Entrepreneurial Crafting for Well-Being[1]

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurs in Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe are often in precarious positions compared to salaried employees; they are outside organized occupational health care systems and solely responsible for their own well-being. It is therefore important that they have ways to proactively enhance their well-being. Building on the concepts of job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life balance crafting, this study proposes a new concept of entrepreneurial crafting for well-being (ECW) and examines it in Finland, using open-ended written survey responses and group discussions with 39 solo self-employed individuals and small-business owners. Qualitative content analysis shows that the most common forms of ECW are work–life crafting and leisure crafting, while cognitive, task, and relational crafting were the least frequently mentioned. The study contributes to the entrepreneurial well-being and crafting literature by showing that crafting in work and other domains can be used outside salaried work to promote well-being.

KEYWORDS

entrepreneur / entrepreneurial crafting for well-being / Finland / job crafting / self-employed / well-being

Introduction

Entrepreneurs are an important part of the economy and society (Pahnke & Welter 2019). They form a large part of the workforce in Finland, with the self-employed people comprising 13.2% of workers, which is the highest in the Nordic countries (OECD 2024b); in the European Union (EU), self-employed people are 13.7% of the workforce (Eurofound 2024, p. 7). However, entrepreneurs in Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe are often in a precarious position compared to salaried employees: They are less likely to have coverage for unemployment or work injury or to have paid sick leave (ISSA 2024). For example, 68% of Finnish solo self-employed individuals do not have an occupational health care service (Hämeenniemi & Hellstén 2022). Furthermore, entrepreneurial work has challenging aspects, such as high responsibilities, uncertainty, risks, and heavy workloads (Dijkhuizen et al. 2016). Since entrepreneurs are solely responsible for coping with these demands, taking care of their own well-being, and creating or acquiring support systems, it is important to find new ways for them to proactively enhance their well-being (Schmitt & Prasastyoga 2024).

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Job crafting refers to the changes that individuals make to their work or work roles to create a better fit for themselves (Tims et al. 2022) and is associated with enhanced employee well-being and performance (Boehnlein & Baum 2022; Lichtenthaler & Fischbach 2019; Rudolph et al. 2017). Entrepreneurs can also benefit from crafting to improve the fit between themselves and the business (Boesten et al. 2024), which may further promote their well-being. However, entrepreneurial job crafting has rarely been studied (Lazazzara et al. 2020) because, by definition, job crafting occurs within the context of prescribed jobs (Berg et al. 2010), which are characterized by clear descriptions and specified tasks (Bruning & Campion 2018).

Entrepreneurs have the dual roles of employee and manager (Boesten et al. 2024), and when starting a business, an entrepreneur can shape the company to best suit their personal needs; entrepreneurs have the freedom to specify the content of their business and how it is run. Indeed, becoming an entrepreneur can be viewed as a form of career crafting that incorporates 'an individual's proactive behaviors aimed at optimizing career outcomes through improving person–career fit' (De Vos et al. 2019, p. 129).

External and environmental factors, such as national legislation, market situations, agreements with clients, and home-related responsibilities, set limits on entrepreneurial work, while internal factors may include the entrepreneur's personal characteristics, knowledge, resources, and aspirations. Within these limits, entrepreneurs may engage in crafting, which, in the entrepreneurial context, can be viewed as 'a proactive behavioral strategy focused on what entrepreneurs can do in their role of employee within their own business to improve the fit between their preferences and their business' (Boesten et al. 2024, p. 9).

Calls have therefore been made to study job crafting in the context of alternative forms of employment and work settings, such as those of entrepreneurs (Bakker et al. 2012; Leung & Fong 2024). Furthermore, the scope of crafting research has broadened beyond the work domain (Tims et al. 2022) to include constructs such as work–life balance crafting (Sturges 2012) and leisure crafting (Petrou & Bakker 2016). This study seeks to address these calls by analyzing job crafting among solo self-employed individuals and small-business owners in Finland, focusing on not only how they craft their jobs but also how they craft their leisure time and the balance between the two to enhance their entrepreneurial well-being. By combining aspects from the existing concepts of job crafting, work–life balance crafting, and leisure crafting with the context of entrepreneurs, we propose a new concept of entrepreneurial crafting for well-being (ECW), by which we refer to the changes entrepreneurs make to their work, leisure time, and work–life relationship that target entrepreneurial well-being. The research question we aim to answer is thus 'What kind of crafting actions entrepreneurs make or plan to increase their well-being in terms of the content, direction and life domains of crafting, and how well these fit with existing theorization of job crafting?'

