



Age-inclusive HR practices and career satisfaction: The role of job crafting and employee age

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Received: 13 May 2025; Accepted: 26 February 2026; Published: 30 June 2026

Abstract: This study examined the relationship between age-inclusive HR practices (AIHRP) and employees' career satisfaction, focusing on the mediating role of job crafting and the moderating effect of employee age. Data were obtained from 244 employees at three time points. At Time 1, participants reported on AIHRP; at Time 2, they completed measures of job crafting; and at Time 3, they indicated their career satisfaction. Results of path analyses showed that AIHRP were associated with higher employee career satisfaction. Moreover, job crafting mediated this relationship, making it stronger and more pronounced among younger employees. These findings extend existing knowledge of AIHRP by highlighting job crafting as a mediator and employee age as a moderator. The results suggest that AIHRP can enhance career satisfaction, particularly by providing job crafting opportunities for employees early in their careers.

Keywords: age-inclusive HR practices; career satisfaction; job crafting; lifespan

Introduction

Across the age spectrum, employees seek career satisfaction with the expectation that their Human Resources Departments will be supportive. Employers also aim to facilitate employees' career advancement to attract, motivate, and retain staff in the "war for talent" (Mampuru et al., 2024; De Oliveira et al., 2019). In contemporary work settings, it is common to find three or even four generations working together. From this, managerial practices fostering inclusive collaboration among multigenerational employees will emerge as a critical determinant of employee career satisfaction and companies' future success. Career satisfaction refers to contentment with the achievements, prospects, and significance gained from career success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In this context, age-inclusive HR practices (AIHRP) have emerged, which refer to organizations providing employees of all ages with equal recruitment, promotion, career development opportunities, training and continuing education (Boehm et al., 2014). Arguably, there would be age differences in how organizational support, developmental platforms, and resource provisions foster their career progression along the aging spectrum. Furthermore, the mechanism of job crafting within this process is less well studied. To address this gap, this research examines how job crafting mediates the link between AIHRP and career satisfaction across different age groups.

AIHRP and career satisfaction

Traditionally, a career was viewed as limited to professionals or those who advance within organizational hierarchies. However, today, the term "career" is applied more broadly and is widely understood as a sequence of work-related experiences throughout one's life (Hall, 2002; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Career satisfaction is not only reflected in objective indicators like status, promotions, and salary (Seibert et al., 2024), but also in subjective experiences such as acquiring new skills, balancing work and personal life, confronting challenges and cultivating a

sense of meaning (Seibert et al., 2024; Heslin, 2005). Prior research has found that individual differences or traits (e.g., proactive personality) and contextual factors (e.g., organizational career development support) can enhance employees' career satisfaction (Wang et al., 2021; Abid et al., 2021).

The current global labor market is facing the trend of population aging (OECD, 2025). Relevant statistics indicate that by 2030, individuals aged 45 and older will account for nearly 50% of the working-age population in China (Peng et al., 2022). In this context, AIHRP represent a key lever for organizations to provide long-term career opportunities for employees across all age groups (Boehm et al., 2014), thereby enhancing their career satisfaction. Specifically, AIHRP are designed to foster fairness for workers of all generations. These practices include unbiased hiring processes, equitable access to training and continued education, and comparable opportunities for promotion and career growth (Boehm et al., 2014). These inclusive practices could provide individuals with valuable resources, making them feel valued, purposeful, and motivated, which ultimately leads to increased career satisfaction (Hur, 2020; Jha et al., 2024).

The mediating role of job crafting

Job crafting refers to employees' proactive reshaping of their tasks and workplace relationships to achieve better congruence with their personal preferences, motivations, and values (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), thus reflecting an employee-driven approach of job design. From a resource perspective, Tims et al. (2012) defined four types of job crafting, which are (1) increasing structural job resources, (2) increasing social job resources, (3) decreasing hindering job demands, and (4) increasing challenging job demands. According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals are inherently driven to protect their current resources, avoid resource losses, and actively strive to gain new resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Those already holding



more resources are inclined to invest in acquiring further resources, thereby creating the gain spiral of resources. In this context, we hypothesize that AIHRP, by functioning as a significant resource, may enhance career satisfaction through job crafting. AIHRP refer to providing equal opportunities to employees regardless of all ages in recruitment, training, promotion, and career development (Boehm et al., 2014), which directly equips employees with instrumental resources. Meanwhile, AIHRP contribute to creating a diverse and inclusive atmosphere within the organization, thereby providing supportive resources (Rudolph & Zacher, 2021). Employees with abundant resources are more inclined to be motivated to undertake more proactive job crafting in pursuit of future career progression. Thus, the current research adopts Tims et al.'s (2012) resource perspective, which considers job crafting as a resource-acquisition behavior initiated by employees.

