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Exploring Boundaryless Careerists Inside Organizations: The Role of Job Crafting and Work Engagement to Subjective Career Success

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between employees' boundaryless career attitudes and career-related outcomes; however, it remains uncertain whether these employees truly perceive career success by working in their current organizations. Drawing from self-determination theory, we propose that employees with boundaryless career attitudes enhance work engagement, which leads to subjective career success through job crafting. We examined the hypotheses using structural equation modeling, with data from 493 Korean employees. The analyses revealed that a boundaryless mindset predicts heightened subjective career success through job crafting and work engagement, whereas organizational mobility preference did not. These results imply that managers should consider employees' boundaryless career attitudes and make the best use of them by facilitating employee job crafting behavior. Additionally, we explored the contingent effect of perceived organizational support that can impact the degree of employee job crafting behavior. Further contributions and future research agendas are discussed.

1 | Introduction

Current employment conditions are highly uncertain, due to actions by both employers and employees. Economic crises have jeopardized employees' occupational security by changing firms' hiring policies, and, at the same time, employees with various career needs have begun to proactively pursue their own career paths (Briscoe et al. 2012). Such volatile conditions have made workforce mobility across organizations more flexible, and boundaryless career attitudes (BCA) have emerged as a new career concept to explain these complex phenomena in the labor market. The main feature of BCA is independent of, rather than dependent on, traditional career arrangements (Arthur and Rousseau 1996), and employees with these attitudes navigate the changing work landscape by having careers characterized by different levels of psychological and physical movement (Sullivan and Arthur 2006).

Briscoe et al. (2006) referred to psychological movement as a boundaryless mindset (BM), and to physical movement as an organizational mobility preference (OMP). BM is a preference for variety in work contexts and self-confidence in one's career, independent of one's employer, and OMP represents a desire to frequently move across objective employment positions, most typically by changing employers (Kostal and Wiernik 2017). Put differently, BM captures employees' general attitudes related to identifying and enhancing their employability and seeking specific tasks or skills transcending their job boundaries; in contrast, OMP consists of attitudes associated with individuals' actual will to move across organizational boundaries, based on their current

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employability. Both attitudes are similar in proactively navigating employees' career paths (by crossing boundaries), whereas they differ in how they achieve their desired career status (crossing jobs/tasks or organizations).

After the validation of measurement items by Briscoe et al. (2006), extensive research has been conducted to find the antecedents (Rastgar et al. 2014; Rodrigues et al. 2019) and consequences (Briscoe and Finkelstein 2009; Enache et al. 2011b) of BCA, including meta-analyses (Kostal and Wiernik 2017; Li et al. 2022). However, the mechanism describing how BCA leads to specific outcomes (especially job attitudes) remains unclear (Mazzetti et al. 2024). In the boundaryless career context, employees now work toward their career success through various activities regardless of organizational boundaries, owing to their own accountability for their careers. As a result, compared with the traditional (organization-centered) career contexts, employees' BCA can be related to job attitudes or behaviors formed both in and out of their organization (Eby et al. 2003).

This feature of BCA necessitates considering intraorganizational activities to establish a framework that describes the phenomena related to BCA in organizational operations. One of the behaviors that employees with BCA exhibit is job crafting (Kundi et al. 2021). Job crafting refers to the changing employees' levels of job demands and job resources to align them with their own abilities and preferences (Tims and Bakker 2010), and it is a strategic way to achieve their goals based on self-determination theory (SDT; Olafsen et al. 2025). Prior studies identified job crafting as an antecedent for subjective career success (Akkermans and Tims 2017; Dubbelt et al. 2019); therefore, this study considers job crafting as an intraorganizational activity and tests its mediating effect among BCA, work engagement, and subjective career success.

Another consideration is that many of these studies have identified BCA as a one-factor construct, leading to less deliberate outcomes (Kundi et al. 2021; Li et al. 2022). Given that BCA can be divided into the BM and OMP, following Sullivan and Arthur (2006), this study examines whether these two mobilities separately predict employees' work engagement and subjective career success. This approach would benefit from capturing the unique traits of each dimension of BCA.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Self-Determination Theory and BCA

According to Gagné and Deci (2005), SDT suggests two overarching motivations: autonomous and controlled motivation. They argued that external rewards can be internalized through autonomy, presenting the continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. SDT is a state-like motivational concept that suggests one's behaviors can be more internalized or intrinsically motivated, as much as self-determined (Gagné and Deci 2005). In the process of internalization and intrinsic motivation, basic psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—take a crucial role as nutriments (Ryan and Deci 2000). That is, satisfying one's needs fosters self-determination and subsequently leads to positive work-related outcomes, promoting wellness and high-quality performance in organizations (Deci et al. 2017).

In the boundaryless career context, SDT can be an effective lens to elucidate how employees unfold their career paths, considering that employees following BCA are more likely to act with self-determination. For example, Sullivan (1999) presented characteristics of BCA, such as learning professional skills (competency), multiple firm networks (relatedness), and setting career goals (autonomy), which can be related to basic psychological needs, in response to the uncertain labor market. Therefore, in performing their jobs, these employees might be more internalized or intrinsically motivated than employees with traditional career attitudes, because they consider their current jobs as a part of their self-determined career paths and feel a sense of control over them, above and beyond the external rewards (e.g., salaries and promotions).