In this study, we empirically examine ECW using qualitative content analysis of open-ended written survey responses and group discussions with 39 Finnish entrepreneurs. The participants were owner-managers of micro and small enterprises (i.e., enterprises that employ from 0 to 49 people; OECD 2024a), including both solo self-employed individuals who worked for their own businesses but did not employ anyone else (Rasmussen et al. 2019) and employer entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial well-being

We define the concept of the entrepreneur using an occupational perspective (Gorgievski & Stephan 2016) to include self-employed individuals and owner-managers of a business (Van Praag & Versloot 2007). Generally, well-being—and more specifically, well-being at work—is considered a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional phenomenon (Laine & Rinne 2015; Tov 2018). Well-being at work refers to the quality of working lives, including aspects of occupational safety and health (Mascherini 2021), with concepts like job satisfaction, engagement, and flourishing used to measure it (Fisher 2014). Entrepreneurial well-being is distinct and defined as 'the experience of satisfaction, positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and psychological functioning in relation to developing, starting, growing, and running an entrepreneurial venture' (Wiklund et al. 2019, p. 579). This definition comprises subjective well-being experiences (Diener et al. 1999), and positive psychological functioning (Ryff 1989) that includes aspects of both psychological and social well-being.

Well-being is important for entrepreneurs both for its own sake (Wach et al. 2016) and because of its positive association with entrepreneurial success in business and persistence in entrepreneurship (Stephan 2018). Conversely, entrepreneurial ill-being—emotional exhaustion—is associated with entrepreneurial exit (Shahid & Kundi 2022). Entrepreneurs benefit the economy and society (Pahnke & Welter 2019) by employing a significant number of people; in 2022, micro and small enterprises employed 77.5 million people in the EU (Eurostat 2024). Thus, entrepreneurial ill-being comes with costs to both entrepreneurs and society (Stephan 2018).

Entrepreneurship itself can have both positive and negative effects on entrepreneurs' well-being, which is encapsulated in the two opposing arguments of entrepreneurial well-being research: that entrepreneurs have more autonomy and independence than wage earners and therefore experience more well-being and that entrepreneurs experience more stress and ill-being because of uncertainty and high workload (Stephan et al. 2023).

In general, individuals seem to derive greater well-being from working for themselves than from working for others (Stephan et al. 2023); that entrepreneurs enjoy higher work and life satisfaction than employees (Stephan et al. 2023) has been explained by higher levels of certain job characteristics among entrepreneurs, such as autonomy, variety, receiving feedback, significance of the job (i.e., positively impacting other people), and having an interesting job (Benz & Frey 2008; Hytti et al. 2013). Self-employment has also been associated with higher subjective vitality (i.e., feelings of positive energetic activation, such as feeling vigorous), which has been explained by a greater meaningfulness of work experienced by the self-employed than by waged employees (Stephan et al. 2020).

On the other hand, entrepreneurs' working conditions are challenging in many ways: They must cope with responsibilities, uncertainty, risks, adversity, heavy workloads, and long and intense working hours (Dijkhuizen et al. 2016; Shepherd & Williams 2020; Stephan 2018). For example, the average working week in the EU was 46.7 hours for self-employed people with employees and 39.9 hours for the solo self-employed, while it was 36.6 hours for waged employees (Eurostat 2025). In Finland, almost half (46%) of solo self-employed individuals work over 40 hours per week (Hämeenniemi & Hellstén 2022). However, whether entrepreneurs or waged

employees experience more burnout is not clear from the existing literature (Bergman et al. 2021; Jamal 2007; Lin et al. 2020).

These somewhat contradictory findings suggest that entrepreneurs have both higher well-being and higher ill-being, and the differences between studies could be explained in three ways: First, self-employed individuals are not a homogenous group when it comes to well-being (Bujacz et al. 2020); second, well-being differences between entrepreneurs and employees vary according to institutional contexts (Fritsch et al. 2019; Stephan et al. 2023); and third, the differences depend on the component of well-being or ill-being under investigation (Stephan et al. 2023). In general, individual, job-related, social, leadership, business, and societal factors have been found to be associated with entrepreneurial well-being (Mäkiniemi et al. 2021; Stephan 2018), but not all stressors have similar effects (Lerman et al. 2021; Wach et al. 2021).

The interconnectedness of the positive and negative aspects of entrepreneurial work may create dilemmas that affect entrepreneurial crafting. For example, the meaningfulness of the work and an entrepreneur's dedication to it may impede recovery because it may be more difficult to psychologically detach from the work (Williamson et al. 2021). Further, because of the pressure to secure an income, entrepreneurs may find it hard to decrease their workload and working hours, particularly under economic uncertainty, and may perceive the needs of the business and their personal well-being and recovery to be in conflict (Williamson et al. 2021). The interconnectedness of business-related factors and well-being is thus a specific feature of the entrepreneurial work context (Mäkiniemi et al. 2021).

Due to differences in individual entrepreneurs' stressors and levels of well-being, not all approaches to increasing well-being (i.e., uniform interventions) will work for all entrepreneurs. It is therefore important to determine how entrepreneurs can improve their well-being in their unique situations; it is also vital to do so proactively, before they encounter well-being challenges. In our view, crafting provides important means for increasing well-being by affecting tasks, social relations, and cognitive aspects of entrepreneurs' work as well as their leisure time and work–non-work balance. However, entrepreneurial job crafting has only occasionally been studied, as detailed below.

