Career Crafting in the Post-retirement Work Engagements: Exploring the Crafting Behaviours of Post-Retired Employees in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Despite significant attention being paid to job crafting of individual employees, career crafting remains a relatively new area of focus, especially in understanding how older workers navigate their post-retirement work engagements. However, career crafting holds substantial potential for deepening our understanding of the post-retirement careers of retired employees. This paper aims to understand why and how retirees engage in career-crafting behaviours in their post-retirement work engagements. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study draws on focus group interviews with 23 retirees from four districts in Sri Lanka. Findings highlight that Retirees adopt cognitive, relational, and task crafting to redefine work, relationships, and activities, making post-retirement work purposeful, flexible, and identity-enhancing while revealing the post-retirement career crafting among Sri Lankan retirees is shaped by motivations such as self-reinvention, autonomy, family bonding, and defying aging stereotypes, reflecting both personal agency and cultural values.

Keywords: Career crafting; Older employees; Post-retirement work engagements; Sri Lanka

Introduction

Workforce ageing is widely recognised as a natural global phenomenon that has significant impacts on contemporary organisations (Salomão Filho et al., 2023). While organisations are implementing strategies to build a resilient workforce, retirees themselves are also seeking ways to engage in work in a resilient manner (Murakami, 2021). Recent studies emphasise the importance of the competencies of older workers (Dychtwald et al., 2024) and their accumulated wisdom (Hilsen & Olsen, 2021). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that older retired workers should shape their post-retirement careers in alignment with their preferred working styles and passions, fostering both satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, career crafting, which can facilitate positive ageing (Bar-Tur, 2021), healthy ageing (Michel & Sadana,

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2017), and successful ageing (Ryff, 1989), could contribute to greater engagement in the workforce.

Past research has explored the outcomes of workforce ageing at various levels, including national, organisational, and individual levels. For example, workforce ageing-related research at the national (macro) level has focused on labour market dynamics (Vodopivec & Arunatilake, 2008), economic issues (Cristea et al., 2022), national-level policies (Blackham, 2017; Gahan et al., 2016; Nagarajan & Sixsmith, 2023), government interventions (Cebulla & Wilkinson, 2019; de Vere et al., 2022), and societal implications (Dingemans & Henkens, 2019). The organisational level attempts to understand workforce ageing have focused on organisational demographics (Calzavara et al., 2020), organisational strategies (Adhikari et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024), and human resource practices (Armstrong-Stassen, 2017; Farr-Wharton et al., 2023; Finsel et al., 2023). In addition to these, recently, particular attention has been paid to motivation drivers for post-retirement workers (Hansson et al., 2023), factors influencing work status (Wu et al., 2024), retirement planning (Eberhardt et al., 2022), work disengagement and life satisfaction (Henning et al., 2025), and successful ageing (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2022), thus attempting to examine the individual-level dynamics of workforce ageing. Still, there is a dearth of findings on individual experiences (Dingemans & Henkens, 2019) in light of the outcomes of workforce ageing.

Particularly, how career-crafting behaviours of retirees occur in response to post-retirement conditions remains largely unexplored. Additionally, career crafting is a rapidly emerging concept in career research (Diaa et al., 2024; Ge et al., 2023), yet it holds significant potential for understanding the post-retirement careers of older individuals. In addition to the studies on late-career planning and job crafting for older workers (Ang, 2021), existing research on carer crafting have explored career crafting in the context of occupational choice in a conceptual study (De Vos et al., 2019), an empirical investigation of the relationship between career success and career crafting (Janssen et al., 2021), career pathways in the school context (Tims & Akkermans, 2020), development and validation of a career crafting assessment (Lee et al., 2021), a meta review of career crafting literature (Balakhtar et al., 2024), career crating in the context of career performance (Leong et al., 2024) and career crafting strategies of self-initiated expatriates (Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023).

Although scholarly attention has been paid to career crafting among the typical workforce, it appears that career crafting is particularly essential for older workers, retirees, or those planning for retirement. Therefore, this study aims to understand why and how retirees engage in career-crafting behaviours in their post-retirement activities. Specifically, the research question addressed in this study is: Why (reasons) and how (ways and means) do retirees engage in career crafting?