2.2 | BCA and Work Engagement

Work engagement reflects a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Although few studies have examined the relationship between BCA and work engagement, Alok and Rajthilak (2023) found a positive effect of BCA on the workplace well-being of Indian IT temporary agency workers. From the SDT perspective, they stated that the characteristics of BCA, such as the pursuit of self-driven career goals, working with numerous organizations, and ownership of one's career, can provide a sense of satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Additionally, personal traits that could be associated with BCA, such as conscientiousness and openness (Segers et al. 2008), are also associated with work engagement (Akhtar et al. 2015). Hence, Dikkers et al. (2010) reported the positive effect of proactivity (as largely related to BCA) on work engagement. Thus, we can infer that BCA is positively related to work engagement.

Notably, the opposite results can be seen when dividing BCA into two dimensions. First, employees with BM prefer diverse work contexts and self-confidence in their careers (Kostal and Wiernik 2017). Thus, they probably engage in activities like learning, coworking, and networking, which can satisfy their basic psychological needs. Satisfaction of these needs also leads to employees' work engagement (Meyer and Gagné 2008). However, employees with OMP might not be interested in activities that satisfy basic psychological needs, but rather, focus on leaving their current organizations. In effect, Liljegren and Ekberg (2009) found that employees' turnover intentions and job mobility predict health problems and burnout, and such issues can reduce work engagement if there are insufficient job resources (Bakker and Demerouti 2017). Based on this discussion, we propose that:

H1a. BM will be positively related to work engagement.
H1b. OMP will be negatively related to work engagement.

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2.3 | BCA and Subjective Career Success

Subjective career success refers to an individual's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with their career (Judge et al. 1995). Among the rest, career satisfaction has been commonly considered to be an operationalization of subjective career success (Shockley et al. 2016). Therefore, this study considers career satisfaction to be equivalent to subjective career success. Because the trait of BCA presented by Arthur (1994) is that employees with BCA pursue a self-directed career, it can be simply assumed that career satisfaction is an important index of their career success.

Furthermore, according to Bellah et al. (1985), individuals can regard it differently by their "job," "career," or "calling," even though they fill the same roles. For example, as employees with high BCA pursue psychologically meaningful jobs (Sullivan 1999), they might regard their current job as a career or calling, not just a job. Employees with a sense of calling at work were found to be positively related to career satisfaction (Xie et al. 2016). Empirical results have also supported the relationship between BCA and career satisfaction (Choi 2021).

Similar to work engagement, there might be differing outcomes regarding career satisfaction when BCA is divided into two factors. As discussed earlier, the activities of employees with BM clearly enhance competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Such activities can help employees acquire new skills, information, and networks, which potentially increase their value. Higher values readily translate into higher wages, positions, or employability, all of which affect career satisfaction. In contrast, the characteristics of OMP include that it is largely motivated by rewards or status (Segers et al. 2008). That is, the criteria of objective career success are important to employees with OMP. In other words, those with high OMP are likely to be dissatisfied with their current career status, so they fulfill their career needs by crossing organizations. Notably, the meta-analysis of Li et al. (2022) and several other studies (Enache et al. 2011a; Park 2018; Rodrigues et al. 2015) reported that BM is positively associated with subjective career success, while OMP is negatively associated with it. Based on this discussion, we propose that

H2a. BM will be positively related to subjective career success.
H2b. OMP will be negatively related to subjective career success.

2.4 | BCA and Job Crafting

Employees with BCA have self-directed career responsibilities and seek both marketability and employability (Arthur 1994). These can be achieved by both external-organization activities (e.g., networking behavior, external support seeking) and by intraorganizational activities: job crafting. Job crafting consists of four dimensions: increasing structural resources, increasing social resources, increasing challenging demands, and decreasing hindering demands, and it is no wonder that job crafting involves an employee's proactive personality, in the sense that they exhibit personal initiative to change their status quo (Bakker and Demerouti 2017).

Since BCA is also characterized by the traits of proactivity (Briscoe et al. 2006) and pursuit of meaningful work (Sullivan 1999), employees with BCA generally try to balance job demands and resources through active job crafting. As a result, the achievement of person-job fit improves job performance and marketability by finding an identity for the current job and making better use of the advanced skills required by the job. In support of these arguments, Mazzetti et al. (2018) reported a positive relationship between BCA and job crafting, suggesting that job crafting enhances person-career fit and person-job fit.

However, a doubt persists regarding whether employees with OMP show active job-crafting behavior. From the perspective of SDT (Bakker and Van Woerkom 2017), job crafting is a strategic method to satisfy basic psychological needs; therefore, for those with BM, it is attractive to engage in job crafting. Conversely, employees who have OMP would be neither exertive in satisfying needs nor have sufficient intention to remain in their organizations, as previously noted, because they tend to move across firms based on their current employability or skills with high specificity (Sullivan and Arthur 2006). Thus, there is little incentive to engage in job crafting. Moreover, job crafting requires faithful job performance in the employee's current organization, so it may itself be perceived as a job demand by those with high OMP, consequently not demonstrated by them, but at the minimum level. Based on this discussion, we propose that

H3a. BM will be positively related to job crafting.
H3b. No relationship between OMP and job crafting will exist.

2.5 | Job Crafting, Work Engagement, and Subjective Career Success

It is taken for granted that job crafting has a positive effect on work engagement. Based on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) synthesized previous studies, proposing that employees motivated by their work would use job crafting behavior, which then increases work engagement. Exemplified job crafting behaviors are as follows: positive changes in the work environment by seeking challenges and job resources, and proactively building a resourceful and challenging work environment that fosters engagement.

There is also a growing body of studies examining another subject, the effect of job crafting on subjective career success (Akkermans and Tims 2017; Kundi et al. 2022). Successful job crafting results in perceiving the meaningfulness of work (Tims et al. 2016) and creating abundant resources for employees' needs, consequently increasing career satisfaction (Dubbelt et al. 2019). In summary, job crafting would be related to career satisfaction and assists employees in achieving their desired career-related outcomes. Based on this discussion, we propose that

H4. Job crafting will be positively related to (a) work engagement and (b) subjective career success.

