesize that workplace loneliness damages employees' organization-based self-esteem.

Moreover, organization-based self-esteem is positively correlated with self-efficacy (Lee, 2003). Employees with low organization-based self-esteem may also have weaker beliefs in their own capabilities (Gabriel et al., 2021), which in turn suppresses proactive behaviors such as job crafting (Su et al., 2022). According to the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), organization-based self-esteem functions as a key job resource that can stimulate motivation and foster work engagement (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015). Employees tend to select tasks and roles that align with their self-perceived competence (Korman, 1970). Therefore, individuals with high organization-based self-esteem are more likely to be satisfied with their performance (Pelham & Swann, 1989) and feel confident in taking on new challenges and imbuing their work with greater meaning. In contrast, those with low organization-based self-esteem may deliberately hold back their efforts, fearing that failure would further undermine their self-worth (Campbell, 1990; Dipboye, 1977). OBSE may play a facilitative role in promoting job crafting. We hypothesize that:

H2: Organization-based self-esteem mediates the relationship between workplace loneliness and job crafting.

The Moderating Role of Self-Rated Performance

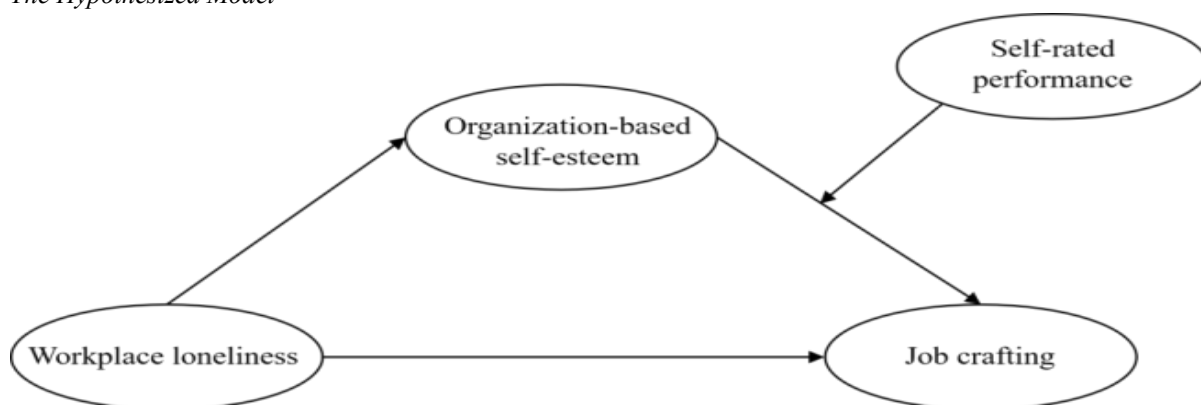
As discussed above, employees with high organization-based self-esteem are more likely to perceive themselves as valuable members of the organization, which stimulates proactive behaviors (Chung & Yang, 2017). However, the translation of this psychological resource into job crafting is subject to individual evaluations of their abilities.

Performance is both a result of prior conduct and an indicator of employees' future expectations. Prior research has shown that high performance enhances employees' influence within the organization and increases job satisfaction (Farris & Lim, 1969). According to expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), employees evaluate the likelihood of achieving future goals based on prior performance, which subsequently informs their willingness to exert effort. For instance, high-performing employees are more likely to believe that their actions will lead to favorable outcomes (e.g., reduced workload, alleviated stress). As a result, those with high organization-based self-esteem and strong performance may be more inclined to actively adjust their tasks, relationships, or perceptions of work. In contrast, employees with low self-rated performance may underestimate the feasibility and effectiveness of job crafting, thereby dampening the positive influence of organization-based self-esteem on job crafting (Vancouver & Kendall, 2006).

Moreover, from the perspective of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the intrinsic motivation to engage in job crafting depends on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Employees' self-rated performance reflects their subjective perception of competence (Heidemeier & Moser, 2009). While organization-based self-esteem supports competence and relatedness, self-rated performance determines whether this sense of competence is fully activated. When employees perceive their performance as high, organization-based self-esteem is more likely to be translated into concrete job crafting. Conversely, low self-rated performance may weaken intrinsic motivation and thus suppress job crafting. The hypothesized model is shown in Figure 1.

