Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences 44 (2023) 675–682

Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: http://kjss.kasetsart.org

Job crafting amongst the Thai workforce: The influences of occupational future time perspective, age, and proactive personality

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Article Info

Article history:
Received 24 May 2022
Revised 16 September 2022
Accepted 28 September 2022
Available online 15 September 2023

Keywords:
age,
job crafting,
occupational future time perspective,
proactive personality,
Thailand

Abstract

Previous research suggests that occupational future time perspective (OFTP), age, and proactive personality (PP) are significantly positively linked to proactive behaviors, (for instance, job search intensity). Our cross-sectional correlational study explored the variables in the context of job crafting (JC), another motivation-driven occupational behavior. Our study extended the existing research on PP and OFTP (i.e., Zacher, 2013) in the context of job crafting. We distributed online surveys which contained JC, PP, and OFTP scale items, collecting data from 155 full-time employees within organizations in Thailand. With JC, employees modify their job interms of work tasks, cognitions, and relationships to satisfy demands. Thus, our study aimed to examine the relationships between PP, OFTP, and age, and their influences on JC. We found that a PP was positively related to JC (H1). The relationship between age and JC was inconsistent with our prediction, showing a non-significant, and positive relationship with JC (H2). Furthermore, age did not moderate the PP-JC relationship (H3, H5). OFTP was also found to mediate the age-JC relationship (H4). Our findings provide better understanding of the factors influencing JC and the similarities to and differences from job search intensity, another self-initiated behavior, which may inform interventions for improving occupational outcomes.

Introduction

Job meaningfulness can influence employees' work behaviors and attitudes (Rosso et al., 2010). Unfulfilling jobs cause increased employee turnovers, negatively affecting organizations. To increase employee job meaningfulness, and subsequent job fulfillment, organizations could aid employees to tailor jobs more to their preferences. This job tailoring process is JC. Currently, research on JC in Thailand is lacking, and none has focused on the relationship between the individual difference factors of PP, age, and OFTP on JC behavior. Our research aims to replicate Zacher's (2013) approach to job-search intensity as a foundation for investigating the conceptual workings of a voluntary self-initiated behavior and its influences in greater detail. The study found that PP was a significant positive predictor of job-search behavior.

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https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2023.44.3.04
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However, this effect was modified by the age of the employees, and their OFTP. Job search in this context is a self-motivated and self-induced behavior like JC, and thus we replicated Zacher's (2013) approach, rationale, and variables. We aim to clarify the influences of these factors on JC to facilitate development of future job-crafting interventions while accounting for the aging workforce—older employees typically have a more limited time perspective, which are associated with negative work outcomes (Wong & Tetrick, 2017). For example, organizations and employees can potentially mitigate the burdens on productivity that come with aging by advocating for a proactive career management or job redesign for the aging workforce, while encouraging greater employee initiative.

Literature Review

JC

JC is defined as a self-initiated process where employees tailor elements of their jobs to fit with their preferences (Berg et al., 2008). Individuals who engage in JC are called job crafters. There are modifiable aspects of JC: task, relational, and cognitive crafting (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims & Bakker, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The definitions of the three categories of JC based on Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) are shown below.

Task crafting involves changing the quantity, scale, type, and means of an employee's job duties. Relational crafting revolves around altering one's social interactions. This may involve changes to the number, type, or way in which relationships and interactions between the job crafter and others are developed within the work context. Cognitive crafting involves modifying the thoughts, perspectives, or goals the job crafters may have regarding their job. The objective of our study is to explore JC and the influences of individual difference factors (PP, age, and OFTP), in the context of workplaces in Thailand.

PP

JC requires employees to utilize proactive behaviors to customize elements of their work in response to task, relational, and cognitive boundaries experienced (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims & Bakker, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). "Personal initiative" is a trait that affects personal and organizational performance. It requires crafters to take an active and self-initiated approach to work to exhibit work-related behaviors beyond minimum job requirements (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), characterized by behaviors that are: (1) consistent with the organization's missions; (2) focus on long-term goals; (3) goal and action-oriented; (4) persistent in the face of barriers; and (5) self-starting and proactive (Frese et al., 1996). Given these definitions, an important determiner of JC may include certain aspects of the crafter's personality. Bakker et al. (2012) found that a PP was positively related to JC (increasing social and structural resources, and job challenges). Proactive individuals were more likely to engage and take control. Thus, we anticipate that those with a higher degree of PP will be more likely to job craft.