2.6 | The Mediating Effect of Job Crafting and Work Engagement

Although BM can enhance employees' work engagement, that relationship seems rather unclear, especially because BM is

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a concept that captures multifarious attitudes and behaviors in and out of employees' organizations (Briscoe et al. 2006). In this respect, identifying a mechanism that explains the connection is necessary, and job crafting is an appropriate behavior to accomplish this (Kundi et al. 2021; Mazzetti et al. 2024).

According to the SDT, jobs that consist of complex, challenging, or important tasks facilitate autonomous motivation (Gagné and Deci 2005). For example, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) argued that proactive employees seek assistance, feedback (social resources), autonomy, training (structural resources), and worthwhile tasks (challenging demands) from their jobs, and these needs are thought to be the same as the needs of employees following BCA (Sullivan 1999). However, these desires are difficult to fulfill solely through assigned tasks, thereby necessitating additional job-crafting behaviors. Through job crafting, employees fulfill such needs (Olafsen et al. 2025), which subsequently leads to improved work engagement by satisfying their basic psychological needs.

Similar to work engagement, employees with BM may resort to job crafting to feel career satisfaction. By redesigning and performing additional tasks, employees can find their identity or the meaning of work, and access rich networks or information for future employability and career success. These processes are intended to promote career satisfaction, thereby clarifying the relationship between BM and subjective career success.

Few studies have analyzed the relationship between BM and career satisfaction, but Kundi et al. (2021) demonstrated that BCA is positively related to career satisfaction and is mediated by job crafting. Additionally, drawing from SDT theory, Dahling and Lauricella (2017) showed that the satisfaction of needs through autonomy and competence support, which is comparable to job crafting, is related to career satisfaction. Based on this discussion, we propose that

H5. Job crafting will mediate the relationship between BM and (a) work engagement and (b) subjective career success.

Employees with BM are more likely to undertake job crafting activities that satisfy their basic psychological needs, thereby making them more autonomously motivated and engaged. Engaged employees have a positive impact at both individual and organizational levels. When focusing on the individual level, positive employee experience from vigor, dedication, and absorption generates subsequent successful feelings of career development in employees' organizations. Supporting these arguments, the studies conducted by Karatepe (2012) and Laschinger (2012) revealed positive relationships between work engagement and career satisfaction. In sum, meaningful job crafting exhibited by employees can satisfy basic psychological needs, which then subsequently affects work engagement and subjective career success. Based on this discussion, we propose that

H6. Job crafting will mediate the relationship between BM, work engagement, and subjective career success.

3 | Method

3.1 | Participants

Since the BCA has been established as a new career paradigm, relevant phenomena can be captured in diverse organizational types (Li et al. 2022). Thus, for generalizability, this study collected data from full-time workers in South Korean firms and the public sector with no industrial restrictions. Through an online survey using social networking sites (i.e., Job Planet, LinkedIn, and Instagram), a total of 518 copies of the survey were collected. There were no missing responses, as all items were in the form of questions that required answers. However, 25 responses were excluded after being judged to have been unfaithfully answered (e.g., answering "strongly agree" to all of the survey questions). Subsequently, 493 samples were used for the final analysis.

A total of 41.4% of participants were aged in their 30s (less than 20s = 29.0%, 40s = 17.9%, 50s or more = 11.7%), and the participants' genders were relatively balanced (male = 46.7%, female = 53.3%). Education levels varied from associate's degree or less = 17.0%, bachelor's degree = 66.0%, to a master's degree and above = 17.0%. Furthermore, one-third of the respondents have worked in their current organizations for 1–3 years (under 1 year = 16.6%, 3–5 years = 17.4%, 5–10 years = 19.7%, over 10 years = 13.0%). Information about respondents' occupations was also obtained, and it indicated that most respondents were general office workers (292 respondents), with the remaining respondents being professionals ($n = 78$), service workers ($n = 52$), researchers ($n = 47$), and sales workers ($n = 24$).

3.2 | Measures

All the study variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*). As all items were developed in English (see Table A1), they were translated into Korean. During the translation process, two PhD students who were proficient in English were asked to evaluate the translated survey questions and back-translate them. Through this process, the questions were slightly modified to fit the Korean context. To secure the reliability of the responses, a pilot test with 118 participants was conducted, and four job crafting items and one work engagement item were removed, due to low factor loadings.

The removed items were judged by translators to be inappropriate for the Korean context, for example, the item "I try to make my work more challenging by examining the underlying relationships between aspects of my job" in job crafting was deemed unintelligible in the back-translation process. Given the length of the survey, we decided that it was better to remove these questions than to translate them to reflect the Korean context. The result of confirmatory factor analysis showed that the Akaike information criterion (AIC) statistics of the model with all items (13,629.00) were reduced when five items were removed (12,143.21).

Boundaryless career attitude. We measured BCA using the thirteen items that Briscoe et al. (2006) developed. It consists of eight items of BM (e.g., "I enjoy working with people outside of my organization") and five items of OMP (e.g., "In my ideal career, I would work for only one organization"). All items of OMP were

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developed in reverse coding, but two items were coded positively in this study, to check the unfaithful answers. Although shortened forms of the BCA items were developed, we chose the original full items to reflect various career attitudes within the organizations. BM had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, and OMP had 0.74.