H3: Self-rated performance moderates the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting.

Figure 1
The Hypothesized Model



Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 365 employees from a major human resource service company in Japan were recruited to participate in a questionnaire survey. Prior to participation, all individuals were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their personal information, and their right to withdraw at any time. Among them, 97.8% (n = 357) had been working at their

current workplace for more than three years. The sample consisted of 93.7% women ($n = 342$) and 6.3% men ($n = 23$). Regarding job type, 66.6% ($n = 243$) were engaged in clerical work, 7.1% ($n = 26$) in front-desk services, and 5.7% ($n = 21$) in customer service or sales. In terms of organizational hierarchy, 80.5% ($n = 294$) were general employees, 17.0% ($n = 62$) held section chief or supervisor-level positions, and 2.5% ($n = 9$) served as project leaders. Detailed demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic characteristics	Category	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Gender	Female	342	93.7%
	Male	23	6.3%
Age	20–29 years old	2	0.5
	30–39 years old	22	6.0
	40–49 years old	97	26.6
	50–59 years old	138	37.8
	60–69 years old	101	27.7
	> 70 years old	5	1.4
Organizational level	General employees	294	80.5%
	Supervisors	62	17.0%
	Project leaders	9	2.5%
Tenure	< 1 years	3	0.8%
	1–3 years	5	1.3%
	> 3 years	357	97.8%
Education	High school	75	20.5%
	Vocational/Junior College	149	40.8%
	Bachelor	134	36.7%
	Graduate degree	5	1.4%
	Others	2	0.5%

Measures

As the survey was conducted in a Japanese-speaking context, the original English scales were translated into Japanese using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1980). The accuracy, clarity, and readability of the translated items were then confirmed by experienced translators. All scale items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). We conducted confirmatory factor analyses using AMOS 26.0 to assess the construct validity of all multi-item scales.

Workplace loneliness. We measured workplace loneliness using the two-dimensional scale developed by Wright et al. (2006), which includes Emotional Deprivation (e.g., “I often feel emotionally distant from the people I work with”) and Social Companionship (e.g., “There is someone at work I can talk to about my day-to-day work problems if I need to”). Three items were selected from each dimension. The scale had satisfactory fit values for a two-factor structure ($\chi^2/df = 1.83$, RMSEA = .05, GFI = .98, CFI = .99, NFI = .98, RFI = .98). Cronbach's α was .89 for Emotional Deprivation and .81 for Social Companionship.

Organization-based self-esteem. We measured employees' organization-based self-esteem using three items that assess their perceived importance and competence in their organizational role, based on the scale developed by Pierce et al. (1989). A given item was: “I am important in this organization.”. Cronbach's α was .92. The CFA results indicated a good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, RMSEA = .06, GFI = .98, CFI = .98, NFI = .97, RFI = .96, supporting the unidimensional structure of the scale.

Job crafting. There is no consensus in existing research regarding the development and dimensionality of job crafting scales. Researchers have proposed different conceptualizations, including a unidimensional scale focusing solely on task crafting (Leana et al., 2009), a three-dimensional model comprising task, relational, and cognitive crafting (Sekiguchi & Hosomi, 2017), and a four-dimensional structure based on the Job Demands–Resources model (Tims et al., 2012). Since this study focuses on workplace interpersonal relationships and job performance, we used five items to measure employees' job crafting from three aspects: task, relational, and cognitive crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This study aims to examine job crafting as a holistic construct, rather than analyzing each dimension separately. Therefore, we conducted a unidimensional reliability and validity analysis for the overall job crafting scale. Cronbach's α was .84, and the confirmatory factor analysis indicated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 4.02$, RMSEA = .09, GFI = .99, CFI = .99, NFI = .99, RFI = .95).