Furthermore, employees who actively reshape their work will gain more job-related and individual resources (Meijerink et al., 2020). For example, Lo Presti et al. (2023) showed that job crafting predicted higher performance feedback, professional development opportunities, and other job resources; Vogt et al. (2016) demonstrated that job crafting was a positive predictor of individual psychological resources, including aspiration, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism. From this perspective, job crafting may help generate ample resources tailored to employees' personal values and professional interests, thereby satisfying their intrinsic need for self-growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tims et al., 2022). Sufficient resources are a key driving factor for workers to achieve their career goals (Kundi et al., 2024). Therefore, job crafting enables individuals to enhance their alignment with both their job and career (Kooij et al., 2017; Kundi et al., 2024), ultimately increasing their subjective career satisfaction. Research evidence also supports this view that job crafting can significantly enhance employees' career satisfaction (Diaa et al., 2024; Dubbelt et al., 2019).

In summary, AIHRP provide both instrumental resources (emphasizing equitable recruitment, training, and promotion) and affective resources (cultivating an inclusive and age-friendly culture) for employees. These resources encourage employees' engagement in proactive job crafting, enabling them to acquire additional resources and, ultimately, enhance their career satisfaction.

The moderating effect of employee age

It is notable that, despite the suggested theoretical link, the resulting effects are unlikely to be absolute or uniform. We argue that the consequence of AIHRP for job crafting and career satisfaction is context-dependent, with employee age serving as a key moderating factor. Previous studies examining age-related disparities in HRM have similarly documented the existence of substantial differences in motivations and conduct across younger and older individuals (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Van der Heijden et al., 2021). Thus, this research posits that employee age serves as a moderator in the link between AIHRP and job crafting.

The social-emotional selection theory (SST) suggests that individuals' needs and motives undergo changes as

their age increases (Carstensen et al., 1999). Specifically, younger people tend to emphasize longer-term objectives focused on knowledge acquisition and skill development because they believe that their remaining time in life is wide, while older individuals perceive the future as constrained and tend to prioritize current objectives with emotional significance (Carstensen et al., 1999). AIHRP afford employees enhanced opportunities for professional career progression, fair promotional prospects, and access to training and education, which will motivate them to invest more resources in behaviors aimed at attaining their enduring career objectives. In contrast, older employees perceive limited time in their future careers, and they pursue immediate, short-term attainable emotion management goals, showing a tendency to seek safety and avoid loss in their work (Carstensen et al., 1999; Scheibe & Moghimi, 2021). Even when AIHRP provide supportive work environments, older employees tend to carry out their work duties in accordance with formalized work rules and procedures, making it difficult to stimulate autonomous work motivation in this group of employees (Feng & Hu, 2021). Consequently, compared to older employees, younger employees will perceive their future career timeline as more extensive and are therefore more inclined to pursue career-advancing behaviors.

Goals of the study

This study proposed a moderated mediation model (see Figure 1) examining (a) the mediating role of job crafting and (b) the moderating effect of employee age in the relationship between AIHRP and employees' career satisfaction. Our specific hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1: AIHRP positively relate to higher employees' career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Job crafting mediates the relation between AIHRP and career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Employee age moderates the relation between AIHRP and job crafting, with the relationship being stronger for younger employees.

Hypothesis 4: Employee age moderates the mediating role of job crafting between AIHRP and career satisfaction, with the indirect effect being stronger for younger employees.

Method

Participants setting

The sample for this study comprised 244 employees recruited from China. Demographic profile of the final sample was as follows: 34.1% male; 59.0% bachelor's

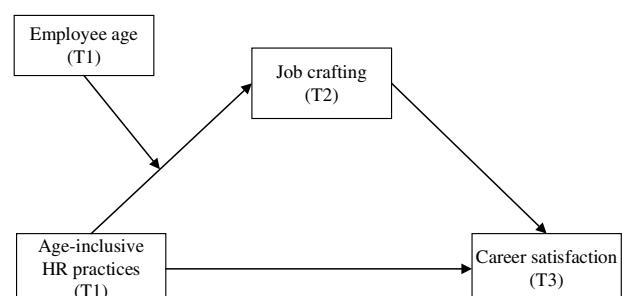


Figure 1. Theoretical research model

degree; averaged age 33.69 years ($SD = 7.22$); and mean organizational tenure 6.21 years ($SD = 4.72$).