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured with a nine-item scale using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9), proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). To enhance the reliability of the scale, we removed one item ("When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work"). Eight items of work engagement (e.g., "At my work, I feel bursting with energy") had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Subjective career success. We took career satisfaction as an operationalization of subjective career success. Career satisfaction refers to an individual's evaluation of his/her work environment and setting (Sekaran 1989). We adopted five items measuring career satisfaction that Greenhaus et al. (1990) used (e.g., "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career"). Five items of career satisfaction had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Job crafting. Based on JD-R theory, Tims et al. (2012) developed job crafting scales, which consist of four dimensions. Despite 21 items having been validated at first, we decided to use 17 items by removing four items. Job crafting had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78.

Demographic variables. We additionally considered employees' age (4-point scale ranging from "under 20 years" to "over 50 years"), gender (coded 0 = female, 1 = male), education (4-point scale ranging from "below associate degree" to "over Ph.D."), and tenure (5-point scale ranging from "under 1 year" to "over 10 years").

3.3 | Data Analyses

We utilized the lavaan package available in R, version 4.3.1 to perform structural equation modeling (SEM) and to test the hypotheses. The analysis consisted of two stages. First, to check the model fit of the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. Before proceeding to the next stage, modification indices (MIs) were used, and the CFA was repeated. This technique can reduce the chi-square and improve model fit by adding specific covariance paths to the basic model. Including relevant relations can decrease specification errors (Whittaker 2012), but cautions are needed since paths must only be added between the observed variables within the same latent variables. In the second stage, the hypothesized structural model was tested, and it presented the path coefficients, which can confirm the hypotheses. The mediating effects were tested using the bootstrap method (5000 bootstrap samples).

4 | Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. Correlations were estimated using the Spearman method, and the relationships among the study variables showed correlations under 0.8, the criterion for judging multicollinearity (Kalnins 2018). Thus, we concluded that there is no serious multicollinearity.

4.1 | Common Method Variance

Before conducting CFA, we tested common method variance, using Harman's one-factor model. This procedure identifies the common method variance by checking the emergence of a single-factor structure, or whether one factor accounts for the majority of covariance (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). We performed factor analysis on our dataset, and the results showed that all variables loaded on one factor accounted for 24.27% of the total variance. Since the variance is generally recommended as being lower than 50% (Kock 2020; Podsakoff et al. 2003), we judged that the common method variance was not a serious problem.

4.2 | Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In our initial CFA, the model demonstrated suboptimal fit, particularly within the job crafting and work engagement constructs, which included a large number of observed variables (17 and 9 items, respectively). It is generally recommended to use around five observed variables for each latent variable (Brown 2015; Hair et al. 2010), and practically, many observed variables with high similarity and long survey questions can increase respondent fatigue and unfaithfulness (Ghafourifard 2024). Above all, the potential item redundancy is likely to contribute to model misfit because the observed variables covary beyond what is explained by the latent variable.

However, we decided against removing items since we used previously validated scales. To address the model misfit, we examined MIs and identified 32 pairs of items within the same latent construct that exhibited substantial residual covariances (MI > 3.0). We allowed correlated residuals only when there was a plausible theoretical or methodological rationale (e.g., similar item wording or conceptual overlap). For example, items 8 and 9 of work engagement and items 20 and 21 of job crafting, which respondents may perceive as similar, had an MI value of 103.96 and 88.21, respectively. By adding covariance paths, we improved data-model fit, and these modifications were limited to within-construct item pairs, which are detailed in the Appendix (Table A1).

We acknowledge that post hoc model modifications can reduce generalizability and increase the risk of overfitting. Therefore, we report model fit statistics both before (base) and after (modified) these modifications in Table 2 and interpret results with caution. Our goal was to balance model parsimony with fidelity to the original measurement instruments. As Table 2 shows, Model 1 (modified), the hypothesized five-factor model, consisting of BM, OMP, job crafting, work engagement, and subjective career success, had an acceptable model fit. We rendered alternative models to verify which is the best model by comparing each of them with the hypothesized model, and the hypothesized model indicated a significantly better fit than the alternative models.

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TABLE 1 | Results of descriptive and correlation analysis.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Gender	0.47	0.49	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Age (30s)	0.41	0.49	0.015	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Age (40s)	0.17	0.38	0.084	−0.392**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Age (over 50s)	0.11	0.32	0.024	−0.307**	−0.170**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Education (bachelor)	0.65	0.47	0.089*	−0.048	−0.022	−0.056	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Education (master)	0.16	0.36	−0.114*	0.133**	0.010	−0.058	−0.612**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Education (doctor)	0.00	0.08	0.006	0.016	0.017	0.037	−0.126**	−0.040	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. Tenure (1–3 years)	0.33	0.47	−0.022	0.054	−0.138**	−0.111*	−0.001	0.005	−0.016	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. Tenure (3–5 years)	0.17	0.37	−0.001	0.091*	0.037	−0.052	0.015	0.015	−0.042	−0.325**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
10. Tenure (5-10 years)	0.19	0.39	−0.033	0.102*	0.102*	0.041	−0.086	0.045	0.069	−0.349**	−0.228**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
11. Tenure (over 10 years)	0.12	0.33	0.038	−0.104*	0.198**	0.271**	−0.053	0.026	0.032	−0.273**	−0.178**	−0.191**	1	—	—	—	—	—
12. BM	3.20	0.71	0.110*	−0.052	0.013	0.011	−0.004	0.064	0.008	−0.090*	0.052	−0.027	0.000	1	—	—	—	—
13. OMP	2.96	0.70	0.011	0.084	−0.037	−0.181**	0.009	0.057	−0.049	0.171**	0.044	−0.044	−0.259**	−0.002	1	—	—	—
14. Job crafting	3.32	0.44	0.046	0.023	−0.096*	−0.069	0.043	0.087	0.047	−0.045	0.012	−0.044	−0.035	0.551**	−0.072	1	—	—
15. Work engagement	3.44	0.65	0.072	−0.050	−0.012	0.062	−0.051	0.120**	0.013	−0.052	0.005	−0.006	−0.026	0.564**	−0.210**	0.559**	1	—
16. Subjective career success	3.20	0.72	0.099*	−0.043	0.077	−0.021	−0.004	0.113*	0.082	−0.054	0.032	0.042	0.078	0.336**	−0.255**	0.355**	0.480**	1

*$p < 0.05$,
**$p < 0.01$,
***$p < 0.001$.

