

Idiosyncratic deals at work: A research summary

Severin Hornung*¹, Jürgen Glaser** & Denise M. Rousseau***

* Carnegie Mellon University, Heinz College

** University Innsbruck, Psychology

*** Carnegie Mellon University, Heinz College and Tepper School of Business

ABSTRACT

Increasingly established in applied psychological research, the construct of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) describes non-standard work and employment conditions, negotiated between individual employees and employer agents, such as supervisors or HR managers. Contents include personal flexibility in work hours, special job tasks, and career support. Unlike illegitimate preferential treatment, i-deals are based on procedural justice and intended to benefit both individual and organization. These and other assumptions are outlined, followed by a review of eight correlational studies on flexibility and development i-deals. Organizational, interpersonal, and individual antecedents are summarized along with outcomes related to individual and organizational benefits and mediating processes. Implications and limitations are discussed and conceptual and practical issues raised.

Keywords

Individual negotiation – human resource practices – working time flexibility – development opportunities – work design – antecedents and outcomes

Current interest in idiosyncratic deals („i-deals“) reflects shifting ideological paradigms underpinning management and organizational research (Bal & Rousseau, 2015; Liao, Wayne & Rousseau, 2016). The classics of industrial administration and bureaucratic management have portrayed organizations as stable and abstract legal entities, defined by formalized structures and standardized processes. For the sake of legitimacy and efficiency, the principle of „formalistic impersonality“ demanded equal treatment of constituents without regard of the individual person. Initial mechanistic-technocratic views softened somewhat in an institutional era influenced by the human relations movement, socio-technical systems theory, and quality of working life initiatives (Barley & Kunda, 1992). Recognizing organizations as social systems, scholars discovered an informal organization in workplace relationships, decoded social-psychological processes,

addressed issues of power and workplace control, and envisioned new forms of management infused with humanistic values (Melé, 2005). Not unlike the humanistic emphasis on personal needs and development, subsequent proponents of organizational individualization emphasize human agency, arguing that employees are not passive job recipients, but actively shape work processes and conditions through their actions and interactions with others (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Grant & Parker, 2009; Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Miner, 1987). The contemporary paradigm proffers a more dynamic and „organic“ view, prioritizing flexibility over structure, improvisation and emergence over external regulation and planning, self-organization and individual agency over command and control, relationships over economic transactions, procedural over distributive justice, etc.

¹ This article summarizes core studies of the first author's postdoctoral Habilitation research, for which he was awarded the teaching permit (*venia docendi*) for Psychology along with the title of „Privatdozent“ by the University of Innsbruck. Acknowledgements and appreciation are due to PD Dr. Bitta Herbig, Assoc. Prof. Violet Ho, and Sen.-Prof. Dr. Winfried Hacker, who acted as external reviewers in the Habilitation process. Further, we thank the other coauthors of summarized studies, namely, Tai Gyu Kim, Matthias Weigl, Andreas Müller, Peter Angerer, and Yipeng Tang. Earlier drafts of this work have been presented by the first author at the 3rd European Conference on Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences (Brighton, 05.07.2016), the 11th European Conference on Social and Behavioral Sciences (Rome, 02.09.2016), and the 20th EBES Eurasia Business and Economics Society Conference (Vienna, 30.09.2016). The studies were funded partially through the second author's research projects at the Technical University of Munich and the University of Innsbruck and the third author's H.J. Heinz II professorship.

Epitomizing these developments, i-deals direct attention to complex and dynamic social interdependencies in organizations (Rousseau, 2001, 2005). The interplay between employees and their jobs is embedded in interactions among organizational members, some assuming the role of agents to represent employer interests in negotiating innovations and deviations from standard practices. Numerous psychological constructs are related to i-deals and inform theory (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010; Hornung, Rousseau, Weigl, Müller & Glaser, 2014; Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg 2006). For instance, leader-member exchange theory suggests social exchange and negotiation as mechanisms through which shared role definitions and status differentiation in work groups develop. Reciprocal interdependencies likely exist between the psychological contract (e.g., transactional vs. relational) and the type of i-deals negotiated. Coming from a different angle, job characteristics theory has established that performing work assignments necessitates cognitive task redefinition. As elaborated by organizational role theory, this may involve interpersonal processes of renegotiating job duties with colleagues, customers, and supervisors. Negotiation of job changes was also identified as one of several socialization tactics of proactive organizational newcomers. Similar processes underlie the influential construct of job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) as autonomously enacted modifications of task, relational or cognitive work boundaries. Particularly relevant to i-deals, the broader concept of proactive behavior comprises a range of constructs, all emphasizing the active role of individuals in shaping their work. More specifically, i-deals relate to the category of proactive person-environment fit behavior, identified by Parker and Collins (2010). Although initiation and negotiation of i-deals are behavioral, however, i-deals in themselves do not refer to behavior, but manifest in personalized conditions. Further, i-deals are tied to several theoretical preconditions that will be discussed next.