Measures

Unless stated otherwise, all measures in this study were assessed using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Employee age. We measured employee age by asking participants to report their actual age, which was subsequently analyzed as a continuous variable.

AIHRP. Drawing on Boehm et al. (2014), we assessed employee's perceptions of AIHRP using a five-item scale from 1 (*very low intensity*) to 5 (*very high intensity*). A sample item is "Our company offers age-neutral recruitment activities". In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the AIHRP scale was 0.87.

Job crafting. Job crafting was measured using the 21-item scale designed by Tims et al. (2012). Example statements are "I try to learn new things at work" and "I ask my supervisor to coach me". The scale demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96.

Career satisfaction. The five-item scale from Greenhaus and Wormley (1990) was used to evaluate employees' career satisfaction. Sample items are "I am satisfied with what I have accomplished in my career", and "I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported at 0.92.

Control variables. Previous studies have suggested that demographic attributes may impact employees' career satisfaction (Olafsdottir & Einarsdottir, 2024; Solomon et al., 2022). Therefore, our data analysis accounted for gender, educational background, and tenure with the organization.

Procedure

The surveys were administered through the Credemo platform (<https://www.credamo.com>). Participants completed the surveys in three waves, with each wave spaced two weeks apart. This study has received ethical approval from the authors' institution and was carried out in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. In order to preserve participants' privacy, the data were stripped of identifying information, and all analyses used aggregated datasets.

Analyses

We utilized Mplus 8.3 (Muthén et al., 2017) to carry out the path analyses to test our research model. In testing of moderating effect, we plotted the interaction graph at both elevated (+1 SD) and reduced (−1 SD) employee age (Aiken & West, 1991), subsequently determining the statistical significance of the simple slope effects. To test the indirect effect and moderated mediation mechanisms, we employed a bootstrapping simulation (5000 resamples) and presented the 95% confidence intervals.

Confirmatory factor analysis and common method variance test

To determine whether research variables were distinct, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses were performed on the study's three key variables: AIHRP, job crafting, and career satisfaction. The fit indices for the model are shown in Table 1, revealing that the three-factor model demonstrated superior overall data fit ($\chi^2 = 201.49$, $df = 74$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.05) relative to other competing models ($p < 0.001$). These results provide evidence for the sound discriminant validity among the three constructs examined. Although data were collected across three waves, all measures were obtained from employee self-reports, which raises the potential for common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). To test whether this bias might have influenced our findings, we used an extra latent variable, specifically a method factor, which accounted for all the observed variables within our model. The results showed that the four-factor model, incorporating the original three factors along with a common method factor, did not yield a statistically significant improvement in overall fit indicators ($\chi^2 = 224.13$, $df = 73$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.09) compared to the three-factor model. Consequently, we infer that common method biases do not seem to compromise the validity of the present research.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Table 2 presented means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients for all research variables. The results revealed positive correlations between AIHRP and job crafting ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and career satisfaction ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). Job crafting was positively associated with career satisfaction ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Findings from the correlational analysis preliminarily support our hypotheses proposed in the present study.

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analyses

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
Four-factor model (A, B, C, CMV)	224.13 (73)	0.94	0.92	0.09	0.09	
Three-factor model (A, B, C)	201.49 (74)	0.95	0.94	0.08	0.05	
Two-factor model 1 (A + B, C)	905.21 (76)	0.66	0.59	0.21	0.14	703.72(2)***
Two-factor model 2 (A, B + C)	667.34 (76)	0.75	0.71	0.18	0.14	465.85(2)***
One-factor model (A + B + C)	1384.29 (77)	0.46	0.36	0.26	0.19	1182.80(3)***