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TABLE 2 | Results of confirmatory factor analysis with modification indices.

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1 (base)	2628.38***	850	—	0.791	0.065	0.070
1 (modified)	1624.14***	818	—	0.905	0.045	0.057
2	1995.56***	822	371.42***	0.862	0.054	0.064
3	2205.47***	822	581.33***	0.837	0.058	0.074
4	2568.40***	825	944.26***	0.795	0.065	0.079
5	3080.77***	828	1456.63***	0.735	0.074	0.081

Note: Model 1, hypothesized five-factor model. Model 2, four-factor model (WE and CS are loaded on one construct). Model 3, four-factor model (BM and OMP are loaded on one construct). Model 4, three-factor model (BM and OMP, WE and CS are respectively loaded on one construct). Model 5, one-factor model (all variables are loaded on one construct).

Abbreviations: BM, boundaryless mindset; CS, career satisfaction; OMP, organizational mobility preference; WE, work engagement; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standard root mean residual.

***$p < 0.001$.

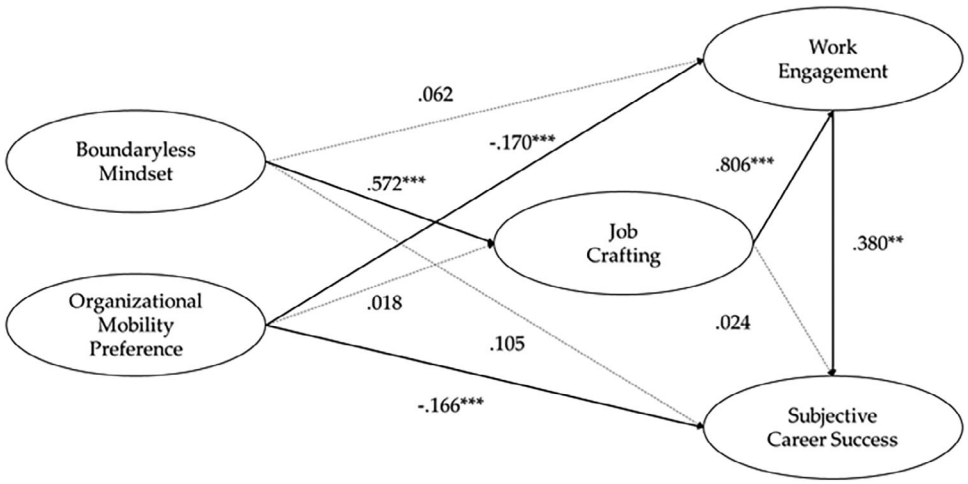


FIGURE 1 | Results of the structural model and path coefficients. The dotted lines represent nonsignificant relations. **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

4.3 | Hypotheses Testing

Guided by the result of the CFA, we adapted Model 1 for testing the study hypotheses. The model fit of the structural equation model appeared to be acceptable (χ^2 = 1624.14, df = 818, CFI = 0.905, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.057).

The results are presented in Figure 1. Hypotheses 1 and 2 assumed that BM is positively related to work engagement and subjective career success, whereas OMP is negatively related to them. The results show that BM did not have a significant direct effect on work engagement (β = 0.062, p = n.s.) and subjective career success (β = 0.105, p = n.s.). Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 2a were not supported. In contrast, OMP was negatively related to both work engagement (β = −0.170, $p < 0.001$) and subjective career success (β = −0.166, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypotheses 1b and 2b.

In the relations of job crafting, hypothesis 3, BM was statistically and positively related to job crafting (β = 0.572, $p < 0.001$), while OMP had no relationship with job crafting (β = .018, p = n.s.). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Hypothesis 4 suggested that job crafting behavior has a positive relationship with employees' (a) work engagement and (b) subjective career success. However, job crafting had a positive relationship only with work engagement (β = 0.806, $p < 0.001$), not with subjective career success (β = 0.024, p = n.s.). Thus, we found partial support for Hypothesis 4.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 suggest the mediating effects. Using the bootstrap method, we confirmed the significance of indirect paths (see Table 3). The results show that BM leads to subjective career success only through job crafting and work engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported, and Hypothesis 6 was fully supported, confirming the full mediating effects of job crafting and work engagement. In other words, employees with high BM can only perceive career success through job crafting and work engagement.

4.4 | Supplemental Analyses

To enhance our understanding beyond the hypothesis testing, we postulated that some organizational factors might impact the effectiveness of job crafting. Among the factors, we speculated that perceived organizational support (POS) is a key moderator in enhancing employee job-crafting behavior. POS refers to an

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TABLE 3 | Results of multiple mediating effects analyses.

Indirect paths (bootstrap = 5000)	95% CI		
	B	**LL**	**UL**
BM → JC → WE	0.461***	0.359	0.602
BM → JC → CS	0.014	−0.167	0.172
JC → WE → CS	0.306**	0.122	0.540
BM → JC → WE → CS	0.175**	0.076	0.323

Abbreviations: BM, boundaryless mindset; CS, career satisfaction; JC, job crafting; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit; WE, work engagement.
**$p < 0.01$,
***$p < 0.001$.

individual's perception of the extent of an organization's commitment to its employees, or that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986). POS can result in employees' engagement in job crafting by improving their intrinsic motivation or the meaningfulness of work (Hur et al. 2021). Similarly, Oldham and Hackman (2010) suggested that the effectiveness of job crafting could derive from either an actual change in job characteristics or a given opportunity for crafting jobs. That is, the circumstances or conditions that enable employees to perform job-crafting behavior are also important.