1 Theoretical considerations

I-deals have been defined by Rousseau (2001, 2005) as personalized agreements negotiated between individual employees and their employer regarding non-standard terms that benefit both sides. Starting point for the study of i-deals was the observation that job features vary, not only across organizations and positions, but also depending on job incumbents. Based on formalized HR practices, general features are either standardized (e.g., mandatory benefits) or position-based (e.g., status privileges). Person-specific features can result from self-enacted or negotiated modifications. Levels of variability are influenced by numerous

factors, such as labor laws, market standards, HR philosophy, job type, and job incumbents. I-deals explain person-specific variability through individualized bargaining. Individual negotiation (authorization), mutual benefits (functionality), and idiosyncratic forms (heterogeneity) are three distinct and interrelated core properties of i-deals.

1.1 Individual negotiation

Individual negotiation is a core feature of i-deals. Typically, i-deals are initiated by employees and authorized by employer agents (e.g., supervisors, HR managers), based on some compromise, concession, or alignment of interests (Rousseau et al., 2006). Employee initiation relates to voluntariness; acknowledging imbalanced power-dependence relationships and pressures on employees to consent to agreements that are not in their best interests, voluntariness is an important prerequisite, operationalized in employee initiation (Klein, Berman & Dickson, 2000). As such, i-deals combine characteristics of formal (organizational) and self-enacted individualization (Hornung, Rousseau, et al., 2010). HR practices and programs promoting individualization are implemented „top-down“ by the employer; examples are working time accounts, training budgets, individual goal setting, and cafeteria benefit plans. At the other end of the spectrum are changes that are enacted „bottom-up“ by employees through discretionary proactive and deviant behavior. Here, person-specific variability results from individual interpretation, use, and expansion or overstepping of the existing zone of autonomy; examples are differences in how job duties are performed, compliance with rules and regulations, use of working time arrangements, or involvement in training and learning. Endorsed by employer agents entitled to authorize the resources bargained for, i-deals are distinct from behavioral concepts capturing autonomous or „self-discretionary“ actions of employees. I-deals share similarities with functional proactive behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010), which contributes to organizational goals (e.g., productivity and innovation) and may involve adopting a broader job role or engaging in active performance (e.g., making suggestions or improvements). In contrast, dysfunctional counterproductive behavior or deviance is exemplified by withheld contributions, neglect of duties, or illegitimate appropriation of workplace resources.

1.2 Mutual benefits

A second defining feature, i-deals are intended to achieve win-win situations. For employees, they offer ways of modifying employment conditions to better fit

personal needs and goals. Employers can use i-deals to increase flexibility and responsiveness in HR practices, improving their capacity to attract, retain, develop, and motivate increasingly diverse workforces. Mutual benefits distinguish i-deals from dysfunctional arrangements of organizational micro-politics, such as favoritism, cronyism, or „old boy“ networks, where rewards are based on personal ties rather than contributions and needs (Rousseau et al., 2006). I-deals, thus, are grounded in procedural justice, whereas illegitimate preferential treatment violates social fairness and collides with longer-term organizational interests (e.g., employee grievances and cynicism). Unbiased, consistent, transparent, and considered decision processes signal adherence to principles of procedural justice and lend legitimacy to reduced distributive justice (i.e., equal treatment), resulting from consideration of broader individual efforts and contributions as well as needs and circumstances. Authorization by agents acting in good faith on behalf of the employer and granting i-deals based on procedural justice is deemed critical to ensure advantages for both sides.

1.3 *Idiosyncratic forms*

Third, the idiosyncrasy of i-deals can combine several attributes in varying degrees (Rousseau et al., 2006). Heterogeneity implies a broad range of possible contents, such as work schedule, workload, job characteristics, and training opportunities, as well as variability in the number of customized job features and scope of deviations from standards. Particularity refers to personal meaning and value (e.g., personally interesting tasks; work schedule suited to family situation) and is closely related to uniqueness, implying that i-deals may only be limitedly applicable to universally valued and scarce resources (e.g., pay or promotions). Accordingly, i-deals offer customized or person-specific solutions and are not conceptually intended as instruments for increasing competition or creating tournament situations for allocating scarce resources among employees (Rousseau, Hornung & Kim, 2009). The fairness of i-deals rather rests on the humanistic idea that there are potentially unlimited features of work and employment that can be modified to accommodate different needs and preferences arising from the personal situations, aspirations and lifestyles of individuals.

2 Empirical studies

2.1 *Study descriptions*

The eight empirical studies on i-deals reviewed in the following were published between 2009 and 2015 in

the context of a research program on employee-oriented flexibility. Data were gathered in Germany, the United States, and China. A shared study feature is the analysis of cross-sectional structural equation models with a focus on antecedents and/or outcomes of i-deals at the individual level. An exception, Study 8 uses an alternative regression-based approach. Studies 5 and 6 included supplementary longitudinal analyses. Six studies used original data sets, obtained in five distinct settings; Studies 2 and 3 shared the same context (rank-and-file employees and supervisors); Studies 4 and 5 reanalyzed data from two other studies. Overall, ten cross-sectional and two longitudinal samples were included, comprising 2779 (cross-sectional), respectively 165 (longitudinal) observations (cases). Taking into account repeat responders and multiple uses of data sets, analyses were based on $N = 2025$ persons in total. Studies differed in the examined dimensions of i-deals, with an emphasis on time-based flexibility and learning-based development arrangements. Measures of i-deals were continuously revised, resulting in psychometric improvements, but reducing comparability between studies.