Note. $n = 244$. A = AIHRP; B = job crafting; C = career satisfaction; CMV = common method variance. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficient of research variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	0.69	0.46						
2. Education	2.98	0.73	0.07					
3. Organizational tenure	6.21	4.72	-0.15*	-0.14*				
4. Employee age	33.69	7.22	-0.03	-0.26***	0.50***			
5. AIHRP (T1)	3.94	0.84	0.01	0.20**	-0.01	-0.06		
6. Job crafting (T2)	4.16	0.65	0.02	0.01	0.12	0.001	0.31***	
7. Career satisfaction (T3)	3.92	0.86	-0.03	0.19**	0.09	0.05	0.40***	0.28***

Note. $n = 244$. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); education (1 = high school, 2 = junior college, 3 = undergraduate degree, 4 = master degree or above); organizational tenure (self-reported in years); age (self-reported in years). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Results of path analysis

Variables	Job crafting (T2)		Career satisfaction (T3)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	0.06 (0.09)	0.04 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.12)	-0.08 (0.11)
Education	0.01 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.26 (0.09)**	0.19 (0.09)*
Organizational tenure	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Employee age (T1)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
AIHRP (T1)		0.28 (0.06)***		0.33 (0.09)***
Age * AIHRP		-0.02 (0.01)**		
Job crafting(T2)				0.23 (0.12)*
R ²	0.02	0.16**	0.06	0.22***

Note. $n = 244$. Unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard deviations in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

AIHRP and career satisfaction. Data analysis outcomes are shown in Table 3, when controlling for gender, education, organizational tenure, and age, AIHRP were positively related to employees' career satisfaction ($B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Job crafting mediation. Hypothesis 2 posits that job crafting serves as a mediator in the link between AIHRP and career satisfaction. The results suggested that AIHRP positively predicted job crafting ($B = 0.28$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$), and job crafting predicted career satisfaction ($B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$). The confidence interval for the mediating effect of job crafting between AIHRP and career satisfaction did not contain zero (indirect effect = 0.06, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI = [0.005, 0.125]). Then, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 proposes that employee age serves as a significant moderator in the relation between AIHRP and job crafting. The findings provide evidence that the joint effect of employee age and AIHRP significantly contributes to job crafting ($B = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$). Figure 2 graphically displays these interaction effects. Simple slope analyses additionally revealed that AIHRP exhibited positive association with job crafting among junior employees (simple slope = 0.42, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$), while the slope of AIHRP on job crafting for senior employees failed to reach statistical significance (simple slope = 0.13, $SE = 0.08$, *ns.*). It indicates that employee age plays a significant moderating role between

AIHRP and job crafting, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Employee age moderation. Hypothesis 4 proposes a moderated mediation model, where employee age moderates the indirect influence of AIHRP on career satisfaction via job crafting. The analyses showed that for younger employees, the indirect effect of AIHRP on career satisfaction through job crafting was statistically significant ($B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.20]). In contrast, for older employees, the indirect impact of AIHRP on career satisfaction through job crafting failed to reach statistical significance ($B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.08]). Therefore, employee age exerted a significant moderating effect on the indirect relation between AIHRP and career satisfaction via job crafting, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 4.

Collateral findings. To further test the stability of our study's results, we conducted a supplementary analysis by using employees' organizational tenure as a proxy variable for employee age. This approach is supported by the significant correlation observed connecting employee age to organizational tenure ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that organizational tenure may capture similar temporal characteristics related to employees' career stages. By incorporating organizational tenure as the moderator, we aimed to examine whether the pattern of results would remain consistent, thereby strengthening the robustness of our conclusions.

Similarly, we used Mplus 8.3 software with 5000 bootstrap samples for path analysis. After accounting for

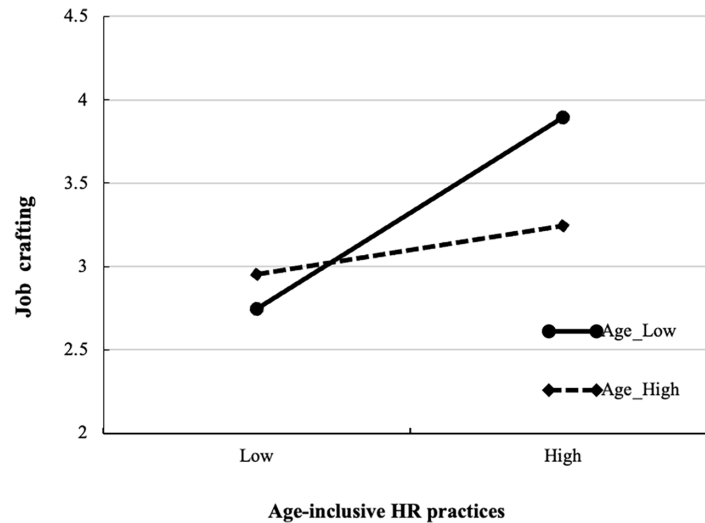


Figure 2. The moderating effect of employees age on the relation between AIHRP and job crafting