Job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life balance crafting

Generally, job crafting refers to the various efforts made to enhance the fit between a person's attributes and their work environment (Rudolph et al. 2017). More specifically, two dominant perspectives have described job crafting; Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 179) defined it as 'the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work' to make their jobs more meaningful and satisfying. In contrast, Tims et al. (2012, p. 174), building on the job demands–resources (JD–R) model (Bakker & Demerouti 2007; Demerouti et al. 2001), defined job crafting as 'the changes that employees may make to balance their *job demands* and *job resources* with their personal abilities and needs.' These two conceptualizations are referred to as role-based and resource-based job crafting, respectively (Bruning & Campion 2018).

Researchers have also differentiated between two job crafting orientations (Zhang & Parker 2019), described as approach and avoidance job crafting (Bruning & Campion 2018)—or, using different terminology, promotion-focused and prevention-focused

(Lichtenthaler & Fischbach 2019). These orientations reflect two major motives: the pursuit of desired goals to facilitate thriving versus the prevention of undesired outcomes to facilitate surviving (Elliot 2006; Holman et al. 2024). Thus, approach crafting involves pursuing desirable work goals (e.g., meaningful work, well-being) through actions that seek to expand positive aspects of work, whereas avoidance crafting involves preventing undesirable work outcomes (e.g., task failure, high stress) through actions that seek to avoid or reduce negative aspects of work (Holman et al. 2024; Zhang & Parker 2019). Notably, promotion-focused job crafting relates to higher levels of employee well-being (such as work engagement) and lower levels of ill-being (such as burnout); in contrast, prevention-focused job crafting is linked with higher levels of ill-being but not associated with well-being (Boehnlein & Baum 2022).

While job crafting focuses on reshaping one's work, leisure crafting focuses on the non-work domain and work–life balance crafting on their interface (De Bloom et al. 2020). Leisure crafting refers to 'the proactive pursuit of leisure activities targeted at goal setting, human connection, learning, and personal development' (Petrou & Bakker 2016, p. 508) or more generally to 'the way in which individuals craft their free time' (Lazazzara et al. 2020, p. 8). Work–life balance crafting—or work–non-work balance crafting—then encompasses efforts to balance different life domains and entails physical, relational, and cognitive forms of crafting (Kerksieck et al. 2024; Sturges 2012); such efforts can be characterized as proactive, self-initiated, and goal-oriented (Sturges 2012). Work–life balance has also been studied outside the crafting literature from the perspective of boundary management—that is, the principles one uses to separate, integrate, and regulate roles, demands, and expectations into specific realms of home and work (Kossek et al. 2012; Piszczek & Berg 2014). Thus, crafting at the interface of work and non-work may involve both managing the boundaries of different life domains and balancing between them (De Bloom et al. 2020).

Entrepreneurial crafting for well-being

As noted by Lazazzara et al. (2020, p. 10), the 'starting point of the job crafting process is related to the individual's motivation to craft.' The motives listed by Lazazzara et al. do not include well-being, but they do include closely related motives, such as pursuing desirable goals (e.g., meaningfulness, better person–job fit, improved work–life balance) or avoiding adversity. In the present study, we consider well-being to be a potentially relevant motivation for entrepreneurs to engage in crafting. We suggest that enhancing their own well-being is a desirable goal for entrepreneurs because it is a prerequisite for persisting as an entrepreneur, continuing to work, and achieving success in business (Stephan 2018). Entrepreneurial crafting may also act as a coping strategy that contributes to entrepreneurial well-being (Boesten et al. 2024; George & Hamilton 2011).

To study well-being crafting among entrepreneurs, we introduce the novel concept of entrepreneurial crafting for well-being (ECW), defined as the task, relational, and cognitive changes, techniques, and activities that entrepreneurs make or use regarding their work, their leisure time, and the work–life relationship, which target promoting entrepreneurial well-being. We also include the changes that entrepreneurs plan to make and thus include the will to engage in ECW; this is based on the findings that employee job crafting intentions predict actual job crafting (Tims et al. 2015) and that self-employed

workers' intentions to practice self-care predict engagement in self-care (Schmitt & Prasastyoga 2024).

The few existing studies on entrepreneurial job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life balance crafting have not explicitly analyzed crafting for well-being; nevertheless, they have identified crafting activities that are beneficial for entrepreneurial well-being. For example, LaRue et al. (2024) found that entrepreneur coaches craft recovery (e.g., sleeping, eating well, exercising, taking breaks) to enter and sustain flow—that is, 'intense engagement in their work' (p. 2). Similarly, in a study of the work–life balance crafting of copreneurs (i.e., co-working couples who run their own business), Dreyer and Busch (2022) found that they created several resource-saving activities: For physical work–life balance crafting, they optimized their ways of working and found ways to recover; cognitive work–life balance crafting helped them to accept their role as business owners and the importance of their health, resources, and recovery; and relational work–life balance crafting involved using and providing social support to their spouses and to other work-related relationships. Boesten et al. (2024, 2025) showed that using a combination of crafting strategies with other proactive behavioral strategies (e.g., network crafting, boundary management) across diverse life domains is particularly beneficial for entrepreneurial well-being and that crafting strategies are helpful for entrepreneurs in dealing with financially demanding times. Furthermore, Hamrick et al. (2023) found leisure crafting to be positively associated with entrepreneurs thriving at work.