Study 1: Differential effects of negotiation timing and i-deal content on perceived social and economic exchange.

Study 1 (Rousseau et al., 2009) tested propositions on the interdependence of negotiation timing and content as well as their differential effects on employee perceptions of social and economic employment exchange (Rousseau et al., 2006). Included were ex ante (at the time of hire) vs. ex post (in ongoing employment) timing and contents related to the number and distribution of paid work hours (e.g., increases or decreases) vs. development and learning opportunities (e.g., special training or work assignments). Data were based on $N = 265$ hospital employees from all areas of a general hospital in the United States (e.g., healthcare, administration, and support functions). The sample was a composite of two survey waves (repeat responders removed from second wave). In addition to quantitative results, this study reports qualitative interviews to explore the phenomenon and develop survey measures. Results confirmed that i-deals made after hire have greater impact on the psychological employment relationship than those made ex ante. Whereas developmental i-deals were positively related to perceiving employment as social rather than economic exchange, work hour i-deals showed the opposite pattern.

Study 2: Organizational and individual antecedents and outcomes of i-deals in the context of telecommuting.

Study 2 (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008) examined organizational and individual antecedents (e.g., work structures and employee initiative) and outcomes of

i-deals (e.g., affective commitment and work-family conflict) in the context of a telecommuting program in the German public administration (Hornung & Glaser, 2010). Scales on i-deals elaborated on the distinction between working time flexibility (i.e., scheduling of work hours without affecting take home pay) and support for professional development (e.g., job content, training opportunities, and performance goals). Analyses included $N = 887$ public employees doing clerical and accounting work in different types of flexible work arrangements, combining home-based telecommuting (telework), external assignments with clients (field-work), and part-time work. Structural conditions promoting individualization as well as personal initiative were positively related to i-deal negotiation. The two forms of i-deals had differential and partly opposing effects. Flexibility i-deals related negatively and developmental i-deals positively to work-family conflict and overtime. Further, developmental i-deals positively influenced affective commitment and perceived supervisor performance expectations, while flexibility i-deals were unrelated to either.

Study 3: A managerial perspective on organizational and individual antecedents and outcomes of i-deals.

In Study 3 (Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2009), we tested a model of organizational and individual antecedents and outcomes of i-deals, which was comparable to that in Study 2, but reflected the managerial perspective of supervisors authorizing i-deals. The sample consisted of $N = 263$ public managers, who were supervisors of telecommuting employees in Study 2. (Studies 2 and 3 were initially parts of a single study, but separated during the peer-review process.) Aside from flexibility and development i-deals, this model also included workload reductions, which, however, showed only marginal relationships with antecedents and outcomes. Overall, results validated the employee perspective. Authorization of development i-deals was influenced by perceived employee initiative and supervisors viewed these i-deals to have positive implications for employee motivation and performance. Flexibility i-deals were dependent on structural conditions (organizational division and group size) and seen as work-life benefits. Further, supervisors tended to grant workload reduction i-deals in the context of unfulfilled organizational obligations towards employees.

Study 4: Work characteristics as mediators between task i-deals and indicators of well-being and performance.

Focusing on task i-deals as a specific form of developmental arrangements, Study 4 (Hornung, Rousseau, et al., 2010) introduced the construct into the work design literature. Reported are the development and test of a model of i-deals, integrating the supervisor relationship, work characteristics (complexity, con-

trol, and stressors), and indicators of performance and well-being (personal initiative and work engagement). Comparable structural models were tested and confirmed in two independent samples; the first included $N = 189$ hospital employees from the U.S., obtained in Study 1 (wave 2); the second consisted of $N = 135$ German hospital physicians, overlapping with Study 6 (wave 1). Leader-member exchange related positively to task i-deals, leading to a more positive evaluation of work characteristics, which, in turn, mediated positive indirect effects of task i-deals on employee initiative and work engagement.

Study 5: Job autonomy and distributive justice as mediators between ex post negotiation of i-deals and job satisfaction.

Study 5 (Hornung, Glaser & Rousseau, 2010) examined job autonomy and distributive justice as mediators between successful negotiation of i-deals and job satisfaction. Differing from the other studies, ex post negotiation was investigated as a general indicator of i-deals, and the content of the respective agreements was inferred from relationships with outcomes (i.e., job autonomy and distributive justice). This study was based on cross-sectional data of $N = 373$ hospital employees pooling both waves of Study 2 (including repeat responders). A smaller longitudinal subsample of $N = 74$ permitted the re-examination of cross-sectional relationships in manifest-variable cross-lagged panel models. Results supported the assumption that workers use i-deals to make their jobs more intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Specifically, ex post negotiation had positive effects on autonomy and distributive justice, which partly mediated the positive time-lagged relationship between i-deals and job satisfaction.