Aging as a Factor in Proactive Behaviors

Aging may affect job crafters' PP. Zacher (2013) explored relationships between age, PP, OFTP, and job search intensity amongst older job-seekers. It was suggested that personal initiative and persistence with challenging tasks—traits that define a PP—lead to higher job search intensity. PP was positively associated with job search intensity, and age was found to be negatively associated. More importantly, age moderated the relationship between PP and job search intensity such that the relationship between PP and job search intensity was stronger for older participants. Therefore, as job search involves a high degree of PP much alike JC, the same moderating effect may be found between age and PP amongst job crafters.

Age is becoming an increasingly important factor in the Thai research context given the country's aging population. As age increases, individuals' priorities change due to cognitive and physical decline, along with the influence of life events which occur in the process (e.g. death of loved ones or retirement). Such changes diminish motivational resources, inflicting repercussions on work-related performance and behaviors. In response, organizations are less inclined to invest in enhancing older employees' productivity, which therefore results in a lower perceived self-efficacy at work, even when older employees are not significantly poorer in health (Ng & Feldman, 2013).

Older employees engaged less in cognitive crafting compared to younger employees (El Baroudi & Khapova, 2017). Therefore, we predict that age will be significantly negatively related to JC. Zacher (2013) found that age moderated the strength of the relationship between PP and job search intensity among unemployed older jobseekers, such that PP was a stronger predictor of older jobseekers' job search intensity. Conversely, Bertolino et al. (2011)

found the opposite effect of age, with the relationship between PP and JC becoming stronger for the younger. Therefore, while job search and JC are similar behaviors, they may be influenced by separate processes. Hence, we planned to explore the moderating role of age on PP and JC to examine these potential differences—whether JC is affected by age and PP in a similar fashion to job search intensity. Presently, we seek to explore the effects of age on the relationship between PP and JC. We predict that age moderates the relationship between PP and JC, such that there is a stronger relationship between PP and JC amongst older than for younger employees.

In this experiment, though research suggests a multidimensional JC construct with differential age effects, we aim to focus on JC to establish the nature that such variables have on wider scale relationships.

OFTP

OFTP is defined as people's perception of their work future (Zacher & Frese, 2009). OFTP is a dynamic cognitive-motivational construct which changes over the lifespan (Cate & John, 2007) and is composed of three dimensions: focus on opportunities, focus on limitations, and perceived remaining time (Zacher, 2013). 'Focus on opportunities', refers to focus on possibilities, goals, and opportunities available in current work settings. 'Focus on limitations' emphasizes the perception of the restrictions and limitations in future work. 'Perceived remaining time', is the perceived amount of time that people believe they have left in their work future. Although these three components are distinct, within the scope of the present study, we will be focusing on OFTP as a general construct to establish its role in JC.

A meta-analysis revealed that OFTP is also related to other individual difference and contextual variables (Henry et al., 2017). Socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that older people tend to have a limited future time perspective which results in a focus on emotionally fulfilling aspects of goals and activities, and on maintaining remaining skills, whereas younger people tend to have an expansive future time perspective that involves prioritization of opportunities and future goals (Carstensen et al., 1999; Wong & Tetrick, 2017). When factoring in OFTP, with the shrinking of time resources, older employees are thus more likely to give precedence to maintaining desirable job aspects by becoming selective with the tasks and social interactions while younger employees are more likely to underscore productivity and skills at work by focusing on available opportunities because they perceive time as plentiful.

Research suggests a potential link between age and OFTP on the motivation to learn. With OFTP becoming linearly more limited with age, i.e., a more limited future time perspective would be expected with age, one's motivated behavior e.g., learning will also be affected (Cate & John, 2007; Kochoian et al., 2016). Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that this effect of age, mediated by OFTP, could affect JC.