Literature Review

Job Crafting Vs. Career Crafting

Job crafting refers to how employees redesign their jobs to better align with their preferred working styles and their passions, enhancing both satisfaction and engagement (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As defined by Akkermans and Tim (2017), job crafting refers to "employees proactively modifying aspects of their job to create a better fit between their job and their characteristics: (p.174). Since jobs consist of a combination of tasks, cognitions, and interactions aimed at achieving specific objectives, job crafting involves changing or altering how tasks are performed, the nature of interactions, and how tasks are perceived (Berg et al., 2008). Job crafting can also help employees overcome adverse outcomes, such as taking control of specific tasks to reduce stress and enhance their ability to cope with workplace challenges (Berg et al., 2008).

Tim and Akkermans (2020) integrate three concepts —cognitive crafting, task crafting, and relational crafting —to propose the idea of career crafting. They argue that, in career crafting, employees engage in cognitive crafting (altering the way they think about their career), task crafting (changing the scope and type of jobs they undertake), and relational crafting (altering the relationships at their workplace) (Tim & Akkermans, 2020). In the present study, we conceptualize our working definition of career crafting in the context of post-retirement engagement in line with the same cognitive, task and relational aspects, thus proposing that cognitive crafting(shifting the way retirees approach the post-retirement career), task crafting(changing the scope and type of jobs the retirees engage in - maybe by shaping the jobs and their daily activities to avoid challenges), and relational crafting (changing the relationships at their jobs - building a strong network of friends, colleagues, and mentors at jobs who offer support).

Notably, job crafting and career crafting differ in their respective scope, timeframe, and the employee's intent. Job crafting refers to the short-term, oriented changes individuals make to their currently engaged work roles to enhance self-satisfaction, engagement, or performance (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In contrast, career crafting is a broader, future-oriented process through which individuals intentionally shape their entire career course, aligning professional paths with personal values and long-term goals (Tims & Akkermans, 2020).

Career Crafting Dynamics

Career crafting is a means of enhancing personal and professional growth (Balakhtar et al., 2024) and is seen as a proactive behaviour of individuals (Tim & Akkermans, 2020). De Vos et al. (2019) identified employability, adaptability, and career competencies as closely related factors in crafting sustainable careers across the life course. Contextual factors shaping career crafting are identified as organisational characteristics, family support, and external

environmental factors. In contrast, adaptability, career competencies, subjective and objective career success, and gender are noted as individual-level factors (Balakhtar et al., 2024). When considering the outcomes of career crafting, Diaa et al. (2024) found that career crafting ensures career sustainability over time, thereby enhancing subjective career success and perceived employability.

Proactive Behaviour Theory [PBT] (Crant, 2000) has been recently used in investigating employee behaviours. Crant (2000) defines proactive behaviour as "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions" (p.436). Accordingly, PBT posits that individuals are not passive recipients of their work environment but instead act in self-initiated, future-focused, and change-oriented ways to shape their roles and contexts. Past research has used PBT in their explorations of career proactivity (Jiang et al., 2023), career competencies and job crafting (Plomp et al., 2016), and career crafting and career success (Diaa et al., 2024). This evidence shows that career-related research draws on PBT to study how individuals shape their career paths. However, post-retirement-focused studies are yet to explore the proactive behaviours of retirees such as career crafting. Interestingly, a recent study by Crant and Chen (2024) highlights that although the main effects, mediators, and moderators of employees' proactive behaviours are known, there remain opportunities for further empirical work to develop and advance theory; thus, cultural considerations are one such area.

Method

This study was a qualitative inquiry grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, adopting an inductive approach and utilising Proactive Behaviour Theory as its underlying theoretical framework. Primary data were collected through four focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with 23 retired but engaged individuals in a cross-sectional study. We used focus group discussions (FGDs) for four key reasons: they collaboratively facilitate obtaining relevant inputs; participants can be selected according to pre-planned stratifications; the synergistic nature of group interaction encourages the sharing of rich information; and they offer a comfortable setting for retired individuals, who may feel more at ease engaging with peers when meeting unfamiliar people (Heller et al., 1990). The participants for these discussions were recruited from four districts: Kandy (4), Matale (10), Nuwara Eliya (3), and Anuradhapura (6), representing a mix of urban, rural, and moderately modernised areas in Sri Lanka. We believe these districts stand out among the country's 25 districts due to their unique blend of history, culture, geography, and economic contributions, offering a rich and diverse population context for the study. Participants were identified and connected through Grama Niladhari officers (the first-contact government representatives for civilians) or Samurdhi

Officers (local officials administering poverty alleviation and prosperity-related programs) in their respective areas. The sampling strategy was non-probabilistic, purposive sampling.