Study 6: I-deals as mediators between employee-oriented leadership and indicators of the quality of working life.

Study 6 (Hornung, Glaser, Rousseau, Angerer & Weigl, 2011) replicated and extended previous findings. Analyses were based on survey data of physicians working in two German hospitals and included two cross-sectional waves of $N = 159$ and $N = 142$ (including repeat responders) as well as a smaller longitudinal sample of $N = 91$. Strengthening links with leadership research, this study established associations of employee-oriented leader behavior in terms of individual consideration with flexibility and development i-deals. Outcomes were work-family conflict and work engagement, selected as indicators of work-life quality. Similar to Study 5, longitudinal data were used to validate cross-sectional results. Corresponding with a priori assumptions, individual consideration had consistent positive effects on both forms of i-deals, which, in turn, showed differential relationships with examined outcomes.

Development i-deals related positively to work engagement, while flexibility i-deals related negatively to work-family conflict. Cross-lagged correlation results were less clear-cut, suggesting a reciprocal influence between development i-deals and work engagement.

Study 7: An extended mediation model of i-deals, work characteristics, and mutually beneficial outcomes.

In Study 7 (Hornung et al., 2014), a more differentiated assessment of i-deals as well as an extended model of work redesign via individual negotiation was suggested. The measure introduced here distinguishes between task, career, and flexibility i-deals. The model specified differential outcomes (job performance, occupational self-efficacy, irritation) and intermediate processes (higher job autonomy and skill acquisition, reduced work overload) connected to these three dimensions. Leader-member exchange was included as an antecedent. Hypotheses were tested in a sample of $N = 187$ clinical employees of a psychiatric-neurological hospital in Germany (e.g., nurses, therapists, counselors, etc.). Supervisor ratings of job performance provided an additional data source. Consistent with theoretical model specifications, job autonomy mediated the task i-deals–job performance relationship; skill acquisition mediated the career i-deals–occupational self-efficacy relationship; and reduced work overload mediated the flexibility i-deals–emotional and cognitive irritation relationships. Replicating previous findings, leader-member exchange was confirmed as an antecedent of all three types of i-deals.

Study 8: Negotiation of i-deals, extrinsic and intrinsic work motivation, and enrichment between work and family roles.

In Study 8 (Tang & Hornung, 2015), we developed a model of employee initiative, flexibility and development i-deals, extrinsic and intrinsic work motivation, and positive spill-over between work and family. This study used a convenience sample of $N = 179$ working parents in China, recruited during a school information event. Despite sample limitations, this study makes contributions in transferring the construct into a new sociocultural context and addressing unresolved issues with regard to the positive function of flexibility arrangements (Rousseau et al., 2009). This study used broader measures of development and flexibility i-deals, for instance, including flexibility regarding the number and distribution of work hours and work location. Results suggest that both employee initiative and a supportive family background facilitated i-deal negotiation. Whereas development i-deals improved the work experience through increased intrinsic motivation and work engagement, flexibility i-deals contributed to positive work-to-family effects via a positive relationship with extrinsic work motivation.

3 Summary of results

Results were integrated in several steps. First, structured study summaries were created, including descriptions of settings, samples, control variables, in-

Table 1: Study settings and samples.

	Setting	Country	Samples	Respondents	Remarks
[1]	Hospital	United States	$N = 265$ (cross-sectional)	Hospital employees (from all areas)	Composite data from 2 survey waves
[2]	Public Administration	Germany	$N = 887$ (cross-sectional)	Clerical workers	Different divisions and work arrangements
[3]	Public Administration	Germany	$N = 263$ (cross-sectional)	Clerical supervisors	Supervisors of respondents in Study 2
[4]	Hospital	United States	$N = 189$ (cross-sectional)	Hospital employees (from all areas)	Sample overlapping with wave 2 in Study 1
	Hospital	Germany	$N = 135$ (cross-sectional)	Hospital physicians (from 2 hospitals)	Sample overlapping with wave 1 in Study 6
[5]	Hospital	United States	$N = 373$ (cross-sectional) $N = 74$ (longitudinal)	Hospital employees (from all areas)	Additional analysis of Study 1 data
[6]	Hospital	Germany	$N = 159$ (cross-sectional) $N = 142$ (cross-sectional) $N = 91$ (longitudinal)	Hospital physicians (from 2 hospitals)	Data from 2 waves and longitudinal sample
[7]	Hospital	Germany	$N = 187$ (cross-sectional)	Hospital employees (clinical professions)	Supervisor ratings of job performance ($N = 18$)
[8]	School	China	$N = 179$ (cross-sectional)	Working parents (heterogeneous sample)	Convenience sample suitable for study focus

Table 2: Studied constructs and relationships.

