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Job Crafting, Job Boredom and Generational Diversity: Are Millennials Different from Gen Xs?

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Abstract: The current working environment requires employees to have some control over their jobs. Drawing on the job demands–resource (JD-R) theory, we investigated the relationship between job crafting and job boredom. Based on the generational cohort theory, we determined the strength of the relationship using generational diversity as a moderator. Data from 320 participants employed in white-collar jobs in the private sector were collected over two time periods. Structural equation modeling and hierarchical regression were used in the analysis. The results of this study show that job crafting has a significant negative impact on job boredom. This effect is further differentiated by generational differences, that is, belonging to Gen X or the Millennial cohorts. The use of self-administered questionnaires may result in the selection of 'socially desired' outcomes. This study has implications for today's intergenerational environment, since different generational groups have different attributes, priorities, desires and motivations that impact their actions. This study adds to the limited research on the impact of job crafting on job boredom. However, this is the first study to examine the moderating effect of Gen X and Millennials on the relationship between job crafting and boredom. As a result, appropriate incentives can be implemented to encourage crafting among generational cohorts within organizations, especially with the entry of Generation Z into the workforce.

Keywords: job crafting; job boredom; generational diversity; millennials; generation X

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1. Introduction

Managers are constantly in search of ways to promote organizational success. Measures are put in place to enrich the roles of the employees to promote favorable results and prevent unfavorable outcomes. This is sometimes achieved by promoting employee engagement, satisfaction and commitment through job rotation and other employee enrichment strategies. However, opportunities exist for employees to take responsibility for making their jobs more meaningful by seeking challenging demands and reducing hindering demands, as well as increasing social and structural resources. Looking beyond the efforts of an organization's leadership, these conscious changes employees make to alter their task boundaries, definition boundaries and relationship boundaries to shape their work to suit their needs exist and are defined as job crafting [1]. Job crafting practices have been found to be successful in balancing the demands and resources of the job with the skills, interests, needs and capabilities of employees [2–5], thereby producing favorable work-related and individual results [6].

A lack of control over one's job and the inability to find meaning within one's work may lead to job boredom. The authors of [7] found job boredom to be an organizational problem whose prevalence is become increasingly more widespread. The effects of job boredom have been constantly associated with withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism, mental health issues such as stress and behavioral changes such as turnover intention.

However, minimal research has been conducted on the correlation between job crafting and job boredom. There is also a shortage of evidence regarding the moderators between these variables. Moderating factors serve as a modifier between an independent and a dependent variable in determining the strength of their relationship [8]. According to previous studies, employees' perceived adaptability [9], motivation [10], high autonomy [11] and other variables serve as moderators of job crafting.

In this paper, the notion that the generational cohort to which an employee belongs can interact with an employee's job crafting behaviors and influence the degree of job boredom is introduced. According to [12], each cohort makes its own contribution to the working environment. These inputs sometimes come in the form of preferred leadership styles, communication preferences, reward systems and technological needs [13]. Although research on generational differences in organizational contexts has sometimes yielded mixed results, some studies have detected variations between the groups [14–17]. The task is, therefore, to determine the role that employees' generational diversity plays in crafting their jobs, thereby impacting on their boredom at work.

This research makes three important contributions to the literature. First, it broadens our understanding of the impact that job crafting has on job boredom. Also, it is the first to study generational diversity as a moderator in the relationship between job crafting and job boredom. Finally, in using generational differences, it provides evidence of similarities or differences between Generation X and Generation Y as moderators. With the decline of the Baby Boomer generation and the arrival of Generation Z, it is important to understand the differences in generational diversity and the influence that generational identity has on the susceptibility of employee work behaviors such as job crafting.

The continuation of the paper adheres to the following structure. In the next section, the literature on job crafting, job boredom and generational diversity is reviewed to establish the underlying hypotheses. After this, the methods used for the study, including its design and procedure, are covered. Following that, the results of the study are presented. The last two sections of the paper discuss the implications of the study and its conclusions.