Aims of the study

This study aims to examine the forms of ECW: how entrepreneurs craft their jobs, leisure time, and the balance between them to enhance entrepreneurial well-being—that is, the steps or actions entrepreneurs make or plan to increase their well-being. It also aims to add to our understanding of how to promote entrepreneurial well-being and contribute to existing theory and findings on job crafting by applying Lazazzara et al.'s (2020) framework in the context of entrepreneurs. Lazazzara et al. (2020) conducted a meta-synthesis of the theories and findings of both role-based and resource-based job crafting qualitative research, differentiating between the dimensions of approach crafting and avoidance crafting—each of which incorporates the themes of task, relational, and cognitive crafting. They also identified the dimensions of crafting in other domains, where they placed the themes of work–life crafting and leisure crafting.

We chose Lazazzara et al.'s (2020) categories for our data analysis due to the model's basis in existing theory; its wide definition of job crafting, which includes both approach and avoidance crafting; its comprehensive coverage of job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life balance crafting forms; and its basis in qualitative research. We then examine whether the identified forms of ECW match the eight types of crafting they identified.

Entrepreneurs can foster their own well-being through self-care practices (Schmitt & Prasastyoga 2024) and strategies to maintain good health (Gunnarsson & Josephson 2011), such as recovery (e.g., relaxation, physical exercise, good eating habits, sleeping, holidays), managing workload (e.g., planning, control, setting limits), and social contact (e.g., networking). Entrepreneurs may also engage in career self-management strategies that have been linked with career sustainability—that is, happiness, health, and productivity (van den Groenendaal et al. 2022). We believe our construct of ECW adds to these

approaches by building on a more comprehensive framework that covers the content of crafting (task, relational, and cognitive), the direction of crafting (approach and avoidance), and life domains (work, life, and their relationship).

Methods

Procedure and participants

The data were collected during an event for entrepreneurs in April 2018 in a large city in Finland. The event, which was organized by the authors in collaboration with a local entrepreneur association, aimed to support entrepreneurs' well-being at work. The participants in the event and thus the study were recruited using several methods: The local entrepreneur organization published an invitation through their website, newspaper, and social media channels; digital invitations were distributed by a local university's entrepreneurial students' unit, a local startup accelerator company, the authors, their research group and university unit; an invitation was published on a website that offers information on local business events; and invitations were sent in direct emails to relevant entrepreneur networks.

The invitations stated that the event was about work well-being and was intended for solo self-employed people and small-business owners. The participants were thus people who considered themselves part of these groups. Both in the invitation and at the beginning of the event, the potential participants were told that they would be provided with information at the event about work well-being and ways to promote it; that they would have the chance to develop ways to promote their well-being and discuss these with other entrepreneurs; and that the collected ideas would be used both as research data and in planning services and support for entrepreneurs.

The principles of research ethics were followed in all parts of the study. The participants voluntarily enrolled in the event, at the beginning which they were informed, both verbally and in writing, that their participation was anonymous and voluntary, that they could discontinue participation at any time, and that the data would be stored according to data protection regulations and not given to any third parties.

The participants were divided into seven small groups consisting of between four and seven participants each. One group comprised employer entrepreneurs while the remaining six consisted mainly of solo self-employed people. The participants first completed individual short survey questionnaires, which included demographic questions (age, gender, education, number of employees, years as a full-time entrepreneur during their careers) and open-ended questions about (1) the participants' current well-being at work, (2) next small step or action they could take to enhance their well-being at work, and (3) the results they expect after taking that step or action. The participants were then asked to write on Post-it notes one small step or action they thought they could carry out; these could be an answer already given on the questionnaire or something else. They were allowed to use more than one note but could only write one action or step per note.

In the second part of the event, the participants were asked to (1) discuss the small steps or actions they had written on Post-it notes, (2) group the notes according to their similarities and differences, and (3) discuss and write down—on new Post-it notes of

a different color—the kinds of support they think they would need to carry out these small steps. The group discussions took 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In the third and final part of the event, the participants were offered the opportunity to listen to a presentation on enhancing entrepreneurial well-being. No data were collected during this part of the event.

The participants were 39 entrepreneurs with a mean age of 49.6 years (range: 24–67 years). The majority (82%) were women; 54% had a tertiary-level polytechnic or university degree, 41% had completed upper-secondary-level education, and the remainder (5%) had basic-level education. The majority (79%) were solo self-employed, and the remainder (21%) were employer entrepreneurs, whose companies employed 1–35 employees. On average, the participants had worked as full-time entrepreneurs for 10.7 years (range: 0–35 years; one participant worked as a part-time entrepreneur).

