

Uncovering missing voices: Invisible aspects of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals)

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Abstract

To provide context for this special issue's eight articles, we review the lenses adopted in i-deals research and its findings and then address under-studied aspects of i-deals. Part of the societal trend toward customization of employment arrangements, the i-deals workers negotiate for themselves are the subject of a growing body of research. We observe that i-deals research investigates both antecedents and consequences of i-deals at levels from the individual and dyad to team and organization. Numerous theories have been applied to explain i-deal phenomena beginning with social exchange theory in its initial research to social comparison and diverse theories regarding human needs and values. Employers are known to use i-deals to attract, motivate, and retain workers, while employees pursue i-deals to better their work lives and career opportunities. Although the positive effects of i-deals for organizations and i-dealers alike are well-documented, potential negative effects are under-studied. Moreover, white collar workers in developed countries are the recurrent focus in i-deals research to the neglect of other occupations and societies. In this article and special issue, we seek insights regarding understudied aspects of i-deals to deepen investigation into their myriad manifestations and effects.

Workers may wonder why a coworker's working life seems different from their own. Why does that person have different hours, enjoy more recognition, or seem to get promoted faster? Work psychologists have long known that individuals with the same job can experience different working conditions (Viteles, 1932). Many factors contribute to such differences. Senior workers with the same job title often perform duties different from junior peers. Workers in high-quality relationships with their managers can have more flexibility and autonomy than their less advantaged counterparts. In fact, individual differences among workers contribute to differences in working conditions too. Individuals wanting to buy a house may be more willing to work longer hours than those with a new baby. But such differences can become problematic since widely varying work conditions in the same organization can undermine workplace justice, hampering cooperation and trust. Idiosyncratic deals, and the circumstances surrounding them, are major contributors to the individuation of work conditions and the challenges it raises, motivating this special issue.

Idiosyncratic deals ('i-deals' for short) are voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standard nature negotiated by individuals with an employer (Rousseau, 2005). These nonstandard work arrangements demonstrate many positive outcomes such as greater flexibility, less work/family conflict, better supervisory relationships, more proactivity, and improved retention (Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Kalleberg, Reskin & Hudson, 2000; Liao, Wayne & Rousseau, 2016; Liu et al., 2013). People seek i-deals for different reasons, to solve work life conflicts (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018; Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2009), make work more rewarding (Hornung et al., 2014), or enhance career advancement (Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2009). Yet, the social ramifications of i-deals can be problematic.

I-deals, by definition, are intended to benefit both the worker and employer (Rousseau et al., 2006), yet they can have negative consequences under certain circumstances. Some i-deals can marginalize workers, making their non-standard contributions appear lower relative to peers (Perlow, 1996). I-deals can weaken relationships with peers and generate resentment—unless peers have access to i-deals too (Lai et al., 2009). And, i-deals can place burdens on managers and HR to avoid undermining company policy and promote fairness (Rousseau, 2005).

We seek to enhance understanding of i-deals by drawing out their heretofore invisible aspects. Two decades of i-deals research tends to provide a positive perspective focused on the i-deal granting organization and the i-deal-making employee. Little is known about broader, subtler, and long-term effects of i-deals on the careers of i-dealers themselves, and their consequences for co-workers, HR/line managers, and other stakeholders. Importantly, i-deals do not exist in a vacuum but occur in the context of other workplace practices. Their impact can depend on changes in employment stability, variations in pay distributions, or the quality of standardized benefits employers provide their workers. Context often drives the function of i-deals, influencing whether they are a supplement to generous benefits or compensation for their absence (cf Rousseau, 2005; Wong et al., 2022). Moreover, the many positive effects observed in existing i-deals research tend to reflect experiences of professionals and high-status workers and those in developed nations, raising the question of generalizability to less-skilled or lower status employees and those in less developed societies. We recognize that context matters to the nature of i-deals, to the motivations behind their creation, and to effects on their principals (worker and employer) and other stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, family). Casting a wider net in terms of phenomena, stakeholders, and settings, this special issue sheds light on unrecognized implications of i-deals.

Mapping the Field

Since Rousseau's (2005) inaugural book, interest has grown in capturing phenomena pertaining to i-deals in the workplace. To date, most research has focused on i-deal outcomes (Liao et al, 2016). This outcome-oriented research is largely at the individual level, examining how specific i-deals affect worker outcomes (Hornung et al, 2009; Liao et al., 2016). It also has prioritized the employee (i-dealer) perspective, with few empirical studies focusing on the line managers' perspective (see Hornung et al., 2009 for an exception). Interest in team-level effects of i-deals has grown (Anand et al., 2021; Vidyarthi et al., 2016) while additional research calls shows the role coworkers play in the consequences of i-deals (Lai, Rousseau & Chang, 2009; Marescaux, De Winne & Sels, 2019; Marescaux, De Winne & Rofcanin, 2021). Finally, i-deal research also calls attention to the effects of contextual factors like internal labor markets (Lee et al., 2014) and the role of organizational position and status in the process of i-deal creation and negotiation (Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1997). In addition, conceptual articles highlight the relevance of multiple stakeholders and interested parties (Afcan Findikli et al., 2022; Anand & Rofcanin, 2022). Pertinent stakeholders come not only from the work setting but also from family and friends (Kroon, Freese & Schalk, 2015). Although a systematic review of i-deal research is beyond our scope of this article, Table 1 illustrates findings from i-deal research on an array of antecedents and consequences across levels of analysis from individual and group to organization.