	Controls	Antecedents	I-deal content	Mediators	Outcomes
[1]	– Gender / Age – Tenure – Education – Part-time	– Ex ante negotiation – Ex post negotiation	– Work hours – Development		– Social exchange – Economic exchange
[2]	– Gender / Age	– Personal initiative – Telework – Fieldwork – Part-time	– Flexibility – Development		– Work-family conflict – Affective commitment – Unpaid overtime – Supervisor performance expectations
[3]	– Gender / Age – Tenure	– Employee initiative – Employer obligations – Unit size – Fieldwork	– Flexibility – Development – Workload reduction		– Employee work-life balance – Employee work motivation – Expected employee performance
[4]	– Gender / Age – Job level – Part-time	– Leader-member exchange	– Tasks	– Job control – Complexity – Stressors	– Personal initiative – Work engagement
[5]	– Gender / Age – Tenure – Education – Part-time		– General ex post measure	– Job autonomy – Distributive justice	– Job satisfaction
[6]	– Gender / Age – Tenure – Education – Part-time	– Leader consideration	– Flexibility – Development		– Work engagement – Work-family conflict
[7]	– Gender / Age – Tenure – Education – Part-time – Temporary Contract	– Leader-member exchange	– Flexibility – Tasks – Career	– Job autonomy – Skill acquisition – Work overload	– Job performance – Occupational self-efficacy – Emotional and cognitive irritation
[8]	– Gender / Age – Family situation	– Personal initiative – Family-work enrichment	– Flexibility – Development	– Intrinsic motivation – Extrinsic motivation	– Work-family enrichment – Work engagement

vestigated forms of i-deals, antecedents, mediating constructs, and outcomes. Subsequently, the most important attributes were identified, compiled, and aggregated. Tables 1 and 2 summarize settings and samples, respectively, studied constructs and relationships. Lastly, findings were organized in a conceptual model, depicted in Figure 1. Antecedents were categorized into organizational, interpersonal, and individual factors. Outcomes were grouped into organizational and individual benefits as well as mediating processes. Further, the model accounts for tensions due to unintended consequences of i-deals at the societal, organizational, group, and individual level. Such potential negative side-effects were not explicitly investigated, but are discussed as part of a critical reflection on presented results and future research needs.

Organizational antecedents

Results on the organizational factors facilitating or constraining i-deals were mixed. Structural de-standardization, such as part-time work and telecommuting, primarily supported flexibility arrangements, however, in some settings this also extended to development i-deals. In Study 6, part-time employment was associated with flexibility i-deals, whereas hierarchical status supported developmental arrangements. These differential effects may partly be attributable to the hierarchical occupational culture among physicians. In Study 7, negotiation of career i-deals was facilitated not only by a higher standing in the organizational hierarchy, but was also more common among temporary workers. Thus, in this context, individual

negotiation appears to be used by less privileged (peripheral) workers to compensate for disadvantages or counter threats of marginalization.

Interpersonal antecedents

Confirmed as a critical interpersonal or social factor for the successful negotiation of personalized arrangements was the quality of the work relationship with the direct supervisor. Evidence was found in Studies 4 and 7 with regard to leader-member-exchange, and in Study 6 for the employee-oriented leadership dimension of individual consideration. Study 3 further suggests that supervisor decisions to grant i-deals are influenced by fairness considerations to compensate for psychological contract violations as well as by structural aspects (span of control) of the leader relationship.

Individual antecedents

Personal initiative, a prominent form of employee proactivity (Fay & Frese, 2001), was established as an important individual antecedent of i-deals, predicting both flexibility and development i-deals in Studies 2, 3 and 8. Defined as the self-starting, future-oriented, and persistent pursuit of individual and organizational goals, personal initiative not only predisposes workers to seek out ways to affect positive changes in their jobs, but likely also plays a role in the decisions of employer agents to grant special arrangements. Study 8 established an interactive effect of initiative and family-work enrichment, such that proactive workers with a supportive social background negotiated more i-deals. As initiative can be developed through complexity and control at work, Study 4 included this construct as an outcome of renegotiated job design. This is consistent with the notion that relationships between personal initiative and development or task i-deals most likely are bi-directional or reciprocal. Additionally, effects of other personal attributes, such as gender and age, as found in some studies, appear to be more context-specific.

Individual benefits

Reduced conflict between work and family or personal life (Byron, 2010) was established as a primary outcome of flexibility i-deals. Specifically, results of Studies 2, 3, and 6 suggest that flexibility arrangements are negotiated to offset overburdening job demands and support employees' work-life balance to maintain or restore health and well-being. Moreover, flexibility i-deals related to a lower number of overtime hours in Study 2 and less time pressure and associated psychological strain in Study 7. Study 8 demonstrated that

flexibility i-deals can lead to positive spillover of work-family enrichment via more extrinsically motivating working conditions (e.g., pay relative to time worked). However, concerns remain that reduced or non-standard work hours achieved through flexibility i-deals may lead to lower quality treatment, such as less challenging work assignments, reduced training opportunities, fewer promotions, etc. (Hochschild, 1997; Klein et al., 2000). Study 2 provided some indication for such negative side-effects. Further, in Study 1, i-deals on the number of paid work hours affected employment quality negatively, triggering lower perceptions of social exchange and higher salience of economic aspects. This finding reinforced concerns about potentially dysfunctional effects of using i-deals to allocate scarce material resources, which directly affect the economic basis of employment exchange.