2. Theory and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Job Crafting

Employees can change how they conceptualize and carry out work, the meaning and importance they attribute to their work mentally and who they associate with at work—altering their task boundaries, definition boundaries and their relationship boundaries. The conscious changes employees adopt to shape their work to fit their lives within the set of organizational boundaries are termed job crafting behaviors [1]. Job demand–resource (JD-R) theory identifies job resources and job demands as the fundamental reasons for job crafting. Job demands are "those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort and are therefore associated with physiological and/or psychological costs" [18]. Job resources, on the other hand, are "those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and associated physiological and psychological costs, and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" [18].

Building on the JD-R model, four elements of job crafting have been identified: decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources, increasing structural job resources and increasing challenging job demands. Reducing hindering job demands may require cutting back on the mentally, emotionally or physically draining features of a person's job [19]. Increasing challenging job demands involves seeking extra tasks and responsibilities, and seeking structural resources involves the opportunity to learn new skills, while increasing social job resources includes the mobilization of resources such as advice from co-workers and social support feedback in the hope of dealing with the demands of the work [20]. By actively reducing hindering job demands while increasing

challenging demands and seeking job resources, an employee is practicing the proactive behavior defined as job crafting.

The optimal blend for employee satisfaction, therefore, occurs in active jobs where there is high job demand and available job resources. Numerous studies have found favorable outcomes for job crafting. Positive relationships have been observed between job crafting and job performance [21], person–job and person–organization fit [22], workplace well-being [23], job satisfaction [24] and work engagement [25], while negative relations between job crafting and turnover intentions [26], burnout [27], job strain [4] and job boredom [28] have been found.

2.2. Job Crafting and Job Boredom

Job boredom has negative implications for organizations. Low organizational commitment, increased intention to quit [29], absenteeism and decreased work satisfaction are some outcomes of bored employees. Boredom is "a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction, which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation" [30]. Boredom is also a negative emotional reaction due to a lack of value or usefulness of an action, and boredom is differentiated from depression through its expression [31]. Whereas depression is internally expressed and experienced, boredom has an outward expression. Job boredom is a state in which an employee lacks interest in his or her tasks and is unable to focus on them [32]. The notion of job boredom, in context, is the opposite of work engagement, which is the willingness of a person to go above and beyond to ensure the achievement of goals for the success of their organization [33].

The predictors of job boredom have been linked to both internal and external factors. Individual personality characteristics [34], boredom proneness [35] and perceived overqualification [36] are some internal elements that can affect workplace boredom. External influences include the type of individual tasks, job routine, work underload and monotony [37], perceived organizational support, restricted learning opportunities and work overload [38]. Due to the subjective nature of job boredom, employees experience it in various ways. The authors of [39] identified three types of job boredom and concluded that job boredom can be experienced in different ways based on the type of boredom. They classified the types of job boredom under inertia at work, acceleration at work and dysrhythmia at work. An employee experiences inertia at work when there is a lack of incentive to learn and grow professionally and, therefore, there is no experience of progress. Acceleration at work, on the other hand, involves a lack of time or opportunity to review and concentrate on the present and plan for the future, while dysrhythmia at work entails a constant discontinuity in work performance as a result of disruptions of planned work [39].

Employees who proactively craft their job give direction and meaning to their work life [25]. Rudolph et al. (2017) [4] found that favorable job attitudes are positively related to increasing job resources and job demands. Empirical studies, using the JD-R model, have shown that job boredom is directly related to job resources and job demands [28,40]. Studies have shown a positive relation between meaningful work and job crafting [22,41]. Although bored workers withdraw from their task to strive for meaning [42], job crafting ensures that such meaning is found in their work. Using a between-person design, a negative correlation was found between workplace boredom and job crafting resources and challenging demands [43]. Other research also showed that increasing job resources, in the form of social support from colleagues, reduces boredom at work [44], while increasing job demands decreases the manifestation of job boredom. Jobs can be enriched by proactively increasing job resources and challenging demands [45].