Although retirement[†] Has traditionally been regarded as disengagement from the formal workplace, but it is increasingly being redefined in light of demographic shifts. Today, retirement is viewed as a phase that offers opportunities for continued engagement and personal development (Dychtwald et al., 2024). Post-retirement engagement refers to retirees remaining involved in meaningful activities, such as part-time work, volunteering, hobbies, or lifelong learning (James et al., 2010). For this study, we define post-retirement work engagement as "Active engagement in an economically beneficial activity undertaken after formal retirement, including both salaried positions and self-employment". Accordingly, the inclusion criteria for participation in this study were: (a) retirement from government or private sector employment, (b) being aged 57 or above, and (c) active engagement in an economically beneficial activity undertaken after formal retirement, including both salaried positions and self-employment.

We conducted four FGDs, covering all four districts, with two rounds of discussions in each. Each focus group consisted of 5–6 retirees with diverse occupational histories. The group discussions were held in person at pre-selected locations, arranged by the participants themselves. Participation was entirely voluntary. At the beginning of each discussion, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the topic of discussion, its rationale, and assured of confidentiality regarding their identities. The FGDs were conducted over four days, with each session lasting between 90 and 135 minutes. Two researchers facilitated the discussions: one moderated the session while the other took detailed notes. The discussions were conducted in the mother tongue (Sinhala language) of all participants, and the notes were taken in the same language. The notes were reviewed, completed, translated into English, and coded by both researchers on the same day to ensure accuracy and reliability. Thematic content analysis was conducted using the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves identifying recurring patterns in the data, clustering similar narratives, and abstracting broader themes across focus groups. Themes such as self-reinvention, freedom work, and capitalising inner craftsmanship were inductively derived through iterative reading of transcripts, supported by illustrative narratives drawn from participant stories. A theme matrix (e.g., Table 1) was developed to consolidate the themes, their meanings, and representative data excerpts. Although data were collected through FGDs, several participants shared rich, personal narratives during the conversations. These narratives, while individually voiced, resonated with the broader sentiments expressed within each group. As Morgan (1997)

[†] The minimum retirement age in Sri Lanka ranges from 57 to 60 years, depending on the effective date of the relevant Gazette notification (Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, November 19, 2021).

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notes, FGDs often bring out shared meanings through individual storytelling, making personal narratives valuable for illustrating group-level themes.

Findings

The insights emerging through the FGDs provide the evidence that post-retirement career crafting is a more intentional process, often characterised by individual agency and artistic expression. Thus, overall career crafting behaviours of Sri Lankan retirees are more towards personal meaning-making rather than just structural or environmental influences. Additionally, this deliberate career crafting effort indicates that retirees are actively seeking post-retirement careers, rather than merely continuing their previous work. The following section presents the findings of the career crafting stories that emerged through the data.

Forms of post-retirement career crafting

Self-reinvention career crafting

This refers to the conscious and strategic process through which retirees proactively plan their transition into post-retirement careers, ensuring continuity in their professional identity. This process often begins well before retirement, allowing for a smooth transition without a career gap. For instance, a retired public-school principal at the Nuwara Eliya District FGD shared:

> *"When I was reaching my 50s, I started thinking about what I wanted to do after retirement. I still felt young and capable, so I gradually took on an advisory role in an international school. By the time I officially retired, I had already transitioned into the role of Principal at the same international school. It was simply a change in the school type, but my professional identity remained intact."* Here, He did not wait until his retirement to consider his next steps. Instead, he began planning well in advance, recognising that retirement would not mean the end of his professional identity.

In his story, he further shared that the responses of his community reinforced his career reinvention. As he shared, the school's parents requested that he continue as Principal, and his students also encouraged him to remain. Even the villagers and neighbours encouraged him to take on his new position with pride and respect. This acceptance by his community further solidified his new role and validated his decision to reinvent himself. Thus, here, post-retirement career crafting is not just about finding a job, but about maintaining a sense of purpose, pride, and professional identity. Thus, many retirees describe it as the rebirth of a new career rather than the end of their professional journey.