Organizational benefits

Whereas flexibility i-deals appeared to benefit more directly the individual worker, developmental arrangements related to outcomes of particular organizational interests, such as employee attachment (affective commitment and social exchange), intrinsic motivation (work engagement), and performance (personal initiative, supervisor expectations, overtime hours, and performance evaluations). All eight studies provided some indication of the positive effects of developmental i-deals for both employers and employees. Differentiating between task and career i-deals allowed a more specific allocation of outcomes related to performance and learning. As this distinction was based on a single study, however, it needs to be interpreted with caution. The same is true for potential negative side-effects of elevated work-family conflict, found mainly in Study 2.

Mediating processes

Some studies suggest that relationships between i-deals and positive outcomes are mediated by changes in extrinsic (e.g., distribution of rewards) and intrinsic (e.g., autonomy) job features, respectively the activation of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational processes. Specifically, this concerns Studies 4, 5, 7, and 8. Most substantiated was a mediating role of work characteristics, specifically higher job control (autonomy), more complex (challenging) tasks, and reduced work stressors (hindrances). Accordingly, i-deals have been advocated as an instrument for differential and dynamic approaches to work redesign and broader HR practices. Nonetheless, results on the mediating roles of extrinsic and intrinsic processes require further investigation and substantiation.

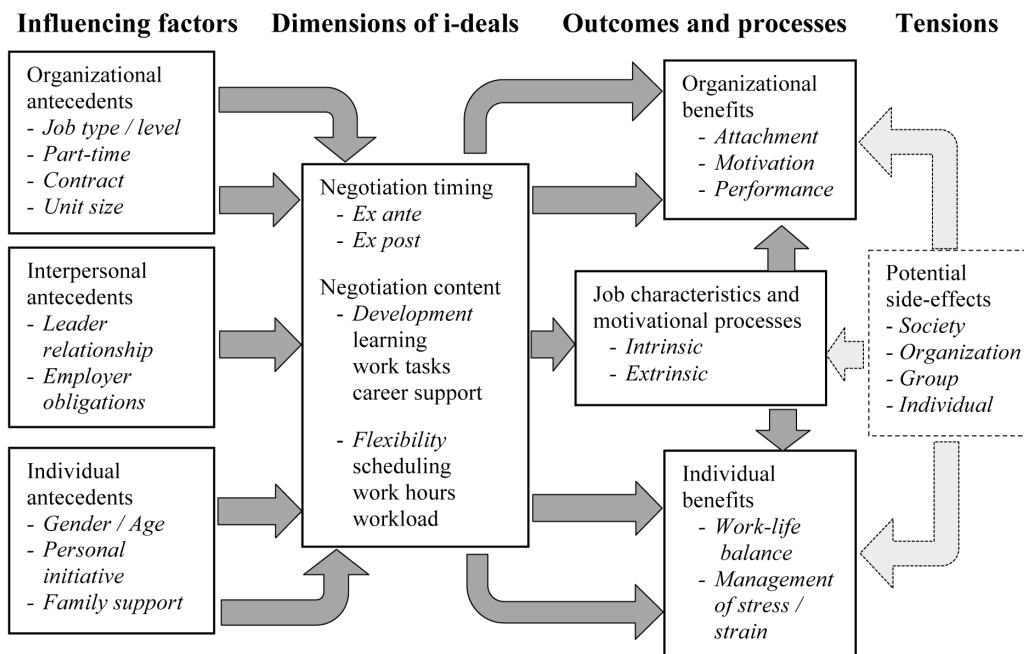


Figure 1: Conceptual model of antecedents and outcomes of i-deals.

4 Discussion

Idiosyncrasy implies abundance in types of i-deals. The main focus here was on flexibility and development. Flexibility i-deals generally entail customized working time schedules, but can include the number of work hours, workload, and work location. Development i-deals broadly refer to learning and professional advancement and can be differentiated into personalized work tasks and career support. I-deals on pay or material rewards were not explicitly investigated, but implied in Study 1 (work hours), Study 5 (distributive justice), and Study 8 (extrinsic work motivation). In terms of processes, the focus was on employee-initiated arrangements negotiated (ex post) in ongoing employment. Examined antecedents and outcomes were selective, reflecting respective study objectives.