The strength of work-related boredom, therefore, lies in the power of an employees' job crafting behavior. From the previous literature, it can be assumed that having highly challenging work demands and available resources leads to a relatively lower level of job boredom, whereas low or hindering work demands and insufficient job resources can result in job boredom.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Job crafting is negatively related to job boredom.*

2.3. Moderating Role of Generational Diversity

The model of proactivity [46] identifies employment and demographic factors such as education, age, hours of work and gender as influencers relating to proactive work behaviors. Variations in values and work ethics also exist [47]. However, studies have found generational differences in organizational variables such as organizational commitment, motivation and attitude at work [15], as well as the use of technology, attainment of goals, expectations and preferences [16]. Generational difference is a factor that could determine weak or strong connections between variables [48]. Generational diversity is much more visible in the workforce today. Each generational unit brings different attitudes, work ethics, beliefs, values and prospects to organizations [49]. 'Generation gap' has been used to describe the contrasts in opinions and attitudes between generations [50]. Generation theory highlights that the period in which a person is born may affect his or her world view and development [51]. There is, therefore, a distinction among generations according to the period in which they are born and the period in which they grow up [52].

The general categorization of generational cohorts [53] includes Baby Boomers (1943–1960), Generation X (1961–1981), Millennials/Generation Y (1982–2004) and Generation Z (2005–present). Workplaces today are witnessing the end of the working era of Baby Boomers, observing the collaboration of Gen Xers and Millennials and preparing for the arrival of Generation Z. Organizations have to adapt to multigenerational work values in order to recruit, retain and motivate the leaders we have today and those we will have tomorrow [54]. This paper concentrates on the currently active majority workgroups, namely, Gen Xers and Millennials.

A study conducted found generational differences to be a moderator between employee motivation and pro-environmental behaviors [55]. Generational difference was also identified as a moderator between job burnout and turnover [56]. In the workplace, both Gen Xers and Millennials are more motivated by higher challenges than any of the previous generations. They are more likely to remain with the organization if opportunities to learn are made available [57]. Nevertheless, studies showed that differences between these two groups still exist [12,17,58–60].

Gen Xers are described as valuing creativity and informality [61], freedom from supervisors [62], flexibility and work–life balance [63], while simultaneously searching for skills and advancement in their career [64]. Research has identified that their need for purposeful work outweighs their tolerance for less challenging work [58]. Skeptical, self-focused and self-centered are terms commonly used to describe them [65]. They crave the opportunity to craft their own work to enhance their perception of autonomy. Gen Xers are seemingly less loyal to their organization than they are to their personal goals since they observed that their Baby Boomer parents were frequently laid off. From their perspective, job security is a thing of the past and cannot be guaranteed [66]. As a result, they seek opportunities to develop their own career path [67]. Potentially, due to the self-satisfying nature of Generation Xers, any extra resources available are saved for themselves. Gen Xers attribute less importance to organizational security than Millennials [68] and also have a higher probability than Millennials of quitting their job in favor of a more challenging position, improved benefits and a better salary [69].

Despite being similar to Gen Xers in the quest for freedom, Millennials strive for freedom to ensure that their desire for a balance between work and life is met and not necessarily their desire to take charge. They crave challenging work conditions and guidelines from their supervisors [70]. This high level of self-esteem leads to them having highly unrealistic expectations with low commitment to the organization [71]. They are, however, more tolerant than the previous generation and are more team-oriented with a great sense of self-identification. Millennials thrive in challenging working environments. Fundamentally, they have a higher tendency to be proactive [72]. They also have the desire to be mobile with their work with flexible working hours. Because of their low tolerance to

boredom [73], with the available social and structural resources, as well as challenging job demands, Millennials utilize their working time to add value to the organization, eliminating the antecedents of job boredom. By withdrawing themselves from the aspects of the job that do not conform to that, they are making room for themselves to become more involved in those areas that do.