In line with these arguments, Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) proposed that human flourishing by self-determination requires important building blocks. These consist of several premises, including that people are inherently proactive; have a tendency toward growth, development, and integrated functioning; and that people need a supporting environment in which to actualize their potential proactively. In short, limited support can reduce job crafting behaviors, even if employees with BM try to proactively change their jobs while exhibiting discretion.

However, there is also the possibility that the interaction between BM and POS could adversely affect job crafting. Employees with BCA tend to be independent from the organization; they may not be concerned with the support of the organization (Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012). Moreover, the effect of POS can be different across cultures. For example, Rockstuhl et al. (2020) argued that the association between POS and organizational identification tends to be stronger in collectivistic countries like South Korea, while the associations of POS with obligation or trust are stronger in individualistic countries. There is room for that BM and organizational identification can be incompatible, so, in South Korea, the interaction effect can be negative. These results can make it difficult to make inferences about the interaction between BM and POS.

Based on this discussion, POS was inputted into our model to test its moderating effect. POS was measured using seven items that showed high factor loadings as validated by Eisenberger et al. (1986). The Cronbach's alpha of POS was 0.88. The next stage involved a multiple-group analysis in which the sample was divided into three groups based on the employees' degree of POS (low, medium, and high). The model for this analysis did not show a good fit (χ^2 = 3969.33, df = 2454, CFI = 0.817, RMSEA = 0.061, SRMR = 0.077), but according to Awang (2012), indices were restrictively acceptable. Table 4 illustrates the difference between the groups. Yet, the moderating effect of POS appeared to be negative, implying that POS weakens the relationship between BM and job crafting. The χ^2 difference between the base model and the restricted model was significant ($p < 0.05$).

5 | Discussion

This study aimed to elucidate how employees' BCA leads to subjective career success within their organization. Although this relationship has been previously investigated (Gerli et al. 2015; Kundi et al. 2021; Li et al. 2022), we also postulated indirect effects of job crafting and work engagement. As shown in Figure 1 and Table 3, the results represent an integrative mechanism that links the hypothesized variables, based on the extensively recognized literature on SDT (Gagné and Deci 2005; Meyer and Gagné 2008). The focus of SDT on basic psychological needs has recently been associated with individual factors. Several studies have suggested that job crafting can satisfy employees' basic psychological needs in the workplace (Slemp and Vella-Brodrick 2014; Olafsen et al. 2025), and as BCA is an initiator of job crafting, it is noteworthy to relate the BCA, job crafting, work engagement, and subjective career success based on SDT to articulate the current career paradigm.

Similar to the findings reported by previous meta-analysis (Li et al. 2022), BM was positively related to employees' subjective career success through job crafting and work engagement, while OMP was not. These findings can be attributed to the characteristics of BCA, such as pursuing a self-directed career (Arthur 1994), but differences between BM and OMP exist because of how employees accomplish self-determined careers (crossing either task or organizational boundaries).

Moreover, by examining the mediating effect with a multiple mediation model, we identified that the significant indirect effects of BM lead to subjective career success through job crafting and work engagement. These findings are important since BCA cannot be simply related to job attitudes because of the BCA feature that employees manage their own careers through various activities (Briscoe et al. 2006; Enache et al. 2011b). This means that the effects of an organization's efforts to connect employee BCA and subjective career success are spurious because employees can perceive or obtain career success through activities outside their organizations. In this context, the present study identified job crafting as a key mediator explaining why BM leads to work engagement and subsequently enhances subjective career success.

Our unhypothesized moderating effect was that POS facilitates job-crafting behavior. However, by conducting multiple group analyses, we found the negative moderating effect of POS, as opposed to what was initially thought. This is possibly because employees with BM set clear objectives through their jobs to succeed in proactive careers. Thus, it could be concluded that unnecessary organizational support (e.g., presenting strict career paths; too much attention) puts pressure on proactive employees or hinders person-job fit.

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TABLE 4 | Results of multiple group analysis.

Dependent variables	Independent variables	Group 1 (low POS)	Group 2 (medium POS)	Group 3 (high POS)
JC	BM	0.625***	0.632***	0.469***
	OMP	0.036	0.068	−0.034
WE	BM	0.073	−0.019	0.037
	OMP	−0.226***	−0.088	−0.119**
	JC	0.718***	0.755***	0.637***
SCS	BM	−0.068	0.210	0.040
	OMP	−0.257**	−0.170*	−0.048
	JC	0.444*	−0.148	−0.125
	WE	−0.132	0.581*	0.631*

Abbreviations: BM, boundaryless mindset; JC, job crafting; OMP, organizational mobility preference; POS, perceived organizational support; SCS, subjective career success; WE, work engagement.

*$p < 0.05$,

**$p < 0.01$,

***$p < 0.001$.

The study results suggest several theoretical implications. First, BM and OMP were confirmed to predict work attitudes and behaviors, respectively. Specifically, BM was positively related to job crafting, work engagement, and subjective career success, while OMP was negatively related to them. These results are consistent with a previous meta-analysis (Li et al. 2022) and indicate that researchers should distinguish between the effects of BM and OMP. Moreover, our study has particular implications since the research was conducted in a Korean context. Therefore, these results suggest a trend in which the Korean labor market has become more uncertain, similar to those in Western countries.