Analysis

We used qualitative content analysis with a directed (deductive) approach, which is suitable when the main aim of the study is to test existing theory in a new context or to extend the theory (Elo & Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh & Shannon 2005). We also included an element of the inductive analysis by incorporating subcategories that emerged from the data (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). Epistemologically, the analysis was conducted within a realist paradigm as the aim was to capture part of the participants' reality (Schreier 2012, p. 47)—that is, the changes or actions they made or planned to enhance their well-being.

Atlas.ti and Excel were used to analyze and categorize the data. The first author initially read through the transcripts of the group discussions and marked sections that included instances of ECW using Atlas.ti; she also listened to the audio recordings of the group discussions. The initial rounds of data analysis and coding were data driven and conducted without reference to a predefined framework because the aim was to elicit a general view of the content of ECW. The eight main categories and subcategories from Lazazzara et al. (2020), together with new ones based on observations from the data, served as initial codes for the marked sections. The text sections and codes were then transferred to Excel for further categorization. Notes were made about the categories, the subcategories, and the text sections for which the categorization remained ambiguous or unclear. If a response included elements from more than one category or subcategory, parts of the response could be coded into different categories.

Distinguishing between crafting (i.e., steps that the entrepreneurs took or were planning to take to enhance their well-being) and a more general discussion or desire for support (i.e., support they thought they would need to carry out the small steps) was not always straightforward. To help separate crafting from social support desires and to obtain an overview of the range of the participants' crafting activities, we coded the survey responses and Post-it responses before proceeding further with the analysis of the group discussions. The survey asked directly for the next small steps that the entrepreneurs could take to enhance their well-being—not their desire for support—and thus reflected well-being crafting. For the Post-it responses, the participants wrote their small steps on yellow notes and support desires on blue notes, which helped in separating between them. We then returned to the group discussion data to deepen our

observations and make further refinements to the categorization; in some cases, the group discussions were also useful for providing context to Post-it responses that would otherwise have been difficult to categorize. The final categorization represents the data as a whole.

The two authors sought to decrease potential bias in coding and analysis using investigator triangulation (Thurmond 2001). Specifically, we independently coded three sets of ten survey responses; after each set, we discussed and resolved disagreements and refined the coding principles. Interrater agreement was 70% for the third set of independently coded responses. For the final categorization, the first author coded all the data and discussed unclear or ambiguous cases with the second author—these we resolved together.

The study design also entailed within-methods triangulation (Thurmond 2001) through two data collection techniques: individual written responses (survey and Post-it notes) and group discussions. We thus sought a more comprehensive picture of ECW by using both individual- and group-level data.

Results

The main categories and subcategories of ECW are presented in Table 1. The frequencies with which each category was mentioned are presented separately for the survey responses, Post-it responses, and discussion groups. As regards the main categories, work–life crafting and leisure crafting were the most frequently mentioned categories of ECW, while cognitive crafting, task crafting, and relational crafting were the least frequently mentioned.

Table 1 Categories and subcategories of entrepreneurial crafting for well-being

Category and subcategory	**Frequency, *n***		
	Surveys[a]	**Post-its[a(b)]**	**Group discussions[b]**
Approach task crafting	5	3 (2)	4
Developing skills and abilities	1	1 (1)	2
Organizing work	1	0 (0)	3
Ensuring business profitability and income	3	2 (1)	1
Avoidance task crafting	2	1 (1)	4
Delegating	1	1 (1)	2
Reducing workload	1	0 (0)	3
Approach relational crafting	2	5 (4)	6
Social expansion and increasing social support resources	2	4 (4)	3
Asking for feedback and advice	0	1 (1)	3
Avoidance relational crafting	0	0 (0)	1
Avoiding working with specific employees	0	0 (0)	1

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Category and subcategory	Frequency, *n*		
Approach cognitive crafting	5	12 (6)	5
Engaging in introspection, increasing self-confidence, and self-acceptance	3	9 (4)	4
Rewarding oneself	2	3 (3)	3
Avoidance cognitive crafting	3	0 (0)	0
Avoiding work-related thoughts	3	0 (0)	0
Work–life crafting	31	22 (7)	7
Time: taking breaks	15	10 (5)	5
Time: reducing or limiting work time	5	2 (2)	2
Time: organizing	3	1 (1)	2
Managing work–life balance and boundaries	8	9 (6)	7
Choosing to become an entrepreneur	0	0 (0)	3
Leisure crafting	27	35 (7)	7
Exercising	15	15 (7)	7
Sleeping, relaxing, resting, meditating, being present	7	12 (6)	4
Taking care of nutrition	2	5 (3)	2
Receiving massages	2	3 (2)	1
Setting home in order	1	0 (0)	0
Other	5	2 (2)	NA[c]

Note. [a]Frequencies are the number of mentions. [b]Frequencies are the number of discussion groups in which each category was mentioned. [c]Not applicable.