In addition, two sub-themes also emerged under this theme: (1) reclaiming identity beyond job titles. This refers to retirees who move beyond their previous designations and find a renewed

sense of self. For example, a former government Nursing officer who transitioned into a Nurse Training Consultant stated:

> *"I realised I was more than just my job title. I had decades of experience, so I rebranded myself as a "Training Consultant" rather than just an 'ex-nurse'."*

Theme (2) designing a "second act" with purpose – Many retirees deliberately curate their post-retirement work to align with personal values and interests. Here, it was noticed that retirees want their second career to be not just an extension of the past, but an intentional and fulfilling new life. For example, a retired female public school teacher became a Private Tutor.

> "*After decades in the public school as a teacher, I wanted to continue teaching, but in a way that allowed me to focus on individual students' needs rather than rigid curricula. Now, as a private tutor, I can design lessons that truly engage my students, and I find so much joy in seeing their progress without the traditional rules in my previous job."*

Taken together, the process of self-reinvention aligns with cognitive career crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), where individuals redefine their professional roles in ways that maintain continuity in their work identity. This supports prior research suggesting that post-retirement career engagement is driven by the need to preserve identity and maintain self-worth (Wang & Shultz, 2010).

Inner value-driven career crafting

It was observed that the retirees often choose self-driven work that provides them with autonomy, flexibility, and a sense of personal control. This allows them to engage in activities that align with their preferences rather than being bound by external structures or employer expectations. One of the most common self-driven career paths observed among retirees was commercial farming. Many retirees transitioned into full-time agricultural work, including vegetable farming, fruit cultivation, and livestock ownership. This was especially prevalent among those who inherited family land or had purchased agricultural property before retirement, allowing them to establish their farming ventures. A former prison officer who became a commercial farmer shared his experience:

> *"I love spending my days among the green pepper fields. My entire day is now dedicated to farming. Unlike the high-pressure environment of the prison, my days are now slow-paced, allowing me to enjoy life while still earning an income."*

He further added;

> *"My spouse, also a retiree, joins me for all the fieldwork, so our days are full of activity. We are alone at home, with our married children living in outstations. I am happy that we have something meaningful to do together, generate seasonal income, and contribute to our daily consumption; not only that, it keeps us healthy as well."*

Thus, through such self-driven career choices, retirees experience a renewed sense of purpose, striking a balance between economic independence and personal fulfilment. Their career crafting is not just about continuing to work, but rather it is about working on their terms, in ways that enhance their quality of life.

Furthermore, this couple's story exemplifies a scenario where a space for family unity emerges in post-retirement career crafting. When the retired prison officer-turned-farmer and his spouse, also a retiree, work alongside him, sharing responsibilities and enjoying each other's company in the process. The couple has found that their shared work in the field brings them closer, making their post-retirement years more fulfilling. Additionally, they generate income together, which benefits their daily consumption needs. The mutual purpose they share strengthens their relationship and provides emotional fulfilment during their post-retirement years.

Regarding the career crafting behaviour highlighted in this story, it suggests a shift toward self-directed work, aligning with task crafting behaviours (Berg et al., 2007), where retirees modify their job tasks to align with their values. This finding also challenges traditional retirement norms by emphasising autonomy over necessity (Fasbender et al., 2019).

Breaking ageing stereotypes, career crafting

This concept challenges the traditional idea that ageing inevitably leads to a passive, less engaged lifestyle. Instead, many retirees actively seek to remain productive and continue contributing to their fields, proving that the value of experience and expertise does not diminish with age. One such individual is a former Nursing Officer whose career was filled with years of valuable local and international training. Despite the wealth of knowledge she had accumulated, she felt that post-retirement career opportunities did not align with her capabilities or provide a platform for her to utilise her expertise fully. She expressed her feelings of frustration and unfulfilled potential:

> *"I feel like I was competent in my job, especially as I was nearing retirement. I wish I could have worked for another decade. I am saddened that my expertise is now going to waste. At the very least, there should be a proper way to channel our expertise back into the community or the field to which we have dedicated our lives. I am open to any opportunity that comes my way to share my expertise in caregiving."*