employees' gender, education, and age, the interaction of organizational tenure and AIHRP significantly predicted job crafting ($B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$). The finding indicated that organizational tenure moderated the link between AIHRP and job crafting. The simple slope test presented in Figure 3 indicated that AIHRP exerted a significant positive influence on job crafting for employees with short organizational tenure (simple slope = 0.41, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the effect was non-significant for employees with long organizational tenure (simple slope = 0.10, $SE = 0.07$, $ns.$). Moderated mediation analyses further indicated that organizational tenure moderated the indirect effect of job crafting between AIHRP and career satisfaction. Specifically, the indirect effect was significant for employees with short organizational tenure (estimate = 0.10, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.20]), with the confidence interval excluding zero, but non-significant for employees with long organizational tenure (estimate = 0.02, $SE = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.07]), with the confidence interval including zero. In sum, the moderating pattern of organizational tenure aligns with that of employee age. This analysis provides additional support for the robustness of our findings, suggesting that the moderating mechanism holds across employee age and organizational tenure.

To strengthen the causal inferences of our proposed model, we conducted a supplementary analysis to examine reverse causality. That is, we examined the alternative possibility that employees' prior career satisfaction might influence their subsequent perceptions of AIHRP through job crafting. We constructed a reverse mediation model using our three-wave longitudinal data. In this model, we designated career satisfaction at Time 1 as the predictor, job crafting at Time 2 as the mediator, and AIHRP at Time 3 as the dependent variable. We included demographic variables (e.g., gender, education, and tenure) as control variables, consistent with our primary analysis. Results of bootstrapping analysis (with 5000 resamples) showed a non-significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.01, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.19]). The confidence interval includes zero, indicating that there is no empirical

evidence for the reverse causal pathway. This analysis helps mitigate concerns that prior career satisfaction drove changes in perceived HR practices, thereby strengthening the causal relationship from AIHRP to career satisfaction via job crafting.

Discussion

AIHRP and career satisfaction

The findings of this study suggest that AIHRP positively predict career satisfaction. It extends research on AIHRP by connecting them with career satisfaction. Prior studies have mainly focused on workplace outcomes, including engagement, thriving, and organizational performance (Fan et al., 2023; Oliveira, 2021), with little attention to career-related outcomes. The emphasis on career outcomes can broaden the impacts of AIHRP from solitary employment instances to the cumulative sequence of roles' experiences (e.g., job engagement and job thriving) over a person's lifespan (Hall, 2002; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Hence, AIHRP offer employees instrumental resources by ensuring equitable access to hiring, development, and advancement prospects across all age demographics, as well as providing employees with supportive affective resources by creating an age-friendly atmosphere. By providing these resources, employees are better equipped to fulfill their professional objectives and experience greater career satisfaction (Dubbelt et al., 2019; Jha et al., 2024).

The mediating role of job crafting

Results demonstrate that job crafting functions as an intermediary in the association between AIHRP and career satisfaction. This conclusion aligns with the established consensus that AIHRP exert broad beneficial impacts on employee attitudes and behaviors, such as facilitating knowledge transfer (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2022), enhancing work engagement (Fan et al., 2023), and strengthening organizational identification (Waligóra, 2024; Ali & French, 2019). Unlike previous studies that have predominantly focused on cognitive pathways (e.g., future career perspective) or