Self-rated performance. We measured self-rated job performance using a single-item scale adapted from Kessler et al. (2003), and asked participants to rate their performance over the past four weeks on a scale from 0% to 100%. A sample item was: "Please rate your overall job performance during the past four weeks, assuming that 100% represents your usual performance when you are healthy and uninjured." Higher percentages indicated better self-perceived job performance.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, age, job position, education, and organizational tenure to account for individual and contextual factors that might influence organization-based self-esteem, performance, and job crafting. These variables were included because prior research has found significant effects of demographic characteristics on job-related attitudes and behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Petrou et al., 2012; Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

Data Analysis

Since all data in this study were collected at a single point in time using self-report measures, we conducted Harman's one-factor test to assess the potential for common method bias. Specifically, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis in which all measurement items were loaded onto a single latent factor. The results revealed poor model fit, indicating that common method bias was not a serious concern in this study ($\chi^2/df = 17.29$, RMSEA = .21, GFI = .62, CFI = .61, TLI = .54, and RMR = .19).

To test the hypotheses, we used hierarchical regression analysis and moderated mediation analysis with Model 4, 14 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012) in SPSS 28.0. Model 14 was specified to assess whether the indirect effect of workplace loneliness on job crafting via organization-based self-esteem was moderated by self-rated performance.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

As presented in Table 2, organizational-based self-esteem was negatively associated with workplace loneliness ($r = -.55$, $p < .01$) and positively associated with job crafting ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), indicating its potential role as a mediating variable. However, self-rated performance—the proposed moderating variable—was not significantly correlated with any of the main study variables. Among control variables, age was correlated with all main variables: organizational-based self-esteem ($r = .17$, $p < .01$) and job crafting ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), and negatively correlated

with workplace loneliness ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Consistent with prior research, position was negatively associated with workplace loneliness ($r = -.11, p < .05$) and positively associated with job crafting ($r = .15, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals in higher positions may experience less loneliness and engage more in proactive behaviors (Liu et al., 2024; Waytz et al., 2015).

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Age	8.15	1.66								
2.Gender	0.06	0.24	.31**							
3.Position	1.22	0.47	-.17**	-.05						
4.Education	4.29	1.61	.05	.03	.07					
5.Tenure	2.96	0.29	.31**	.04	.06	.06				
6.Workplace loneliness	2.73	1.11	-.15**	-.04	-.11*	-.03	-.11*			
7.OBSE	4.58	1.11	.17**	.03	.10	.05	-.04	-.55**		
8.Job crafting	4.75	0.96	.18**	.03	.15**	.05	-.05	-.50**	.48**	
9.Self-rated performance	78.44	20.77	.09	-.09	.09	.05	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.02

Note. $N = 365$; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; Gender was coded 1 for male and 0 for female; self-rated performance was measured using a percentage scale (0%–100%); OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem

The Mediating Effect of Organizational-Based Self-Esteem

After controlling for gender, age, job position, education, and organizational tenure, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to test the direct effects of workplace loneliness and organization-based self-esteem on job crafting. In addition, we used Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012) to examine whether organization-based self-esteem mediates the relationship between workplace loneliness and job crafting. Tables 3 and 4 show the results.

As shown in Table 3, Workplace loneliness had a negative effect on organization-based self-esteem ($B = -.55, p < .01$) and job crafting ($B = -.29, p < .01$), which means that employees who feel lonely at work may see themselves as less valued by the organization and less likely to take initiative in redesigning their work. These results support H1 and H2. Moreover, organization-based self-esteem had a positive effect on job crafting ($B = .24, p < .01$). Employees who feel trusted, needed, and respected at work are more likely to adjust their tasks. They also tend to see more meaning in their job. The analysis also revealed patterns among control variables. Position was a strong positive predictor of organization-based self-esteem ($B = .48, p < .01$). Employees in higher positions reported greater self-worth within the organization. Gender was positively predicted to job crafting (coded as male = 1, female = 0). Male employees were more likely than female employees to engage in job crafting. Education level showed a slight negative relationship with job crafting ($B = -.06, p < .05$). Employees with higher education were less likely to change or adjust their work.