Her desire to continue making a meaningful impact despite retirement shows her determination to break the common stereotype that older individuals lose their drive and ability to contribute. Rather than accepting a passive role, she actively seeks ways to stay engaged in her field. She expressed interest in consultancy, advisory roles, and volunteer training, hoping to share her vast knowledge with others in need. Thus, her story is a perfect example of career crafting in post-retirement, where the individual actively works to maintain

professional relevance and continues to contribute meaningfully, defying the notion of "passive ageing." By seeking out new opportunities and remaining open to various forms of work, whether through consulting, volunteering, or teaching, she demonstrates how retirees can craft their careers in ways that utilise their expertise while breaking the conventional moulds. In particular, this aligns with the concept of "encore careers," where retirees seek meaningful work that aligns with their values and expertise (Freedman, 2007).

Craftsmanship-oriented career crafting

The data revealed that among Sri Lankan retirees, especially women, craftsmanship serves as a meaningful and intentional avenue for career reinvention. This aligns with research showing that older women in South Asia often leverage domestic and artisanal skills in self-employment or small-scale entrepreneurship after retirement, both for income generation and personal fulfilment (de Mel, 2001; Gunatilaka, 2020). Globally, such forms of engagement have been framed as “encore enterprises,” particularly among women seeking purpose-driven work in later life (Cohen, 2014; Weber et al., 2019). Many retirees turn to artisanal and heritage-based crafts, such as batik-making, handloom weaving, and jewellery design, blending traditional skills with entrepreneurial aspirations. Unlike passive work continuation, these engagements are deliberate and deeply personal, reflecting retirees’ desire for an active and engaged lifestyle.

One such example is a retired postmaster who transitioned into running a batik and handloom shop after retirement. Reflecting on her journey, she shared:

> *“During my years as a postmaster, I always liked the design of batik sarees and handloom fabrics worn by customers who visited my post office. When retirement arrived, I did not want to just sit at home. I wanted to create something of my own, something that reflected my personality."*

She began by attending a short batik-making course and experimenting with designs at home. Initially, her creations were gifts for friends and family, but the positive feedback encouraged her to take it further. With her savings and a small business loan, she set up a modest workshop and retail space, hiring a few local women skilled in handloom weaving and batik dyeing.

> *"Now, my days are filled with colours and creativity. I design unique batik sarees, and our handloom shawls are made with great care. Customers love that each piece tells a story. This is not just business for me; it is a passion."*

This story illustrates how craftsmanship, when approached with intentionality, can offer retirees a purposeful, fulfilling, and financially viable second career. More than just economic survival, these post-retirement careers represent a form of self-expression.

Transitioning career crafting

This refers to individuals who opt for a completely different occupation post-retirement. This may be due to a desire for change, an unwillingness to continue in the same career, or a need

for a fresh start. These retirees seek a career shift that allows them to explore new interests or engage in less stressful and more socially engaging roles.

A retired government school male teacher shared his experience:

> *"I did not want to continue my teaching career even though there were private tutoring opportunities. Instead, I started a retail grocery shop attached to my home and became the shop owner. I enjoy the diversity of tasks I handle; it is a one-man show where I take care of everything. The best thing I enjoy is people dropping by; I always have a customer to chat with, share information, exchange gossip, and feel connected to the community. However, I still follow my old work habits and close my shop at 2 PM, just like the school day used to end."*

This story highlights how, despite a complete career shift, continuity in work habits and structured routines remain integral to the retiree's post-retirement work life. The transition reflects a deliberate move toward a career that offers greater social interaction, autonomy, and flexibility while maintaining a sense of purpose and discipline from the previous profession.

In summary, the above five stories reveal several reasons for post-retirement career crafting, as depicted in the table below.