Kooij et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on the relationship between FTP and work behaviors, including JC as a mediator. They reported that employees whose open-ended FTP increased during the period crafted their job more by introducing challenges to their job demands and crafted more job resources to increase learning opportunities. This is consistent with the proposal that employees with more expansive FTP would adopt a promotion focus on their work, instigating proactive behaviors to increase growth opportunities (Kooij et al., 2014). Based on past research and corroborating findings that OFTP may be involved in such relationships, we therefore predict that OFTP will mediate the moderating effect of age on the relationship between PP and JC.

Research Hypotheses

Our first research hypothesis focuses on the effect of PP on JC outcome variables in the Thai context.

Hypothesis 1: We predict that PP is significantly positively related to JC.

Another finding in our literature review was the relationship between age and JC. While both older and younger employees job crafted, the younger engaged more in cognitive crafting (El Baroudi & Khapova, 2017). Therefore, to verify their findings in the Thai context:

Hypothesis 2: We predict that age is significantly negatively related to JC.

Furthermore, age was found to modify the relationship between PP and job search. The effects of PP on job search were greater in older participants (Zacher, 2013). Another study scrutinizing JC revealed an inverse pattern: the effect of PP on JC was stronger in younger participants (Bertolino et al., 2011). Therefore, we aim to clarify the workings of this moderation effect within our current context with the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: We predict that age moderates the relationship between PP and JC, with stronger effect for older people.

We predict the effect to be stronger for older people because we expect that younger employees would be

predisposed to job craft due to a more expansive OFTP; therefore, a PP would deliver a greater effect on older employees' JC.

OFTP was also found to influence motivational proactive behaviors i.e., people with more expansive OFTP were found to participate more in proactive behaviors (Kooij et al., 2014). Nonetheless, OFTP does not operate independently, but acts as a mediating pathway for the influence of age on outcomes of proactive behaviors (Zacher, 2013). JC should thus be affected by OFTP. Therefore, it is sensible to predict that the effect of age on JC would be idiosyncratic based on individual differences in OFTP. To test this mediation effect of OFTP on the relationship between age and JC, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: We predict that OFTP mediates the relationship between age and JC.

To combine H3 and H4 and Zacher's (2013) past finding:

Hypothesis 5: We predict that OFTP mediates the moderating effect of age on the relationship between PP and JC.

Methodology

Participants

The true number of participants we acquired was 212, which was reduced to 155 based on our exclusion criteria. Our inclusion criteria strictly contained office employees in various organizations in Thailand. Participation was followed by clicking on the link to an online survey sent out to various offices and respective departments through connections and link-sharing via social media, such as through Facebook posts, and the instant messaging app LINE. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an effort donation incentive was provided.

The analyzed sample of 155 (mean age of 45.34 years) consisted of 90 male (58.06%) and 65 female (41.94%) participants. One had a vocational certificate (0.65%), 50 a bachelor's degree (32.26%), 97 with a master's degree (62.58%), six with a doctorate (3.87%), and one with a medical degree (0.65%). Of this sample, 46 were in executive positions (29.68%), 54 in middle management (34.84%), 41 in operations (26.45%), and 14 were working in other positions (9.03%). The mean employment duration by the participants' current organization in this sample was 11.68 years. Ten participants worked at public organizations (6.45%), 130 at private organizations (83.87%), and 15 at state-owned enterprises (9.68%).

Materials and Data Collection

We collected participants' demographic information in addition to focal measures. Three measures collectively formed the test battery, which was created and completed on the research platform Qualtrics. All measures were translated from English to Thai and back translated using 15 raters for consistency.

JC

The three domains of JC: task, relational, and cognitive crafting, were measured through a shortened version of Niessen et al.'s (2016) JC scale based on Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) proposed model of the behavior. The scale contains nine questions in total, with three for each of the categories of JC. The measure utilizes a 1-5 point Likert-type scale with statements ending in "so that the job I do suits me." An example of a statement is "I concentrate on specific work tasks …" for task crafting. Overall, the scale was satisfactorily reliable with $\alpha = .72$, $\alpha = .49$ for relational crafting, $\alpha = .78$ for relational crafting, and $\alpha = .66$ for cognitive crafting. The measure had high construct validity as the results of confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the three-factor model of FTP scale fit the data, $\chi^2/df = 3.55$, $p < .05$, CFI = .80, SRMR = .06. The factor loadings of all items were significant, ranging from .482 –.854.