Second, the serial mediation model was tested, focusing on intraorganizational processes. Several prior studies have examined the relationships between our study variables (Akkermans and Tims 2017; Dubbelt et al. 2019; Kundi et al. 2021), but our study directly identifies the mechanism of how employees with BCA flourish by considering their vocational activities both in and outside of their organizations. Furthermore, by exploring the multidimensional aspects of job crafting, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for how boundaryless careerists deal with career proceedings. These results adduce that researchers must deliberate both sides of the career properties when examining contemporary employment conditions.

Third, this study explored the contexture effect of POS that can affect the extent of employees' job crafting. Previous studies also reported that POS enhances job crafting (Hur et al. 2021; Cheng and Yi 2018), but in this study, the interaction of BM and POS yielded an opposite result. Although our result should be interpreted with caution due to the poor model fit of the multiple group analysis, it also suggests that previous studies on the interaction between BM and POS (Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012; Rockstuhl et al. 2020) have to be revisited. That is, researchers should review the particular mitigating circumstances or individual differences when considering the taken-for-granted positive relationship between POS and job crafting.

5.1 | Practical Implications

This study also has practical implications for managers. First, managers need to identify and manage the BCA of applicants or incumbents to effectively recruit or develop core talents. As can be seen from the results of the study, BCA does not always lead to negative results within organizations, and in particular, BM has a particularly strong positive relationship with work engagement and subjective career success. Considering the value or the characteristics of employees with high BM, such as proactivity or growth desire, they can have positive long-term consequences for an organization. Therefore, it is necessary to manage employees with high BM (and low OMP) to create core values.

However, if an employee's BM is high, expectations for employability are also high. Thus, to retain them in the organization, external and intrinsic rewards corresponding to performance should be provided so that they can coexist with their organizations. For example, the correlation coefficients in Table 1 reveal that younger employees had greater OMP, and this can be interpreted as indicating that employees in their 20s and 30s with high BM are more likely to leave their organizations than older employees. Thus, effective compensation or incentives to retain them should be fully considered. Additionally, organizational career development can enhance employees' positive attitudes or retention (Jena and Nayak 2023), so it should be paired appropriately with employees' self-directed career development.

Second, effective job crafting is important for employees with BCA to engage in their work. The organization needs to understand employees' BCA, design tasks accordingly, and educate them to take the lead in job crafting. This will enable employees to become passionate about their jobs and careers, leading to beneficial results for their organizations. Furthermore, the faster an organization changes, the more suitable and advantageous it will be for those who pursue a proactive career that can improve their jobs and organizations. Since job descriptions cannot cover

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all job changes caused by organizational change, organizations should increase their overall capabilities and create additional value by deploying employees with high BCA to jobs that require many changes and encouraging job crafting.

In contrast, as the labor market becomes increasingly flexible, employees are more likely to turn into boundaryless careerists, endeavoring to strengthen their employability. This means that employees are ready to move to another organization at any time, so their needs should be realized within an organization to not only remain in it but also create value for it. Job crafting is important here, but managers must be anticipatory in assigning challenging tasks to employees. It will be important to ensure employees perceive that their current organization can provide them with learning opportunities and career opportunities, and progress, and is therefore a place where they can enhance their employability. For example, the characteristics of BCA, such as transferable skills, psychologically meaningful work, individualized career responsibility, training through on-the-job training (OJT), and continuous learning (Sullivan 1999), can produce synergy with job crafting.

Third, employees with a BM try to build their own careers based on high proactivity, rather than relying on their organization. Even in job changes, they may not need excessive support from the organization because they find improvements that meet their needs and initiate changes in themselves rather than depending on organization-led support. In particular, organization-led uniform support that does not consider individual differences can be ineffective in encouraging retention, as it can be burdensome for employees with high BM or can inadvertently become a job demand, reducing job crafting motivation. Nevertheless, given that organizational support remains an important factor in effective job crafting, it is undesirable for organizations to provide no support at all. Studies have shown that young employees in their 20s and 30s show more job-crafting behavior, and these activities, which involve accessing and utilizing job resources and avoiding demands, will be difficult for them to independently perform with individual status or authority. Therefore, it can be said that it is essential to grant organizational autonomy for effective job crafting.

To remain attractive to its employees, an organization must provide them with an appropriate level of support. Employees who meet their individual needs will remain attracted to their organizations, and although aware of their high employability, they will not easily move to other organizations. Therefore, organizations should value these employees' contributions and meet their needs as much as possible. However, when an organization's resources are limited, excessive support can lead to negative consequences for individuals as well as the organization, so focusing on giving autonomy, for example, may be a more efficient strategy for resource allocation.

In summary, to fully harness their employees' capabilities, organizations must fully consider job crafting. Employees should be assigned work that allows them to identify problems, solve them, and produce results from a front-line perspective, all of which emphasize their individual values and potential, as opposed to the traditional top-down approach. For example, the Millennials and generation Z (MZ), which will account for a large portion of the economically active population in the future, values decision-making authority and autonomy (Bencsik et al. 2016), and organizational effectiveness will be further improved if they perceive that they can change their organization through job crafting.

Finally, given that boundaryless careerists can perceive career satisfaction within their organization, it is incumbent upon career counselors to verify whether the employees' work environments are actually conducive to career success (Kundi et al. 2021). In an era of increased career diversity, reconciling mismatched goals or values between employees and organizations can be particularly challenging. However, where the work environment allows for individual autonomy, it can be a beneficial strategy for employees to change the boundaries of their work by encouraging job-crafting behavior (Riasnugrahani et al. 2019). In other words, engaging in job crafting can simultaneously enhance organizational productivity and individual career success; thus, fostering job crafting, which leads to balancing each side of goals, will be important to career counselors.