According to generational cohort theory, differences in beliefs, attitudes and values within generations are a result of societal changes and major historic events that happen within formative years and persist among generations over time [74]. The impact of these shared experiences and collective memories shapes their perspectives and preferences [75,76]. A cross-sectional study on generational differences suggested that older generations are more accepting of their jobs and their challenges than the younger generation [77]. Building on the above literature, it can be said that the degree of moderation of Gen Xers and Millennials is not the same. It is, therefore, proposed that, for Gen Xers, the effect of job crafting on job boredom is stronger than for Millennials.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Generational diversity moderates the relationship between job crafting and job boredom such that the level of the negative impact of job crafting on job boredom is stronger for Gen X than for Millennials.*

Figure 1 gives a graphical representation on Hypotheses 1 and 2.

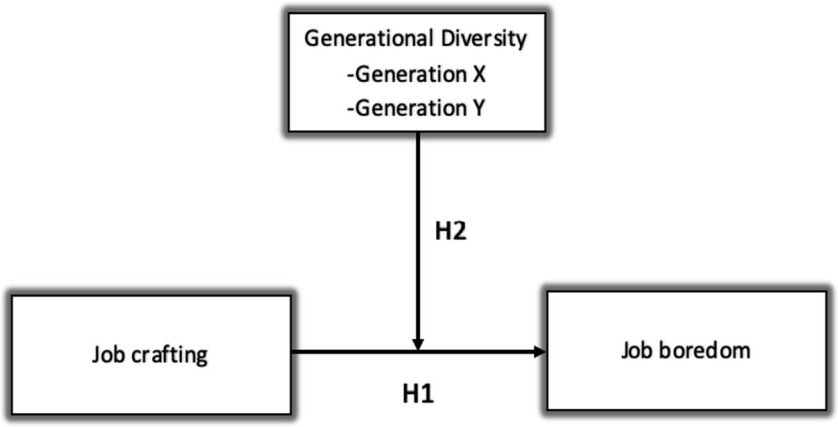

Figure 1. Research model.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design and Procedure

The study was conducted in a form of a survey. It focused on white-collar employees in private-sector companies in Turkey with the use of paper-based questionnaires. A total of 400 participants were acquired via convenience sampling. To prevent common-method bias, the survey was conducted in two different time periods. At Time-1, 400 questionnaires were distributed. Job crafting was measured, and participant demographics were collected. The response rate was 86 percent, with 346 responses accumulated. Two weeks later, at Time-2, despite being contacted, not all previous participants returned their surveys. In total, 320 responses were collected, and these were matched to the previous dataset and analyzed. Of the respondents, 60% were female and 40% male, and they came from the banking sector, health sector, educational sector and real-estate companies. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 58 years (M = 28.7, SD = 4.35); 53.7% were Gen X, and 46.3% were Gen Y. Majority of the participants had undergraduate degrees (77.2%). Respondents' demographic profiles are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profiles (N = 320).

	Frequency	Respondents (%)
Gender		
Female	192	60.0
Male	128	40.0
Age (birth year)		
Gen X (1961–1981)	172	53.7
Gen Y (1982–2004)	148	46.3
Education		
Associate degree/high school	29	9.0
Undergraduate	247	77.2
Graduate	44	13.8

3.2. Measures

With the use of a five-point Likert scale, job crafting was measured using the 21-item Job Crafting Scale [78]. This scale distinguishes the four dimensions of job crafting: increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, increasing challenging demands and decreasing hindering demands. The first component includes items such as "I try to develop my capabilities", the second element includes "I ask whether my supervisor is satisfied with my work", the third aspect of the scale includes "When there is not much to do at work, I see it as a chance to start new projects" and, finally, a sample question of the fourth dimension is "I manage my work so that I try to minimise contact with people whose problems affect me emotionally" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Although these four dimensions of job crafting are frequently accepted as independent sub-dimensions, many authors [4,22,79,80] have also aggregated sub-dimension scores to calculate an overall job crafting score. According to these previous findings, we aggregated the four sub-dimensions and calculated an overall "job crafting score" as a second-order construct. To test the construct validity of the first-order and second-order models, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis. The results of both models are given in Table 2. The results supported that the second-order model had an acceptable fit. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of overall job crafting was calculated as 0.90.