4.1 Research implications

Reviewed studies represent an initial wave or „first generation“ of empirical research on i-deals. Whereas prior empirical evidence was mostly indirect or anecdotal, today a prolific international stream of research on i-deals exists (Bal & Rousseau, 2015; Liao et al., 2016). In the presented series of studies, some proof for mutual benefits was found, while indications of negative side effects, although not explicitly or systematically examined here, were limited. Though the notion that i-deals could transform „Tayloristic“ work

structures into „custom-tailored“ jobs, seems overly optimistic, individually negotiated agreements may prove useful as a leadership instrument for the differential and dynamic design of work and employment arrangements. Theorizing and research suggests that i-deals are most appropriately used as supplementary elements or „secondary elasticities“ to increase the responsiveness and flexibility of a well-designed and internally aligned HRM system, but not as a substitute for formalized HR practices and processes. Scholars are cautioned not to overestimate and „oversell“ the applicability and positive effects of i-deals. Instead, research should pay closer attention to the preconditions and boundaries of appropriate uses of i-deals in contemporary organizations, corresponding to their theoretical conceptualization as voluntary and mutually beneficial workplace arrangements.

4.2 Practical implications

Results suggest practical relevance of i-deals. Although in all studies the reported extent of i-deals was only low to moderate (below the scale mean), some evidence for their occurrence and relevance was found in every setting. The perspectives of employees and supervisors on negotiation, respectively authorization of i-deals, converged, thus validating each other. Further, despite mostly low or moderate effect sizes, consistent relationships with outcomes confirmed the importance of i-deals for the subjective experience of work.

Both employees and managers need to pay attention to specific implications and unintended side effects of different types of i-deals. Likely are tensions between working time flexibility and professional development. Negative side-effects can be avoided by negotiating balanced arrangements, combining non-standard working hours with customized learning and advancement opportunities. Another practical concern is the scope of employment conditions that should be subject to informal and individual versus formalized and collective arrangements. In making use of i-deals as an innovative HR practice, managers are reminded that individual negotiation as an instrument of employee-oriented leadership is contingent on a number of prerequisites, most importantly, adherence to principles of procedural justice.

4.3 Limitations

In absence of a strong theoretical framework, i-deals research has evolved in a pragmatic way. Studies have drawn on frameworks of social exchange, work design, leadership, role theory and models of motivation. This review suggests how results can be organized in a conceptual meta-model, which, however, remains preliminary and incomplete. Focusing on antecedents and outcomes of successful negotiation at the individual level, it neglects failed negotiations or unfulfilled agreements as well as systemic effects at the group or unit level (Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Lai, Rousseau & Chang, 2009). Methodological constraints arise from cross-sectional single-source data, context-specific measures, opportunistic field access, overlapping samples, and partial merging of (deductive) theorizing and (inductive) data analysis (MacCoun, 1998). Many of these issues apply to the reality of field research in general, which often unfolds in an iterative, stepwise, and retrospective fashion, rather than a linear, planned, and prospective process. The presented review focused on summarizing own research, excluding a growing number of other relevant studies.

4.4 Critical evaluation

Theorizing has emphasized the positive role of i-deals to accommodate individual needs and preferences. The boundaries between legitimate i-deals and unfair preferential treatment, however, seem blurry. Even more disconcerting is the possibility of a systematic misuse of personalized agreements in the context of broader trends in employment politics and labor utilization strategies (Allan, O'Donnell & Peetz, 1999). Not only could i-deals aggravate workplace inequalities due to differences in bargaining power (e.g., core vs.

peripheral employees), but employers could misuse „i-deals“ for a cost-efficient and case-by-case upgrading of „no frills“ work contracts, stripped of traditional benefits (Kalleberg, 2003). Reasons for such a critical assessment are found in tectonic shifts in risks and responsibilities from employers to individual employees, including erosion of labor laws and collective bargaining, shrinking employee benefits, mass layoffs, new forms of precarious employment, and marginalization of entire labor market segments. Current managerial interest in individualizing HR practices may be contaminated by a neoliberal rollback of employee rights and employer responsibilities. Research needs to address the risk that i-deals become associated with divisive labor political strategies by paying special attention to their potential „dark sides“ under real-world conditions of diverging interests and imbalanced power-dependence relationships. This includes establishing prerequisites and boundary conditions that support intended mutually positive outcomes, as well as investigations of related dysfunctional forms of differential treatment defying definitional features of i-deals.

5 Conclusion

Heterogeneity notwithstanding, i-deals on working time flexibility and professional development appear to be relatively widespread and exert clear-cut differential effects. Developmental i-deals are associated with higher work motivation, affective commitment, and increased job performance, while flexibility i-deals can improve work-life balance, reduce work overload and offset job strain. Thus, the former relate more strongly to intrinsic and the latter to extrinsic job features. Development arrangements imply higher investments of both employer and employee (e.g., extra time, effort, and dedication), whereas flexibility reduces coupling with temporal work patterns and time-related demands. Combining both may be „ideal“ to create a dynamic balance between involvement at work and personal life. However, such a „personal equilibrium strategy“ assumes high flexibility and responsiveness on both sides. In practice likely more relevant is the prevention of negative side effects, for instance, when requests for i-deals are turned down or special arrangements lead to tensions among employees. These problems are especially pertinent in workplaces emphasizing competition rather than solidarity. Advocating i-deals as a „magic bullet“ to remedy the contradictions employees in contemporary organizations are frequently exposed to would be misleading. Concerns discussed above require close attention if benefits of i-deals are not to be undermined by negative side-effects. Few positive stimuli can be expected from deals

based predominantly on market logic. Arrangements made in good faith to accommodate particular needs and situations of individual employees, however, can be a step towards developing more human-centered organizations.