As shown in Table 4, the 95% bootstrap confidence intervals for both the direct and indirect effects did not include zero, and H3 was supported. Workplace loneliness had a direct negative effect on job crafting ($B = -.29, SE = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.38, -.20]$) and an indirect effect through organization-based self-esteem ($B = -.13, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.19, -.08]$). The total effect of workplace loneliness on job crafting was $-.43 (SE = .04, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.50, -.35])$. These results suggest that workplace loneliness not only reduces employees' proactive job redesign directly but also indirectly undermines it by lowering their organization-based self-esteem. The direct and indirect effects accounted for 67.44% and 30.23% of the total effect, respectively.

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Table 3*The Mediating Effect of Organizational-Based Self-Esteem*

Variable and statistic	Organization-based self-esteem			Job crafting		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1: Control variables						
Age	.06	1.97	.05	.05	1.82	.07
Gender	-.06	-0.29	.77	.50	2.82	.01
Position	.48	4.72	<.001	.15	1.64	.10
Education	.04	1.49	.14	-.06	-2.28	.02
Tenure	.15	.89	.37	-.02	-.13	.90
Step 2: Main variables						
Workplace loneliness	-.55	-12.71	<.001	-.29	-6.44	<.001
OBSE				.24	5.3	<.001
R ²	.35			.35		
F	32.28**			27.37**		

Note. $N = 365$; ** $p < .01$; OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem.

Table 4*Bootstrapped Indirect Effects of Organization-based Self-esteem*

	Effect	SE	95% bootstrap confidence interval		% of Total Effect
			Lower	Upper	
Total Effect	-0.43	0.04	-0.5	-0.35	
Direct Effect	-0.29	0.05	-0.38	-0.2	67.44%
Indirect Effect	-0.13	0.03	-0.19	-0.08	30.23%

The Moderating Effects of Self-Rated Performance

After controlling for gender, age, job position, education, and organizational tenure, we used Model 14 of the PROCESS macro to test the moderating effect of self-rated performance on the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting.

Table 5 shows that the interaction between organization-based self-esteem and self-rated performance was statistically significant ($B = -.01$, $t = -2.34$, $p = .02$, 95% CI $[-.02, -.01]$), indicating that as self-rated performance increases, the positive effect of organization-based self-esteem on job crafting becomes weaker, supporting H4. Table 6 further demonstrates that the mediating effect of organization-based self-esteem was greatest among employees with low self-rated performance (M-1SD) ($B = -.18$, $BootSE = .04$, 95% CI $[-.27, -.11]$), while the mediating effect was weakest but still significant among employees with higher self-rated performance (M+1SD) ($B = -.08$, $BootSE = .04$, 95% CI $[-.16, -.01]$). These findings support a moderated mediation model. The indirect effect of workplace loneliness (independent variable) on job crafting (dependent variable) through organization-based self-esteem (mediator) was moderated by self-rated performance.

According to Aiken et al. (1991), the conditional effects of organization-based self-esteem were probed at ± 1 SD of self-rated performance by simple slope analysis. The results revealed that employees with low self-rated performance, organization-based self-esteem, significantly predicted job crafting (simple slope = .33, $t = 5.59$, $p < .001$). In contrast, for those with high self-rated performance, the effect of organization-based self-esteem on job crafting remained significant but was relatively weaker (simple slope = .15, $t = 2.46$, $p < .05$) (see Figure 2).

Table 5*The Moderating Effects of Self-Rated Performance*

Variable and statistic	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Bootstrapping CI	
				Lower	Upper
Step 1: Control variables					
Age	0.05	1.96	0.05	−0.00	0.11
Gender	0.48	2.71	0.01	0.13	0.83
Position	0.14	1.55	0.12	−0.04	0.33
Education	−0.06	−2.25	0.03	−0.11	−0.01
Tenure	−0.01	−0.1	0.92	−0.29	0.27
Step 2: Main variables					
Workplace loneliness	−0.29	−6.35	<.001	−0.40	−0.18
OBSE	0.58	3.83	<.001	0.27	0.94
Self-rated performance	0.02	2.31	<.001	0.00	0.04
OBSE * Self-rated performance	−0.01	−2.34	0.02	−0.02	−0.01
R ²	.36				
F	21.83**				