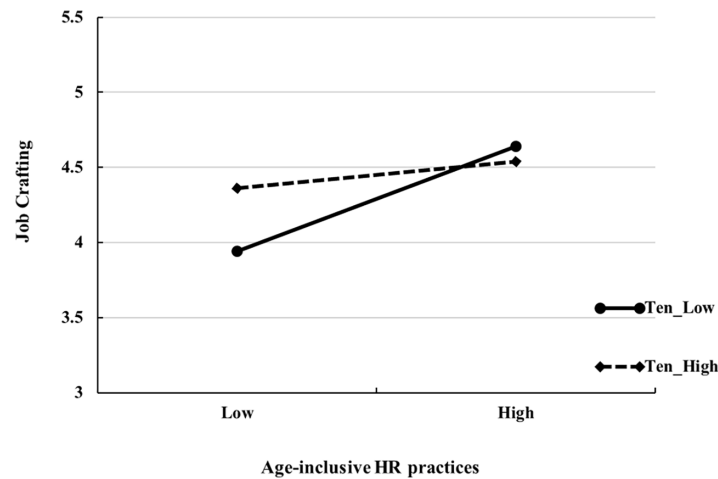


Figure 3. The moderating effect of organizational tenure on the relation between AIHRP and job crafting

affective pathways (e.g., perceived organizational support) (Oliveira, 2021; Fan et al., 2023), this study uniquely identifies job crafting as a behavior-oriented mechanism influencing career satisfaction. This contribution provides deeper insight into how AIHRP impact employee outcomes.

Drawing upon COR theory, AIHRP supply employees valuable resources, including equal opportunities for promotion and development throughout their careers (Boehm et al., 2014). As the core of job crafting is the employees' ability to adjust specific aspects of their work, which often requires them to invest additional effort or resources to engage in proactive behaviors. Employees with abundant resources exhibit a greater tendency to undertake proactive job crafting to fulfill their interests, needs, and goals. Moreover, AIHRP are centered on creating an age-friendly work environment within the organization, which will be viewed as the organization's commitment to fostering long-term relationship with employees (Boehm et al., 2014; Abid et al., 2021). Employees who perceive their access to organizational support resources tend to align their personal developmental goals with organizational objectives, thereby demonstrating a greater willingness to undertake job crafting. Furthermore, job crafting enables employees to acquire both job-related and personal resources. Prior studies have suggested that those who undertake job crafting report an accumulation of job resources within a two-month period (Tims et al., 2013). This reveals that the effectiveness of job crafting is evident in its capacity to progressively enhance job resources. In turn, these resources contribute to positive adaptive outcomes for employees, including increased job and career satisfaction (Tims et al., 2013; Dubbelt et al., 2019; Diao et al., 2024). In conclusion, the present research posits that job crafting serves as a mediating mechanism in the association between AIHRP and career satisfaction.

Age differences in the effectiveness of AIHRP

Our findings reveal that AIHRP positively influence job crafting, and this effect is particularly pronounced among younger employees. Previous literature has demonstrated that AIHRP positively affect employees, or specifically senior employees (Boehm et al., 2014; Segel-Karpas et al.,

2015; Teo et al., 2022), such as by enhancing work engagement, mitigating the threat of age stereotypes, and facilitating successful aging at work (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2022; Oliveira, 2021; Cui et al., 2025). Despite this, most of these studies have not systematically explored the varying strength of impact these practices have on employees of different ages. By revealing the moderating role of employee age, this study finds that AIHRP significantly promote job crafting among younger employees. Specifically, these practices more effectively enhance career satisfaction among those earlier in their careers by providing job crafting opportunities. These findings align with previous research, such as Bal and De Lange (2015) found that younger employees exhibit higher engagement in response to flexible HR practices, and Kooij et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis also pointed out that maintenance-oriented HR practices offer greater advantages to older employees, whereas development-oriented HR practices are preferred by younger counterparts. Together, these insights lend theoretical support to our argument that the effectiveness of AIHRP varies with employee age.

Younger employees who perceive their future as broad and boundless are inclined to strive for long-range career objectives. Consequently, they prioritize the gathering of information and acquisition of knowledge within the organization (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen et al., 1999; Scheibe & Moghimi, 2021). Thus, the impacts of AIHRP on job crafting and career satisfaction for younger workers. Conversely, the older employees view the future as constrained and tend to pursue maintenance-oriented career paths. Older employees, therefore, prioritize learning, knowledge acquisition, and resource gathering less, viewing such activities as having potentially delayed benefits. Instead, they accord greater value to deriving meaning from life and fostering a sense of belonging in social contexts (Burmeister et al., 2018). In contrast to younger employees, older employees exhibit a less pronounced impact of AIHRP on job crafting and career satisfaction.