References

- Allan, C., O'Donnell, M. & Peetz, D. (1999). Three dimensions of labor utilization: Job broadening, employment insecurity and work intensification. *Current Research in Industrial Relations*, 1, 15-24.
- Bal, M. & Rousseau, D. M. (2015). *Idiosyncratic deals between employees and organizations: Conceptual issues, applications and the role of co-workers*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Barley, S. R. & Kunda, G. (1992). Design and devotion: Surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37, 363-399.
- Byron, K. (2010). A meta-analytic review of work-family conflict and its antecedents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 67, 169-198.
- Fay, D. & Frese, M. (2001). The concept of personal initiative: An overview of validity studies. *Human Performance*, 14, 97-124.
- Feldman, M. S. & Pentland, B. (2005). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48, 94-120.
- Grant, A. M. & Parker, S. K. (2009). Redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3, 517-575.
- Ho, V. T. & Tekleab, A. G. (2016). A model of idiosyncratic deal-making and attitudinal outcomes. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31, 642-656.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1997). *Time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Hornung, S. & Glaser, J. (2010). Employee responses to relational fulfillment and work-life benefits: A social exchange study in the German public administration. *International Journal of Manpower*, 31, 75-92.
- Hornung, S., Glaser, J. & Rousseau, D. M. (2010). Interdependence as an i(-)deal: Enhancing job autonomy and distributive justice via individual negotiation. *Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*, 24, 108-129.
- Hornung, S., Glaser, J., Rousseau, D. M., Angerer, P. & Weigl, M. (2011). Employee-oriented leadership and quality of working life: Mediating roles of idiosyncratic deals. *Psychological Reports*, 108, 59-74.
- Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M. & Glaser, J. (2008). Creating flexible work arrangements through idiosyncratic deals. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93, 655-664.
- Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M. & Glaser, J. (2009). Why supervisors make idiosyncratic deals: Antecedents and outcomes of i-deals from a managerial perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 24, 758-764.
- Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M., Glaser, J., Angerer, P. & Weigl, M. (2010). Beyond top-down and bottom-up work redesign: Customizing job content through idiosyncratic deals. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31, 187-215.
- Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M., Weigl, M., Müller, A. & Glaser, J. (2014). Redesigning work through idiosyncratic deals. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 23, 608-626.
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2005). Flexible firms and labor market segmentation: Effects of work-place restructuring on jobs and workers. *Work and Occupations*, 39, 154-175.
- Klein, K. J., Berman, L. & Dickson, M. (2000). May I work part time? An exploration of predicted employer responses to employee requests for part time work. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 57, 85-101.
- Lai, L., Rousseau, D. M. & Chang, K. T. T. (2009). Idiosyncratic deals: Coworkers as interested third parties. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94, 547-556.
- Lawler, E. E. III & Finegold, D. (2000). Individualizing the organization: Past, present, and future. *Organizational Dynamics*, 29, 1-15.
- Liao, C., Wayne, S. J. & Rousseau, D. M. (2016). Idiosyncratic deals in contemporary organizations: A qualitative and meta-analytical review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37, 9-29.
- MacCoun, R. J. (1998). Biases in the interpretation and use of research results. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 259-287.
- Melé, D. (2005). The challenge of humanistic management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44, 77-88.
- Miner, A. S. (1987). Idiosyncratic jobs in formalized organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 32, 327-351.
- Parker, S. K., & Collins, C. G. (2010). Taking stock: Integrating and differentiating multiple forms of proactive behavior. *Journal of Management*, 36, 635-662.
- Rousseau, D. M. (2001). Idiosyncratic deals: Flexibility versus fairness? *Organizational Dynamics*, 29, 260-275.
- Rousseau, D. M. (2005). *I-deals: Idiosyncratic deals employees bargain for themselves*. New York: Sharpe.

- Rousseau, D. M., Ho, V. T. & Greenberg, J. (2006). I-deals: Idiosyncratic terms in employment relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*, 977-994.
- Rousseau, D. M., Hornung, S. & Kim, T. G. (2009). Idiosyncratic deals: Testing propositions on timing, content, and the employment relationship. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *74*, 338-348.
- Tang, Y. & Hornung, S. (2015). Work-family enrichment through i-deals: Evidence from Chinese employees. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *30*, 940-954.
- Wrzesniewski, A. & Dutton, J. E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review*, *26*, 179-201.

Correspondence to:
Dr. Severin Hornung
Carnegie Mellon University
Heinz College
5000 Forbes Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
USA
shornung@andrew.cmu.edu