Task crafting

Approach task crafting

We identified three types of approach task crafting. The first, *developing skills and abilities*, concerned the development of oneself for the purposes of the job. Some participants described participating in—or thinking they should participate in—training to either find new ideas or learn ICT skills relevant to their businesses. One described acquiring new skills to widen the range of products they could sell; this mention was thus also related to the subcategory of ensuring business profitability and income.

The second type was *organizing work* and concerned the organization of the elements of work in a certain order, such as planning work tasks beforehand: 'I will plan the work for the next day the day before' (survey response). More specifically, mentions of work organization were related to the order of tasks within a workday (i.e., ensuring that the hardest tasks are completed at the beginning of the workday and the easier ones toward the end, when energy levels are lower) or over a longer period (i.e., planning non-acute tasks later in the future)—the latter of which involved task prioritization.

The third type concerned *ensuring business profitability and income*. Although these were more about the participants pondering actions to ensure their company would be profitable enough to offer increased well-being, rather than any specific steps to achieve it, we considered them instances of approach task crafting because they were related to developing a business.

Avoidance task crafting

Mentions of avoidance task crafting were related to reducing tasks by *delegating* some of them—that is, using a subcontractor for specific tasks—or *reducing workload*, which also included mentions of reducing one's responsibilities or limiting non-critical tasks (e.g., social media communications). For instance, one participant described delegating as

> getting help if possible, so that one does not try to manage alone. One can, for example, get help from someone who works on Facebook pages or something and not do the task alone, if one does not want to use one's own work time for it. (Group discussion)

Relational crafting

Approach relational crafting

We identified two types of approach relational crafting; the first, *social expansion and increasing social support resources*, concerns networking and seeking support from other people and other entrepreneurs by participating in groups, meeting for coffee or lunch, or involving oneself in a work community or shared working space. For example, one survey response described how working in an office space with the possibility of being around and chatting with other people would increase the meaningfulness of their work: 'If I could get a workroom/space where I could be together with other people, my work would be more meaningful. I miss coffee babble and the like. Now, my office is at home.'

In the second type, entrepreneurs described their efforts in terms of *asking for feedback and advice* from peers or clients regarding their work or an aspect of it, such as pricing. The need for relational support was raised in several instances when entrepreneurs discussed the kind of support they would need to help them realize their crafting goals. We did not consider these instances to be relational crafting when entrepreneurs did not specifically mention making or intending to make changes or actions but instead discussed the benefits of social support more generally.

Avoidance relational crafting

We identified avoidance relational crafting only in one discussion group—the employer entrepreneurs—which discussed challenges related to their roles as employers and how working with some employees might be more stressful than with others. One way

mentioned to address this was to *avoid working with specific employees* in the same shift.

Cognitive crafting

Approach cognitive crafting

We identified two types of approach cognitive crafting; the first was labeled *engaging in introspection, increasing self-confidence, and self-acceptance*. The participants described how they engaged in reflection on their current situations, their desired state of affairs, and how they would achieve that state. They had become aware of—and in some cases changed—their thought models regarding work to become more approving of their own ways of working and to have confidence in themselves. This involved freeing themselves from work-related feelings of guilt for not working excessively, such as by deciding what to do and then sticking to it. One participant described self-acceptance as

> admitting to myself that what I manage to do today is enough—that one doesn't have to be a superhuman performer. It is also accepting that I am enough with what I do today and what I can manage today. (Group discussion)

This also involved attitude change: The entrepreneurs noted the importance of learning healthy selfishness, such as in making their timetables, and they understood that they did not have to be constantly available.

The second type of cognitive approach crafting noted the importance of *rewarding oneself* and celebrating accomplishments by thanking oneself or treating oneself after reaching specific goals. This can involve both small things that could be done during the workday (e.g., praising oneself or eating a piece of chocolate) and activities during leisure time (e.g., going to the theater).

Avoidance cognitive crafting

Only one form of avoidance cognitive crafting appeared: *avoiding work-related thoughts*, which involves not thinking about work when not working. For example, in a survey response, one participant described avoiding work-related thoughts as 'learning how to control one's mind/shutting out work-related matters when one should not/doesn't have to think about them.'

Work–life crafting

Many of the actions to increase the participants' own work well-being were related to work–life crafting, most of which involved *time*. All mentions of *taking breaks* were grouped into this category, which ranged from small breaks during the workday and the use of natural breaks in one's work to taking free days, holidays, or just generally having more free time, such as 'to have a little break in the middle of a workday' (survey

response). The breaks themselves were categorized under work–life crafting, whereas their content—such as eating, exercising, relaxing, or being outdoors—were categorized as leisure crafting.

The second type of time-related work–life crafting concerned *reducing or limiting work time*, such as by reducing the amount of work or number of workdays or sticking to an eight-hour working day. Mentions of reducing work or workdays were considered time-related work–life crafting when they did not mention reducing specific tasks (in contrast to avoidance task crafting), such as 'I try to avoid booking too many events in my schedule to keep it from being too tight' (survey response).