6 | Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contribution of this study, it also has several limitations. First, it utilized cross-sectional data, limiting causal inferences about the proposed relations. Although the discussions supported the causal directions of the structural equation model, alternative approaches, such as longitudinal designs, are necessary to strengthen such causality. Furthermore, a self-reported survey method was used that has a deficiency of common method bias. All of the study variables (BCA, job crafting, work engagement, subjective career success) are psychological concepts that are well-assessed by self-reporting (Conway and Lance 2010), but only Harman's one-factor test was conducted to identify common method bias. Thus, future research should use other methods such as the marker variable technique, or take various sources of respondents.

Second, the study analyzed the mediating effect of job crafting, considered as an intraorganizational activity. However, BCA is a comprehensive concept that includes attitudes or behaviors both in and out of the organization, as previously stated. Therefore, interorganizational or external activities can also affect employees' work engagement and subjective career success; thus, testing only internal processes oversimplifies the complicated phenomena of actual organizations. To generate more nuanced results, future research must consider more variables, such as interorganizational behavior (e.g., networking behavior), to improve clarity. Similarly, this study only utilized individual-level variables, so it can provide guidelines for managing a single employee, but not general directions for managers. For instance, POS reflects employees' perceptions of an organization's commitment; thus, it may not capture actual organizational support. Therefore, future research must consider additional variables (e.g., actual organizational support) or multilevel methods using other nested variables.

Third, some methodological issues should be addressed. We removed some items from the questionnaire because they did not reflect the Korean context, which requires more rigorous

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judgment and validation. We have checked some validity through CFA, but in the future, measures such as rigorous judgment by experts will be required. Hence, the MIs we used should also be handled with caution. While it is desirable that the model is modified to improve the goodness-of-fit index, adding MIs from a sample extracted from a specific population may limit some degree of the generalizability of the study results (MacCallum et al. 1992).

Lastly, some of the variables (BCA, job crafting) in the study may vary in magnitude depending on the industry in which the employees are engaged. We were able to identify respondents' occupations, but did not measure industry, so we could not account for this. Future researchers may benefit from analyzing differences in employee attitudes across industries or examining differences in the effects of BCA or job crafting on work engagement and subjective career success.

Author Contributions

Younggun Kim: conceptualization, methodology, analysis, investigation, writing—original draft, writing—review and editing. **Keummi Lee**: methodology, writing—original draft. **Jang-Ho Choi**: conceptualization, analysis, writing—review and editing, supervision

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data collected for this study can be obtained from the first author upon request.

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Appendix

TABLE A1 | Measurement items.

Boundaryless career attitudes (Briscoe et al. 2006)
1. I enjoy working with people outside of my organization.
2. I enjoy jobs that require me to interact with people in many different organizations.
3. I enjoy job assignments that require me to work outside of the organization. **(6)**
4. I like tasks at work that require me to work beyond my own department. **(5)**
5. I would enjoy working on projects with people from across many organizations.
6. I have sought opportunities in the past that allow me to work outside the organization.
7. I am energized by new experiences and situations. **(8)**
8. I seek job assignments that allow me to learn something new.
9. If my organization provided lifetime employment, I would never desire to seek work in other organizations. **(Reversed)**
10. In my ideal career, I would work for only one organization.
11. I would feel very lost if I couldn't work for my current organization.
12. I like the predictability that comes with working continuously for the same organization. **(Reversed)**
13. I prefer to stay in a company I am familiar with rather than look for employment elsewhere. **(Reversed)**
Work engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2006)
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy. **(2, 9)**
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
3. I am enthusiastic about my job.
4. My job inspires me.

(Continues)

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TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Boundaryless career attitudes (Briscoe et al. 2006)
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work. **(Extracted)**
6. I feel happy when I am working intensely.
7. I am proud of the work that I do.
8. I am immersed in my work. **(9)**
9. I get carried away when I am working.
Career satisfaction (Greenhaus et al. 1990)
1. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.
2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.
3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.
4. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement. **(5)**
5. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.
Job crafting (Tims et al. 2012)
1. I try to develop my capabilities. **(2, 3)**
2. I try to develop myself professionally. **(3, 5)**
3. I try to learn new things at work.
4. I ask my supervisor to coach me. **(Extracted)**
5. I ask whether my supervisor is satisfied with my work. **(6, 7, 8, 19)**
6. I look to my supervisor for inspiration.
7. I ask others for feedback on my job performance. **(8)**
8. I ask colleagues for advice. **(19)**
9. When an interesting project comes along, I offer myself proactively as a project co-worker. **(11)**
10. If there are new developments, I am one of the first to learn about them and try them out.
11. When there is not much to do at work, I see it as a chance to start new projects.
12. I regularly take on extra tasks even though I do not receive extra salary for them.
13. I try to make my work more challenging by examining the underlying relationships between aspects of my job. **(Extracted)**
14. I make sure that I use my capacities to the fullest. **(Extracted)**
15. I decide on my own how I do things. **(Extracted)**
16. I make sure that my work is mentally less intense. **(17, 18, 19, 20, 21)**
17. I try to ensure that my work is emotionally less intense. **(18, 19, 20)**
18. I manage my work so that I try to minimize contact with people whose problems affect me emotionally. **(19, 20, 21)**
19. I organize my work so as to minimize contact with people whose expectations are unrealistic. **(20, 21)**
20. I try to ensure that I do not have to make many difficult decisions at work. **(21)**
21. I organize my work in such a way to make sure that I do not have to concentrate for too long a period at once.

Note: A bolded number in parentheses means that the error covariance path with the corresponding number of items in the variable was added.

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