PP

Individuals' PP was measured using an abridged form (six items) of Bateman and Crant's (1993) 1–5 point Likert-type Proactive Personality Scale (PPS). An example of a PPS item is "I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition."

The overall measure is reliable with an $\alpha = 0.69$. A CFA revealed that the fit index of 1-factor model of PPS was within an acceptable range, $\chi^2/df = 2.49$, $p < .05$, CFI = .925, SRMR = .05. The factor loadings of all items were significant, ranging from .392–.613.

Age

Age was measured on a continuous scale; participants indicated their age (in years) as a whole number into a text box provided within the online form.

OFTP

OFTP was measured using the 10-item Future Time Perspective (FTP) scale (Carstensen & Lang,1996). The original FTP measure contains items which represent the three components which make up FTP; the scale used in the current study was adapted to an occupational context, as per previous studies (Cate & John, 2007; Zacher, 2013; Zacher & Frese, 2009).

OFTP was measured using the 1–5 point Likert-type 10-item Future Time Perspective (FTP) scale originally developed by Carstensen and Lang (1996). The original FTP measure contains items that represent the three components of FTP; most of the statements measured individuals' "focus on opportunities" and "perceived remaining time", whilst the last two items of the scale contained reverse-coded "focus on limitations" statements. OFTP items were quite reliable as it had an overall reliability of α = .90. Focus on opportunity items (α = .80), Perceived remaining time items (α = .78), and focus on limitations items (α = .77) displayed high reliability. A CFA analysis revealed that the three-factor model of FTP scale fits the model, $\chi^2/df = 3.55$, $p < .05$, CFI = .80, SRMR = .06. The factor loadings of all items were at a range of .482–.854.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses of our data were conducted using SPSS version 22 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA), a statistical analysis software (with an additional PROCESS add-on).

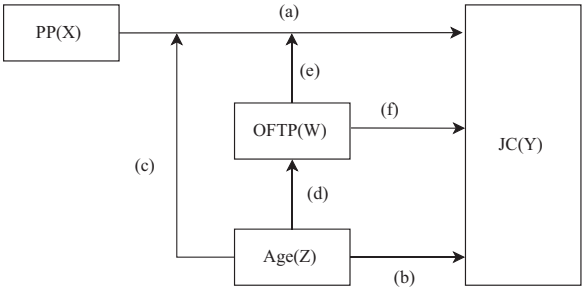

Figure 1 Comprehensive model of the predictor variables on JC. Route (a) represents the direct effect of PP on JC (H1); Route (b) represents the direct effect of age on JC (H2); (c) Represents the moderation effect of age on PP and JC (H3); Route (d) through (e) represents the effect of age on JC via OFTP (H4); Route (d) through (f) Represents the effect of age, mediated by OFTP, on JC (H5)

We conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses on the direct effect of PP on JC practices (H1), the direct effect of age on JC (H2), and the moderating effect of age on PP and JC(H3). Our indirect effect analyses were conducted using SPSS - PROCESS. First, an analysis of OFTP as the mediator of the relationship between age and JC (H4). Second, an analysis of age as the mediator of the moderating effect of age (H5).

Results

A thorough cleanup was performed to prevent inapt responses from confounding our results. One participant was removed for reporting an age of zero, and for repeatedly selecting the same answers. Six were removed as they were still undergoing their probationary period, along with three who have been part of the organization for six months or under, as were a further seven for being part-time employees. Those whose company types were "Freelance" or "Others" were also excluded from our analysis, removing a further 22 responses. A further nine were then removed for failing to complete the questionnaire. A total of eight outliers were also removed from the data pool—one outlying response from JC measures, two from OFTP measures, and five from the measures of PP. One additional data point was excluded for missing values. Post data-cleanup, a total of 57 responses were removed, and the remaining 155 responses were included in the analyses.