Implications for practice

The results of this study provide practical guidance for management practice. First, this research confirms that AIHRP are valuable for employees across all age groups,

and their implementation must adhere to the principle of equity in support rather than uniformity in design (Burmeister et al., 2018; Fan et al., 2023). Given that age diversity has become widespread in contemporary work environments, building an age-inclusive environment is a key measure to manage this diversity effectively. Managers should recognize that the core value of AIHRP lies in addressing the heterogeneous needs of different age groups: for younger employees in the career development stage, age-neutral training opportunities, fair promotion mechanisms, and task autonomy can provide critical resources to support their proactive career building; for older employees in the career maintenance stage, in addition to valuing their work experience and fostering an age-diverse and respectful culture (Boehm et al., 2014), managers need to provide additional, tailored support to encourage job crafting—such as clear guidance on how to leverage their expertise through work redesign, mentorship roles that align with their strengths, or flexible work arrangements that reduce barriers to proactive engagement.

Second, consistent with prior evidence that job crafting could benefit employees' work outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2017; Holman et al., 2024), our research supports the proposition that job crafting positively influences career satisfaction. Therefore, managers ought to offer employees opportunities to undertake job crafting, which can promote person-job fit and consequently bring about a host of positive organizational outcomes (Kooij et al., 2017; Kundi et al., 2024). Moreover, job crafting entails an inherent level of failure risk, and accordingly, organizations must proactively develop an organizational culture defined by mistake tolerance and a constructive view of failure. Such a culture can act as a psychological resource for workers undertaking job crafting. Additionally, organizations might implement job crafting programs to boost employee engagement in task modification (Kooij et al., 2017; Kundi et al., 2024), maximizing their strengths for favorable results (Zhang et al., 2021).

Strengths, limitations and future directions

First, our study adopted a three-wave design and included an attention-check question to enhance the quality of our data. Although we used latent method factors to test for possible common method biases, all variables that are self-reported may still be influenced by social expectations and transient emotional states. Future research can collaborate with enterprises from different regions, industries, and occupations to collect data on specific industries and roles (e.g., blue-collar workers and rural employees), while integrating employee-supervisor pairing data or objective career outcomes (e.g., salary changes and promotion) to improve the robustness and generalizability of our findings.

Second, the survey sample in this study was mainly composed of young employees, with a relatively small proportion of older employees. Although supplementary analysis using organizational tenure as a proxy for age has confirmed the robustness of the moderating mechanism, this demographic imbalance may still limit the statistical power of age's moderating effect

and the generalizability of conclusions to older workers. Future research should expand the sample's age range and adopt a cross-generational comparative design to explore the heterogeneous needs of employees in different age groups for AIHRP, thereby providing more targeted practical implications.

Third, this study cannot fully rule out the influence of unmeasured third variables (e.g., supportive organizational culture, macroeconomic stability). For instance, a culture of inclusivity may simultaneously promote AIHRP and employee career satisfaction. Subsequent studies might utilize quasi-experimental designs to better establish causal relationships.

Fourth, this research examined the mediating effect of job crafting in AIHRP on employee career satisfaction from a resource perspective. Future studies might further probe other potential mechanisms of influence. For example, based on SST, older employees may be more concerned with emotion regulation strategies. Future research could explore the ways in which AIHRP enhance older employees' emotional regulation responses and thus affect their work and career outcomes.

Conclusion

Drawing upon COR theory and SST, our research found the AIHRP impact employees' career satisfaction, with the mediating pathway via job crafting and the conditional impact of employees' age. For young employees, AIHRP exhibited a stronger impact on career satisfaction via job crafting. These findings highlight the necessity of adopting a differentiated and age-sensitive approach in the implementation of HR practices. Organizations should acknowledge that while these practices generally enhance career satisfaction, their effectiveness is significantly amplified when aligned with employees' career stages. This study illustrates that age inclusivity is not universally applicable; instead, it is a dynamic and tailored approach that can strengthen both individual career trajectories and organizational resilience within an age-diverse workforce.

Acknowledgement: Not applicable.

Funding Statement: This research was funded by Beijing Education and Science Research Project 2023 (Grant number: BECA23123).

Author Contributions: The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Liang Hou; methodology, data analysis, visualization: Jing Zhou; project administration: Siqi Li; writing—original draft: Liang Hou and Jing Zhou; writing—review & editing: Liang Hou, Jing Zhou, and Siqi Li; funding acquisition, investigation, supervision: Liang Hou. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials: The datasets used and/or analyzed in the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Approval: The study was approved by School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Beijing Institute of

Petrochemical Technology. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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