Table 2. Construct validity results.

Tested Model	$\chi 2$	*p*	df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	IFI
Job crafting (first order)	738.837	0.01	183	0.90	0.89	0.06	0.89
Job crafting (second order)	706.323	0.01	189	0.91	0.90	0.06	0.89
Job boredom (first order)	26.126	0.01	9	0.90	0.89	0.05	0.90

($\chi 2$ = chi-square, df = degrees of freedom, GFI = goodness of fit, CFI = comparative fit index, RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation, IFI = incremental fit index).

Job boredom was measured using the 6-item Dutch Boredom Scale [40]. Sample items include "I tend to do other things during my work" and "It seems as if my working day never ends" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). On the job boredom scale, we only tested a first-order one-factor model. As hypothesized, this model fitted the data. Model indices are presented in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of job boredom was calculated as 0.91.

In measuring generational diversity, age-group categorization (Generation X—1961–1981, Millennials/Generation Y—1982–2004) was used [53]. The two levels of generation were calculated as 'high generation' (GenY) and 'low generation' (GenX) to test the significance of the interaction effect.

3.3. Control Variables

Despite being an important part of a researcher's toolkit, control variables do not need to be theory driven [81]. However, they must be based on rationale and be relevant

to the study. Although very limited research has considered gender as a coordinate for job crafting, gender-based restriction such as glass ceilings, inclusion and gender pay sometimes limits the motivation to craft [82]. We included gender, age and education level as control variables.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, reliability scores and correlations of all variables of the study. From the data, it can be observed that job crafting has a significant negative relationship with job boredom, while generation has a positive relationship with job boredom, and there is a negative relation between job crafting and job boredom.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, reliability scores and correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.1. Job crafting	3.69	0.63	(0.90)		
2.2. Job boredom	2.43	0.68	−0.63 **	(0.91)	
3.3. Generational diversity	0.52	0.49	−0.23 **	0.14 *	-

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Note: Cronbach's alphas are given in diagonal parentheses.

4.2. Test of Hypothesis

The research hypotheses were tested with AMOS 21.0 software by running a structural equation model using the 2000 re-sampling option with the bootstrap technique. The results are given in Table 2. In the model, job boredom is treated as the dependent, and job crafting and generation (moderator) are treated as independent variables. The interaction variable (job crafting * generation) is created and added to the model as an independent variable. To control the impacts of the demographics, gender, age and education level are also included to the model. The tested model can be seen in Figure 2.

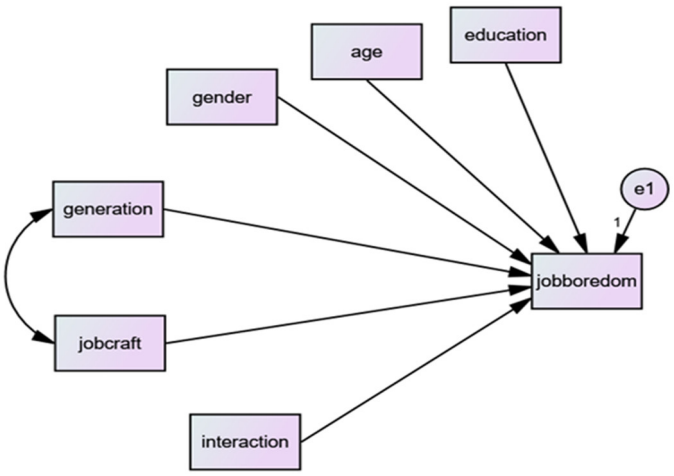

Figure 2. Research model on AMOS.

H1 predicts that job crafting is negatively related to job boredom. As shown in Table 4, job crafting has a significant negative effect on job boredom (B = −0.407, 95% CI = [−0.461, −0.346], t = −13.559, $p < 0.05$); hence, H1 is supported.

Table 4. Bootstrap results for job boredom.