Note. N = 365; ** $p < .01$; OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem

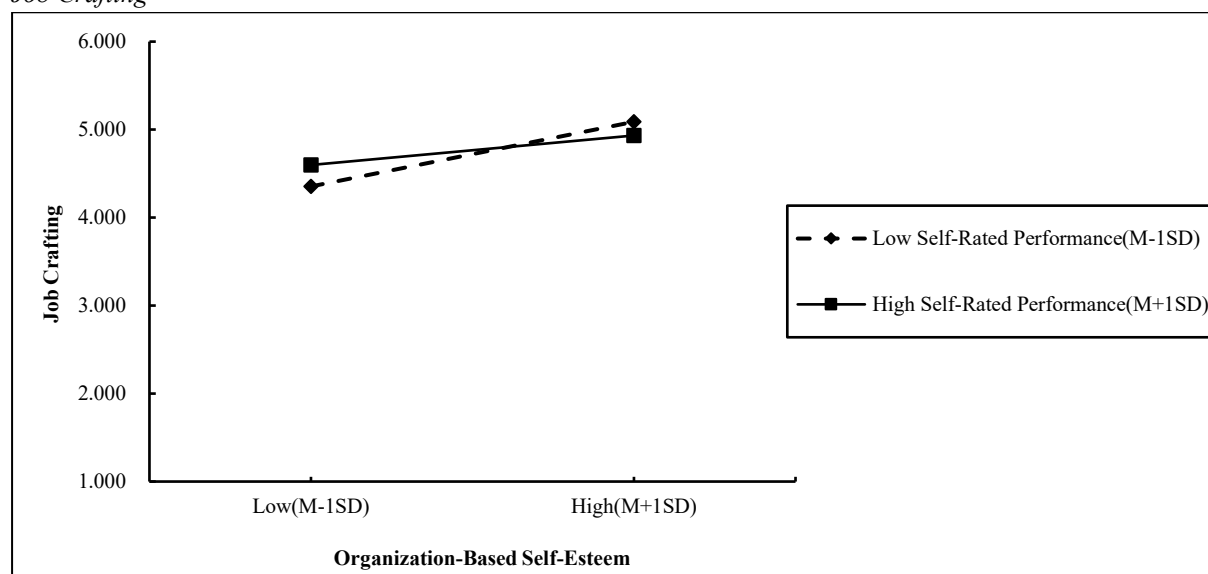
Table 6*Indirect Effects at Different Levels of Self-rated Performance*

	Self-rated Performance	<i>B</i>	BootSE	Bootstrapping CI	
				Lower	Upper
Indirect Effects of OBSE	57.67 (M-1SD)	-0.18	0.04	-0.27	-0.11
	78.44 (M)	-0.13	0.03	-0.2	-0.08
	99.21 (M+1SD)	-0.08	0.04	-0.16	-0.01

Note. N = 365; self-rated performance was measured using a percentage scale (0%–100%); OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem

Figure 2

Moderating Effect of Self-Rated Performance on the Relationship Between Organization-Based Self-Esteem and Job Crafting



Discussion

After controlling for employees' age, gender, position, education level, and tenure, we tested a moderated mediation model. Workplace loneliness was treated as the independent variable, job crafting as the dependent variable, and organization-based self-esteem as the mediator. Additionally, self-rated performance moderated the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting.

This study enhances our understanding of the negative impacts of workplace loneliness by examining its relationship with job crafting, thereby addressing gaps in behavioral research. Prior research has mainly focused on interpersonal and attitudinal outcomes. For example, Firoz and Chaudhary (2022) found that workplace loneliness inhibits extra-role behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior, while Jung et al. (2021) and Lam and Lau (2012) demonstrated its detrimental influence on work engagement and turnover intentions. Our results are consistent with these findings but further explain the mechanism by showing that workplace loneliness reduces employees' willingness to proactively adjust their tasks, relationships, and cognitions at work (job crafting).