Table 01: Reasons leading to post-retirement career crafting

Reason	Description	Extract from Stories
Self-reinvention	Retirees proactively plan for a new career path while maintaining their professional identity.	The retired school principal transitioned to an international school before retiring to maintain continuity in his career.
Maintaining professional identity	Retirees redefine themselves beyond their previous work roles, recognising their expertise.	The retired nurse rebranded herself as a "Training Consultant" instead of just an "ex-nurse."
Designing a "Second Act" with purpose	Retirees craft careers that align with their values and interests, creating a fulfilling new phase in life.	The retired schoolteacher became a private tutor to provide personalised education outside rigid curricula.
Freedom work	Retirees seek autonomy, flexibility, and control over their work.	The retired prison officer became a commercial farmer, enjoying freedom and a relaxed pace.
Strengthening family bonds	Career crafting involves joint work with spouses, creating a shared purpose.	The retired prison officer and his spouse worked together on a farm, strengthening their relationship.
Breaking Stereotypes of Passive Ageing	Retirees resist societal expectations of slowing down and seek continued engagement.	The retired nurse sought consultancy and training roles, refusing to let her expertise go to waste.
Capitalising inner craftsmanship	Retirees turn hobbies and passions into viable careers.	The retired postmaster started a batik and handloom business
Transitioning to a new career path	Some retirees deliberately switch to an entirely different career to explore new interests.	The retired schoolteacher opened a grocery shop, finding joy in social interaction and flexible work.

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Safeguarding health and physical fitness	Most retirees deliberately engage in various activities as a means of physical exercise to safeguard their health.	The retired prison officer continues to work in the field as a daily need for exercise, keeping the body moving.

Ways of Post-Retirement Career Crafting

The same five stories were used to illustrate the process of career crafting in the context of post-retirement. It can be observed that the post-retirement work engagement involves all types of career crafting, including cognitive, task, and relational crafting, as presented in the table below.

Table 02: The ways of career crafting in the context of post-retirement

Career crafting form	cognitive crafting (reframing meaning & identity)	Relational crafting (redefining work relationships)	task crafting (redesigning work activities)
Self-reinvention career crafting	Retirees reframe their professional identity beyond retirement (e.g., seeing it as a transition rather than an end).	Strengthening existing professional relationships and gaining validation from communities, students, and colleagues to solidify the new role (e.g., retired principal motivated by parents & students).	Taking on advisory/consulting roles, engaging in leadership within a different but related domain, and shifting focus from rigid job titles to meaningful work.
Inner value-driven career crafting	Viewing work as a means of personal autonomy and well-being rather than obligation (e.g., farming as a fulfilling lifestyle rather than necessity).	Engaging in collaborative work with spouses, family, or neighbours (e.g., a retired prison officer and spouse farming together).	Shifting to work that allows complete control over tasks, pace, and environment (e.g., agricultural activities)
Breaking ageing Stereotypes: career crafting	Rejecting societal perceptions of ageing as a decline and instead reframing it as a stage of contribution and impact (e.g., retirees resisting the idea of "wasted expertise").	Seeking new professional and social networks to stay engaged in their field (e.g., a former nurse looking for consultancy, training, or volunteer work).	Engaging in consultancy, advisory, or volunteer-based tasks to continue leveraging expertise rather than retiring into inactivity.
Craftsmanship-oriented career crafting	Redefining work as an artistic, expressive, rather than just a job (e.g., a batik	Creating new relationships through entrepreneurship (e.g., working with local women in craft-	Learning and mastering new crafts, shifting from structured work to entrepreneurial creativity (e.g., running a

	maker, seeing her work as a creative passion).	making, building customer networks).	boutique for handloom sarees).
Transitioning career crafting	Redefining what "work" means by embracing a completely different profession post-retirement (e.g., a schoolteacher reinterpreting his role as a shop owner).	Rebuilding social engagement through customer interactions rather than formal professional networks (e.g., a shop owner enjoying conversations with customers).	Taking on entirely new tasks that differ from previous roles, adopting a work structure that maintains routine but enhances flexibility (e.g., a grocery shop owner maintaining structured work hours like a school day).

Discussion and Conclusion

In the current study, based on the literature on successful ageing (Kooij, 2015), we demonstrate that older workers continually craft their careers in a way that allows them to pursue what they find interesting. Furthermore, the study shows that older workers are more likely to engage in interest crafting on workdays. Hence, it can be concluded that older workers craft their careers to do what they find interesting. In line with the literature on successful ageing, we demonstrate that older workers exercise agency in dealing with the ageing process by incorporating their changing motives into their post-retirement careers (Featherman, 1992; Freund & Baltes, 2002). This aligns with contemporary research emphasising the importance of meaningful work and psychological resilience in post-retirement transitions (Wang, Wanberg, & Kanfer, 2021). The findings reflect not only individual adaptation but also culturally embedded motivations, including family obligations and social recognition, which are less commonly explored in Western-centric retirement literature (Mahadevan & Mayer, 2023).