Variables	Coeff.	SE	*C.R.*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Age	−0.214	0.060	−3.574	0.000	−0.334	−0.082
Gender	−0.026	0.091	−0.289	0.773	−0.189	0.127
Education level	0.078	0.112	0.698	0.485	−0.129	0.285
Job crafting	**−0.407**	0.030	−13.559	0.000	−0.461	−0.346
Generation	0.187	0.037	5.104	0.000	0.116	0.265
Interaction	0.130	0.035	2.554	0.011	0.028	0.191

H2 envisages that the generational diversity moderates the relationship between job crafting and job boredom such that the level of the negative impact of job crafting on job boredom will be stronger for Gen X than for Millennials. As shown in Table 4, the interaction variable has a significant and positive impact on job boredom (B = 0.130, 95% CI = [0.028, 0.191], t = 2.554, $p < 0.05$). The results showed that generation has a moderating effect between job crafting and job boredom since the interaction term has a significant impact on job boredom. Thus, H2 is supported.

To further examine the outcome of the interaction between job crafting and job boredom for high and low generations, a simple slope regression was plotted. Figure 3 shows an inverse relationship—when job crafting is high, job boredom is low, and when job crafting is low, job boredom is high. However, this negative relationship is more significant for low-generation employees than it is for high-generation employees. These results, therefore, support both hypotheses since job crafting is negatively related to job boredom, and generational diversity moderates the relationship between job crafting and job boredom such that the level of the negative impact of job crafting on job boredom is stronger for Gen X than for Millennials.

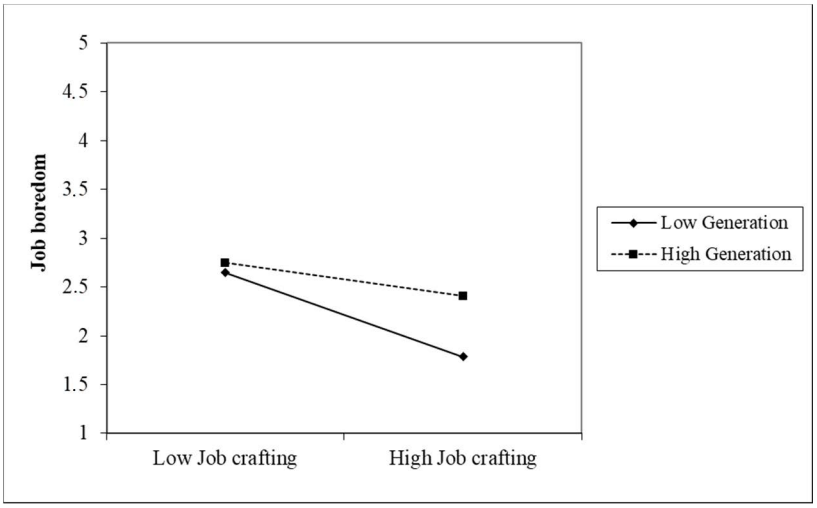

Figure 3. Interactive effects of job crafting and generation on job boredom.

5. Discussion

Although some organizational studies show a relationship between job crafting and job boredom, they are scarce in the literature [28,36,43,83,84]. However, previous researchers have found a negative relationship between job crafting and job boredom. Using data obtained from 320 white-collar employees, we also found that workplace boredom and job crafting are inversely correlated such that employees who actively increase structural job resources, increase social job resources, decrease hindering job demands and increase challenging job demands experience lower workplace boredom. The negative relationship between job crafting and job boredom that resulted from our study adds to the limited existing literature.

As pointed out, generational diversity cannot be forecasted as a moderator unless it is tested. Our understanding of possible generational differences at work stems from meta-analytic and time-lag studies, which have sometimes been inconclusive. Although some researchers [85] have argued that there is inadequate evidence of generational differences in workplace outcomes, others [48,86,87] have provided increased evidence of the existence of generational differences within the work environment. On the basis of generational cohort theory, it is apparent that generational differences could play an important role in how the relationship between job crafting and job boredom pans out. Some researchers [56] assume that, within the generational cohorts, Generation Xers and Millennials are more similar in their work values and characteristics. However, our results suggest that a clear difference exists between the two groups. Our second hypothesis, which suggested that generational diversity moderates the relationship between job crafting and job boredom such that the level of negative impact of job crafting on job boredom will be stronger for Gen X than for Millennials, was supported. This could be as a result of the low tolerance for boredom on the part of Generation Y [73], the satisfaction gained from the autonomy Millennials crave, their tendency to be more proactive [72] or the inclination of older generations to accept their jobs as they are [77].