Previous research has highlighted job crafting as a resource that enhances person–job fit and supports employees in times of adversity (Berg et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2014). However, our findings show that workplace loneliness inhibits job crafting, which contrasts with the assumption that crafting universally helps employees cope with challenges. This result indicates that when employees lack positive workplace relationships, they are less able to regulate themselves through job crafting. It also supports the call by Tims et al. (2022) for more research on the role of social relationship quality in shaping employees' capacity to craft their jobs. Earlier studies have shown that loneliness is associated with low self-esteem (Kong & You, 2013; Vanhalst et al., 2013). Our results are consistent with this evidence but extend it by situating self-esteem in the organizational context. Specifically, we show that workplace loneliness reduces employees' organization-based self-esteem, which in turn undermines their motivation to redesign their work. This highlights organization-based self-esteem as a key mechanism linking loneliness to proactive behaviors such as job crafting.

Finally, this study highlights the moderating role of self-rated performance in the link between organization-based self-esteem and job crafting. While performance is typically treated as an outcome variable, prior research suggests that employees' self-perceptions of performance can shape their motivation and behavior (e.g., Park et al., 2020). Our findings are consistent with this view and extend it by showing that when employees rate their performance as low, even those with high organization-based self-esteem are less willing to craft their jobs. This suggests that discrepancies between perceived performance and organizational standing weaken employees' motivation for proactive work redesign.

Practical Implications

This study offers several practical implications for managers and leaders seeking to promote job crafting and mitigate workplace loneliness. Managers should recognize that workplace loneliness is not merely a subjective emotional state but a critical factor that can hinder employees' job crafting behavior. This suppression may ultimately affect the outcomes of organizational change (Petrou et al., 2018). Therefore, for managers, it is essential to attend to

employees' social needs and to prevent the development of loneliness by fostering an inclusive organizational climate and providing social support.

Furthermore, psychological resources are essential in mitigating the adverse impacts of workplace loneliness (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2022), especially organization-based self-esteem. Managers should try to enhance employees' self-esteem within the organization. As a result, employees may be less likely to internalize negative interpersonal experiences and more willing to engage in job crafting by expanding their relational boundaries. By implementing positive feedback mechanisms and providing career development support, organizations can help employees recognize their own value within the organization, thereby enhancing their organization-based self-esteem. In addition, employees' subjective assessment of their performance requires managerial consideration. When there is a mismatch, such as high self-esteem but low perceived performance, employees may question the fairness of the evaluation system. This perception can reduce their motivation to engage in proactive work behaviors. To address this, organizations should build fair and transparent appraisal systems that recognize both effort and ability.

Finally, this study finds that male employees report significantly higher levels of organization-based self-esteem compared to female employees. This gender disparity indicates that efforts to boost self-esteem and job crafting should pay special attention to women's psychological needs and development. By fostering a work culture that actively resists gender bias, organizations can promote stronger self-identities among female employees and enhance their confidence in engaging in job crafting.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional data limit the ability to draw causal inferences between workplace loneliness and job crafting. Additionally, the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, raising concerns about common method bias and social desirability bias. Although Harman's one-factor test indicated that common method bias was not a serious issue, future studies could enhance the robustness and generalizability of findings by incorporating multi-source data, such as supervisor or peer evaluations, or using experience sampling methods.

Moreover, this study focused on organization-based self-esteem as a mediating variable. Future research could explore the roles of other psychological resources (e.g., resilience, psychological empowerment) and contextual factors (e.g., leadership, organizational climate) in shaping the relationship between workplace loneliness and job crafting. Such investigations may provide deeper insights into how to mitigate the negative effects of loneliness and foster proactive employee behavior through the development of psychological capital. Finally, the sample in this study had a gender imbalance, with significantly more female than male participants. Future research should aim for a more balanced sample to improve the generalizability of the results across genders.

Declarations

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of Faculty of Human-Environment Studies, Kyushu University (2023-020, 28 September 2023).

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