The reliability of each of the scale items was moderate to high, with JC scale items α = .72, PPS scale items α = .69, OFTP scale items α = .89. One JC item (The first relational crafting item) was removed from the questionnaire due to poor internal consistency.

Hypothesis Testing

Using SPSS, a Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR) analysis was conducted with PP, OFTP, and age as predictors (OFTP, age, and PP were mean centered) and JC as the criterion.

HMR Analysis

Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables under investigation.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between JC, Age, OFTP, and PP

Variables	*M* (*SD*)	JC	Age	OFTP	PP
JC	3.77 (0.56)	0.72			
Age	45.30 (10.00)	0.02			
OFTP	3.53 (0.65)	0.32***	-0.20*	0.89	
PP	3.79 (0.43)	0.27***	0.05	0.36***	0.69

Note: Values in the diagonal (italicized) are the reliabilities; $N = 155$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

At block 1, PP explained a significant 7 percent of the variance in JC scores, F ch. (1, 153) = 11.86, p < .001. At block 2, age explained less than 1 percent of the additional variance in JC scores, F ch. (1, 152) = 0.01, *ns*. At block 3, the interaction between PP and age explained less than 1 percent of additional variance, F ch. (1, 151) = 0.26, *ns*. At block 4, OFTP explained a significant 7% of the additional variance, F ch. (1, 150) = 11.36, p < .001. At block 5, the interaction between OFTP and PP explained less than 1 percent of additional variance, F ch. (1, 149) = 0.25, *ns*. At block 6, the interaction between OFTP and age explained a significant 3% of additional variance F ch. (1, 148) = 4.73, p = .031. Lastly, the interaction between age and OFTP used to test for H5 was a significant predictor of JC, β = -0.17, p = .045. Table 2 shows the hierarchical multiple regression analysis results.

Simple Slopes Analysis (via PROCESS)

The significant interaction was followed up by a simple slopes analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro with OFTP as the predictor, age as the moderator, and JC as the outcome variable. Values one standard deviation above and below the mean age were used as high and low values of age. As presented in Figure 2, the effect of OFTP on JC was not significant at a high age (55.36 years), b = 0.12, SE = 0.08, *ns*, with 53.20 being the last significant age, p = .044. At a lower age (35.31 years), the effect of OFTP was positively associated with higher JC scores, b = 0.44, SE = 0.11, p < .001. At the mean age (45.34 years), OFTP was positively associated with JC scores, b = 0.28, SE = 0.07, p < .001.

Mediation Analysis (via PROCESS)

In a mediational analysis with PP as the covariate, age as the predictor, OFTP as the mediator, and JC as the outcome variable, results showed that the total effect of age on JC was not significant when OFTP was excluded from the model (TE < 0.01, SE = 0.00, *ns*.). The direct effect of age on JC when OFTP was included in the model was not significant (DE < 0.01, SE = 0.00, *ns*.). However, the indirect path for the effect of age via OFTP on JC was significant, with OFTP fully mediating the relationship between age and JC (IE = -0.06, SE = 0.03, LL = -0.12, UL= -0.01). Therefore, our fourth hypothesis, that OFTP mediates the relationship between age and JC, was supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our first hypothesis was supported, in line with past studies (Bakker et al., 2012). Contrary to our expectations, H2 was not supported. Regarding the non-significant link between age and JC, it is possible that the physical age of employees does not influence JC practices, as other relevant traits such as OFTP and PP may override the effects of age; these variables were found to be significant, suggesting that JC may be influenced by a multitude of factors to differing degrees. The discrepancy in the results of the role of age on JC requires confirmation.