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Three main contributions have been made with this study. By testing the impact of job crafting on job boredom based on JD-R theory, it confirms and adds to previous findings regarding the relationship between the two variables [28,43,84]. When job crafting is high, job boredom is low, and when job crafting is low, job boredom is high. Nevertheless, although there are studies on this subject in the literature, research on job crafting and job boredom is usually focused on highly educated Westerners [36], and, consequently, this investigation expands its scope.

Secondly, this study is the first to identify a strong theoretical relationship using generational diversity as a moderator between job crafting and job boredom. Prior to this survey, no academic research has been conducted on job crafting and job boredom using generational differences.

Finally, it also contributes to the literature by proving that differences do exist between generations. According to Figure 2, although the downward sloping of both the high generation (Millennials) and low generation (Gen Xers) indicates a negative relationship, in the high generation, the impact of job crafting on job boredom is stronger for Gen Xers than for Millennials. Despite different research showing varied results on generational diversity, the results of the study show that there is, indeed, a contrast between Gen Xers and Millennials.

5.2. Practical Implications

This study provides useful information for organizations. The findings demonstrate the negative impact of job crafting on job boredom. It sheds light on the fact that the degree of influence of this relationship is dependent on an employee's generational cohort. Organizations can benefit from this knowledge in several ways. First, the traditional top-to-bottom approach to problem solving within organizations is not the only way. This shift of function from employer to employee helps to reduce management costs and saves time in problem solving. Employee issues within an organization are usually specific to an individual, and, since the bureaucracy involved might be cumbersome, it can be a lengthy process before it reaches management to be addressed.

The study also suggests a deliberate boost of job crafting interventions to enhance proactive job behaviors. The strategic alignment of human resource practices to favor the stimulation of proactivity in terms of feedback, rewards, career development strategies and an enabling environment motivates employees to identify the source of job boredom and proceed to find ways of minimizing boredom through crafting.

Different generational groups have different attributes, priorities, desires and motivations that motivate their actions. Human resource managers should consider that a one-size-fits-all enrichment approach does not work in today's intergenerational environments. This environment warrants more initiative and proactivity from the employees [88], and, therefore, job enrichment practices must be altered from the traditional organizational-oriented approaches to self-initiated enrichment models. Soon, there will be yet another change in the workforce. The focus will no longer be on Gen Xers and Millennials but will include the more self-satisfying Generation Z.

6. Limitations, Future Research and Conclusions

However, this study is not free from limitations. The data were collected from the employees themselves. Although conducting the survey in two different time periods helped to minimize common-method bias, this self-rating form of measurement still contains an element of bias. Future studies could involve supervisors and peers. Information obtained from these channels will more likely yield a more accurate representation of the employees' characteristics.

In determining the crafting behaviors of employees, focus was placed on the individuals' generational cohort. In future studies, individual external factors such as the tenure and rank of the individual can be tested. However, with the knowledge that crafting is not always motivated intrinsically [89], it will also be insightful to conduct research on how team-level goals and expectations impact on our research variables—job crafting, job boredom and generational diversity. Secondly, the sample was gathered from one group of individuals with the same nationality. The results could potentially have been influenced by internal cultural and economic factors. As such, generalization across countries should be made with caution since differences among countries exist. Future studies can concentrate on duplicating this study in other cultural or economic environments.

Organizations are not the only beneficiaries of job crafting and reduced workplace boredom. These actions develop an employees' competence and skillfulness, thus, promoting overall career success by encouraging self-learning [79]. The study proves that encouraging these actions with a person's generational personality in mind yields a more desirable outcome for both the employer and the employee.

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