Third, mentions of *time organizing*—that is, planning how to use one's time—were placed under the category of time-related work–life crafting when they did not specifically mention the organization of work tasks (as compared to work organization within the approach task crafting domain).

Fourth, some of the entrepreneurs managed or planned *managing work–life balance and boundaries* between working time and free time, such as no longer reading or replying to work-related messages (e.g., email, social media) in their free time and avoiding bringing work home 'by sticking to the boundaries that I have set to separate work and leisure time' (survey response). The time-related categories of *taking breaks* and *reducing or limiting work time* also share elements with crafting work–life boundaries.

Fifth, *choosing to become an entrepreneur* was considered a form of work–life crafting: Some entrepreneurs described having worked too much in the past as an employee and choosing to become an entrepreneur in the hope of having more free time, being able to care for themselves, and being free to make decisions regarding their jobs.

Leisure crafting

Leisure activities were commonly mentioned by participants as a way to improve their well-being. Most such activities were related to *exercising*, such as going for a walk, working out at a gym, or doing yoga. Some participants also mentioned *sleeping*, *relaxing, resting*, *meditating, or being present*, while others mentioned *taking care of nutrition*, *receiving massages*, or *setting one's home in order*. As described above, while we categorized the breaks themselves as time-related work–life crafting, we considered the content of those breaks as falling into other domains, such as leisure. For example, one participant suggested in a survey response, 'Having a small break in the middle of a workday, when I would, for example, take a walk outside and would try to think about something else than matters concerning work.' For this response, having a break was categorized as time-related work–life crafting, taking a walk outside was considered exercise leisure crafting, and thinking about things other than work was cognitive avoidance crafting.

Other

Finally, some responses or parts of responses were coded as *other,* including explanatory text that did not mention small steps to be taken and responses that were uncategorizable because they contained too little information. There were five such mentions in the

survey responses and two in the Post-it notes. The parts of the group discussions that did not relate to ECW at all were excluded from the analysis.

It should be noted that some of the crafting instances shared elements of more than one category. For example, we categorized all breaks into the work–life crafting category and the *taking breaks* subcategory; an alternative would have been to categorize such breaks under approach task crafting in the subcategory *organizing work*. Similarly, some forms of work–life crafting that were placed into time-related subcategories—such as avoiding tight schedules—could also have been placed in avoidance task crafting.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify the kinds of steps or actions that entrepreneurs take or plan to increase their well-being. The results show that ECW involves a variety of crafting forms in both work and non-work domains and at their interface, which correspond broadly to job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life crafting, as identified by Lazazzara et al. (2020). The results also indicate that the participants mentioned approach crafting somewhat more than avoidance crafting.

The most common crafting types revealed in the responses were work–life crafting and leisure crafting. The former included finding a balance and boundaries between work and free time alongside a range of time-related crafting forms, such as taking breaks. In general, time-related or temporal crafting involves 'managing the length, timing and temporal experience of the working day' (Sturges 2012, p. 1545), which is particularly important for entrepreneurs because they work long hours (Eurostat 2025). Leisure crafting was intertwined with work–life crafting because it involved activities that entrepreneurs engage in during their free time or breaks, such as exercising, sleeping, and nutrition. Choosing to become an entrepreneur was also a type of work–life crafting, which has previously been identified as a form of entrepreneurial job crafting (Baron 2010; George & Hamilton 2011) but which we suggest is more aptly described as career crafting.

The entrepreneurs also engaged in cognitive crafting, task crafting, and relational crafting, but these forms of ECW appeared to be less common than the others in the present study. Approach cognitive crafting included introspection, self-confidence, self-acceptance, and rewarding oneself. Tikkamäki et al. (2016) relatedly observed that engaging in reflective practice, such as by changing one's point of view or trusting in oneself, is beneficial for entrepreneurs seeking to promote positive stress (i.e., eustress).

In contrast, avoidance cognitive crafting involves entrepreneurs trying to avoid work-related thoughts when not working. This is a way to psychologically detach from work, which is a key recovery experience (for a review, see Agolli & Holtz 2023). It has previously been argued that an 'always on' mentality is not conductive to well-being and health (Dreyer & Busch 2022, p. 817); indeed, recovery from work is considered crucial for entrepreneurial well-being (Williamson et al. 2021), and its benefits have been demonstrated empirically (Bennett et al. 2025). However, although recovery from work is particularly important under stressful work conditions with multiple job demands, actions that promote recovery are also especially difficult under such conditions—a phenomenon referred to as the recovery paradox (Sonnentag 2018), which is amplified in entrepreneurship (Williamson et al. 2021). Work–life crafting and leisure crafting activities used by the participants in this study, such as breaks, physical activities, and sleep,

can also be considered entrepreneurial recovery activities (Williamson et al. 2021)—consistent with Gunnarsson and Josephson's (2011) findings—or more generally as entrepreneurial self-care practices (Schmitt & Prasastyoga 2024).