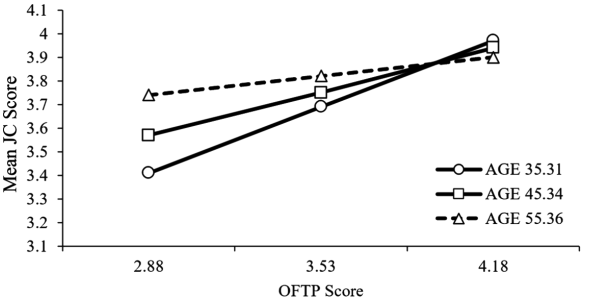

Figure 2 Simple Slopes Mean JC scores as a function of OFTP scores and Age.
Note: High and low values for OFTP and Age were +1*SD* and -1*SD* from the mean, respectively. The dotted line at *Age 55.36* indicates statistical non-significance.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 2 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting JC from PP, age, their Interaction, and the Mediating Effect of OFTP

Block	*Predictor*	*B*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	R^2*Ch.*	*F Ch.*	*df1*	*df2*
1	PP	0.25	0.1	0.19***	0.07	0.07	11.86	1	153
2	Age	< 0.01	< 0.01	0.09	0.07	< 0.01	0.01	1	152
3	PP × Age	-0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.07	< 0.01	0.26	1	151
4	OFTP	0.27	0.07	0.32***	0.14	0.07	11.36	1	150
5	OFTP × PP	-0.08	0.16	-0.08	0.14	< 0.01	0.25	1	149
6	Age × OFTP	-0.02	0.01	-0.17*	0.17	0.03	4.73	1	148

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Our results do not show support for H3 and H5, suggesting that age differences do not alter the effects of PP, and that affects JC behavior independent of other factors. H4 was supported as OFTP completely transferred the effect of age on JC, backing past literature (Kooij et al., 2014; Zacher, 2013).

The mediational relationship between age, through OFTP, on JC was negative. From the simple correlation between age and OFTP, as one ages, their OFTP becomes more limited, and job craft less. This mediation directionality is consistent with predictions of the socioemotional theory. The significant interaction between age and OFTP on JC suggests that OFTP varies at different levels of age, thereby solidifying the moderating effect of age on JC.

As a mediated moderation was not supported in our overall model, different relationship conceptual models could be explored in future studies.

The differences between job search intensity findings and those for JC may be explained by distinctions between the two behaviors. The difference in age effects may be supported by the difference in context– age matters more for job search as younger job seekers may be more motivated to find experience via employment while older job seekers may simply be looking for a career or job change, as they may have more experience. However, as both behaviors are autonomous and motivated, they both are influenced by OFTP and age, which are variables with an interaction that may be of great significance.

Our findings highlight potential for expanding OFTP and cognitive-motivational traits such as PP to increase positive work outcomes. Through using job redesign, employee autonomy and JC behaviors can be reinforced. Regarding our peculiar finding on the interaction between age and OFTP—that OFTP had a greater effect on those at a younger, or middle age, but not for older employees—older employees' limited OFTP may mitigate effects on JC as they may be more multifaceted due to ripple effects of aging. Therefore, eclectic interventions may be worthy of investigation. With differential age effects, practical implications may require age-targeted interventions i.e., designing organizational climates alleviating occupational ageism. For example, SOC (Selection-Optimization-Compensation) strategies promote successful aging in organizations as older employees can maintain and optimize their skills to compensate for age-related losses by using those remaining skills, as only promoting an expansive OFTP may not be effective for older workers.

As we implemented self-reported measures, social desirability bias may come into play. Also, we did not account for potential confounds such as job position. Since our study was conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to remote work could have affected work behaviors and attitudes. As Thai culture is characterized as one with a high power distance, future research could consider organizational culture as a factor of interest since a paternalistic leadership style in Thai organizations may limit JC. Furthermore, exploring constituent elements of JC may provide a deeper understanding of how core factors interrelate and fit into mechanisms of the occupational mind.

Our investigation of our proposed JC conceptual model (Figure 1) has explored the important antecedents of JC and has revealed that the dynamic relations between age, OFTP, and PP have important influences on Thai employees' JC practices. As PP, OFTP, and age contribute to JC, our study has provided insight into avenues for future research, where outcomes can aid Thai organizations in creating interventions that cater to a variety of employees of different ages, perspectives, and personalities. These interventions can thus promote JC, consequently improving work outcomes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded and supported by Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Psychology. We would like to thank our supervisor for supporting us throughout this process.

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