In particular, the retirees in the study demonstrated a proactive mindset and a desire to continuously develop and acquire new skills, which aligns with the concept of self-reinvention and career crafting. Their ability to adapt and evolve shows how retirees can find purpose and reinvention in their professional lives even after retirement (Schreurs et al., 2011). Further, the participants experienced positive emotions in their work lives, which is a fundamental strength for self-reinvention and career crafting. This highlights the importance of maintaining a sense of purpose and meaning, which retirees seek when crafting a second act (Fredrickson, 2001). The findings also align with the concept of encore careers, which emphasise purpose and flexibility, in line with existing literature (Lain & Vickerstaff, 2022; Freedman, 2007). This adaptive behaviour supports current understandings of cognitive and relational career crafting as essential strategies to maintain identity and well-being in older adulthood (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013).

The study emphasises flexible work hours and part-time arrangements as essential elements of post-retirement careers. This aligns with the idea that retirees seek work that offers freedom

and flexibility, allowing them to design their work around their needs and preferences (Schreurs et al., 2011). It was also noticed through data that post-retirement career crafting, where workers adjust their roles to fit their needs and abilities, was a key factor. This approach gives retirees control over their work environment, aligning with the freedom to choose work that suits them (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Additionally, retirees in this study challenged traditional stereotypes of passive ageing by remaining engaged through entrepreneurship, creative expression, and community work. These findings reinforce newer perspectives in ageing research that highlight agency, purpose, and intergenerational contribution (Formosa, 2021; Calasanti, 2020). Interestingly, perhaps due to the influence of Sri Lankan culture, the retirees described a strong support system and a permissive home environment, which suggests that family support and connections play a crucial role in their ability to continue working. This supports the idea that retirees often work to maintain or strengthen family ties (Bosma et al., 2025). The participants also exhibited a high level of proactivity and psychological strength. This challenges the stereotypes of passive ageing and highlights retirees' desire to remain engaged, active, and productive, even in their later years (Ng & Feldman, 2008).

The current study revealed how Sri Lankan retirees engage in post-retirement career crafting as an evolving, culturally embedded process that involves all forms of dimensions of job crafting: cognitive, relational, and task crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Drawing on the participants' stories, it is evident that retirees proactively reframe the meaning of work and their professional identities, a form of cognitive crafting evident in themes such as self-reinvention and breaking stereotypes of passive ageing. This reframing challenges societal expectations around ageing and retirement, highlighting retirees' agency in redefining the meaning and value of their post-retirement engagement. Alongside cognitive reframing, relational crafting emerged prominently through retirees' efforts to sustain and reshape social and professional relationships. The Sri Lankan context, with its strong emphasis on family and community cohesion, appears to amplify the relational dimension of career crafting, making social ties a crucial enabler for post-retirement work engagement. Finally, task crafting was manifested as retirees redesigned their work activities to align with their evolving preferences, capabilities, and life circumstances. This included shifting to flexible work arrangements, engaging in entrepreneurial ventures such as craft-making or commercial farming, and initiating entirely new career paths, such as retail business ownership. Such flexibility reflects retirees' desire for autonomy and control, consistent with the theme of "freedom work" identified in this study. Task crafting thus allows retirees to tailor their work to sustain health, personal well-being, and satisfaction. Importantly, these three dimensions did not emerge as discrete categories but were deeply intertwined with Sri Lanka's socio-cultural context. Post-retirement career crafting in this context is not only a reflection of individual agency but also a culturally constructed phenomenon shaped by collective values, family structure, and societal

expectations. Retirees' pursuit of self-reinvention, meaningful second acts, and craftsmanship-oriented careers is embedded in narratives of family support, community validation, and cultural respect for sustained contribution.

In conclusion, while the well-established job crafting framework provides a helpful lens to interpret retirees' experiences, this study extends the framework by emphasising the holistic and culturally embedded nature of post-retirement career crafting in Sri Lanka. This insight invites further cross-cultural research to understand how socio-cultural contexts shape the forms and meanings of career crafting beyond traditional Western models. Additionally, the study focused on a small, purposively selected sample of Sri Lankan retirees, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample across different regions and occupations to achieve a richer understanding. The use of FGDs in this study prioritised individual narratives over group-level themes; subsequent studies might combine FGDs to balance personal and collective insights.

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