Task crafting actions mostly comprised approach forms related to developing skills and abilities, organizing work, and ensuring business profitability and income. Firm success and income have previously been found to be positively associated—and financial problems negatively associated—with entrepreneurial well-being (Mäkiniemi et al. 2021; Stephan 2018). Avoidance task crafting included delegating tasks or otherwise reducing one's workload; Gunnarsson and Josephson (2011) identified similar strategies that entrepreneurs use to manage their workloads, such as planning and receiving help from others.

The participants also engaged in approach relational crafting by social expansion, increasing social support resources, and asking for feedback and advice. Similarly, Dreyer and Busch (2022) identified ways in which copreneurs engage in relational crafting to facilitate their work–life balance; Gunnarsson and Josephson (2011) identified networking as a strategy entrepreneurs use to maintain good health; and Schmitt and Prasastyoga (2024) identified social interactions as a form of entrepreneurial self-care.

Dreyer and Busch's (2022) differentiation of macrodomains from microdomains may be useful for bringing together the different forms of ECW; they suggested that, when separating macro life domains—such as work and family—is difficult, entrepreneurs may seek to create microdomains, which are small areas within a macrodomain (e.g., breaks to detach from work). Entrepreneurs can establish these microdomains structurally by scheduling fixed times for different activities, including work and breaks, and then communicating their availability. In the present study, the time-related organization of the relationship between work and non-work can be seen as an example of this kind of work–life crafting; for example, some well-being crafting actions involved taking breaks during the day and using them for leisure activities, such as exercising. Dreyer and Busch (2022) further posited that entrepreneurs would need to first engage in cognitive crafting and develop the mindset that taking care of such microdomains is important. An example of this in our data is the thought model of healthy selfishness, which may be an essential step for entrepreneurs to begin setting boundaries between work and life, sticking to them, and communicating them to others—that is, boundary management. Dreyer and Busch's (2022) conceptualization illuminates how a single crafting action may not be sufficient to achieve lasting increases in well-being.

Developing work and well-being proactively is particularly important for entrepreneurs because they are solely responsible for their own well-being. Our results do not directly suggest which crafting activities are the most useful for enhancing entrepreneurial well-being, and it may therefore be beneficial for entrepreneurs to reflect on their own situations to determine which crafting activities might best contribute to improving their personal fit with their own business and thus might best produce well-being benefits. Nevertheless, it would also be useful for entrepreneurs to understand the range of aspects that affect well-being and then act proactively, using a wide range of crafting types to improve their well-being (Boesten et al. 2025).

We also encourage entrepreneurs to use task crafting (e.g., organizing work) and relational crafting (e.g., expanding social relations for social and practical support), even though they were among the less frequently mentioned crafting strategies in the present study. Social support, such as in the form of social networks, has been shown to be an

important way to support entrepreneurs (Galloway et al. 2021; Kuhn et al. 2017), and the participants in the present study also acknowledged this in the group discussions. Finally, we suggest that entrepreneurs emphasize approach-oriented crafting strategies rather than avoidance crafting because only the former has been linked with positive indicators of well-being at work (Boehnlein & Baum 2022).

More practically, entrepreneurs can use the results of this study to develop insights into how to use crafting to enhance their well-being before they encounter problems. Many of these actions and practices do not require marked time or financial investment, which is important because it is not uncommon for entrepreneurs to view investments in their own well-being as jeopardizing their company's financial success (Williamson et al. 2021). Relatedly, entrepreneurial organizations could also use the results to plan well-being promotion campaigns and activities for their members.

The present study has some limitations, particularly the study's small sample size and its unrepresentativeness of Finnish entrepreneurs. However, we did not intend to generalize or suggest that the results would apply to entrepreneurs broadly; instead, we aimed to explore the suitability of job crafting, leisure crafting, and work–life balance crafting concepts in the context of entrepreneurs and thus increase understanding of ECW. Moreover, by combining different data types (i.e., data triangulation), including individual responses and group discussions, we aimed to deepen that understanding.

Conclusion

This study introduced and examined the new concept of ECW and contributes to the entrepreneurial well-being and job crafting literatures by showing that diverse forms of crafting in work and other domains can be used outside salaried work; in this case, these forms of crafting can be used by entrepreneurs to proactively enhance their well-being. It also adds to existing studies on entrepreneurial crafting by focusing specifically on well-being, covering a wide range of crafting types, distinguishing between approach- and avoidance-type entrepreneurial crafting, and considering different life domains and their interface. Building on a comprehensive framework by Lazazzara et al. (2020), the study demonstrates the kinds of crafting actions that are emphasized among entrepreneurs.

Future studies would benefit from considering the effects of different entrepreneurial contexts on ECW, including different countries, professions, and family situations and whether the entrepreneurs employ others. Examining entrepreneurs with different entrepreneurial well-being profiles (Bujacz et al. 2020) could also provide further insights into the usefulness and applicability of different forms of ECW in diverse contexts.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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