-----TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE-----

Theories in I-deals Research

Diverse theories have been used to explicate phenomena associated with i-deals. We now turn reviewing the theoretical lenses applied in i-deals research.

Relational theories

The relationship between the individual worker and the employer was the critical context for i-deals research at its inception (Rousseau, 2005). As such, the modal investigation of i-deals adopts a *social exchange theory* perspective, until recently the dominant approach to explicating i-deals (Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006). Its central focus is understanding why employers grant i-deals to certain employees and why workers with i-deals respond as they do once those deals are created. In line with social exchange theory, the norm of reciprocity is central to exchange relationships: Parties in a relationship are expected to reciprocate contributions to each other (Blau, 1964). For i-deals formed in the context of on-going employment relationships (i.e., ex post i-deals), the employing organization (or others in authority positions such as managers or HR) may reciprocate the contributions an employee makes by granting him/her a requested i-deal. In return, the employee responds to receiving an i-deal with positive work-related work attitudes and behaviors. In line with broader social exchange theory, Guerrero, Bentein and Lapalme (2014) find that i-deals granted by an employer can mitigate the adverse effects of employer psychological contract violation.

Yet, social exchange theory is insufficient for explicating the complexity of i-deal phenomena. First, i-deals negotiated pre-employment (i.e., ex ante i-deals) arise in what can be construed as a market transaction, not a relationship, with the employee attributing the benefits brought by the i-deal to their market-value, not the quality of a relationship with the employer (Rousseau, 2005). Second, not all employees granted ex post i-deals experience a greater bond with the organization as in the case of those who pursue self-aggrandizement (e.g., Ho & Kong, 2015). Moreover, some forms of i-deals (like flextime and reduced workload arrangements) do not necessarily motivate reciprocity toward the employer (e.g., Hornung et al., 2009). However, little

systematic study exists on the circumstances that account for lack of reciprocity where ex post flexibility and reduced workload i-deals are concerned.

Social exchange theory informs scholarship addressing relational quality in the context of i-deals, particularly the promotion of trust or disappointment, conflict or cooperation. This research largely focuses on individuals, be it the i-dealer, the employer's agent (manager), or third parties like coworkers. I-deals research from a social exchange perspective attends to the consequences of i-deal requests, particularly in the short-term, the nature of the deals actually negotiated, and spillover effects on coworkers.

Social Information

Social comparison is the second most common theory used to explicate i-deal-related phenomena. It represents how actors draw social information from talking with or observing others, which in turn informs their actions and emotional responses. As such social comparison calls attention to the cues actors derive from others, often in the settings in which they work. These cues may reflect not only observations and communications regarding individuals but also social information attached to work groups or larger collectives including gossip and stories pertinent to i-deals.

Social comparison theory is grounded in the principle that individuals derive their sense of both social and personal worth based on how they compare with others (Festinger, 1954). In i-deals research, social comparison applies in several ways. It is used to account for the social costs of i-deals, like envy or perceived injustice. I-deals research using a social comparison perspective has grown recently (e.g., Garg and Fulmer, 2017; Marescaux, De Winne & Rofcanin, 2021; Ng, 2017; Pestotnik & Süß, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) with a particular focus on coworkers, that is, those working in the same team, reporting to the same direct supervisor, or occupying similar

positions. Marescaux et al. (2019) observe that coworkers compare themselves to an i-dealer only when they consider the deal to be personally relevant or desirable. Representative of research in this context, Ng (2017) finds that i-deals increase the likelihood of coworkers envying the i-dealer and of the i-dealer feeling envied by others.

Employees identify ‘referent others’ and use them to compare their own rewards, working conditions, and social relationships (Greenberg et al, 2007). This comparison serves as a means of uncertainty reduction, self-evaluation, and self-enhancement (Brown et al., 2007). The social comparisons in which coworkers engage can be upward (particularly when they feel disadvantaged), of equal standing (seeking information on equitable treatment) or downward (particularly when they feel better off) (Pestotnik & Süß, 2021). Comparison with the i-dealer initiates cognitive appraisal of the situation (i.e., perceived fairness) which in turn triggers co-worker emotional responses including envy and/or emotional exhaustion (Kong, Ho, & Garg, 2020; Ng, 2007) resulting in behavioral reactions. Marescaux et al. (2019) calls attention to the need to use a social comparison framework to examine i-deals at both dyadic (coworker and i-dealer) and triadic levels (coworker, manager, and i-dealer in a leader-member exchange comparison). Moreover, leaders are shown to use social comparison in judgments regarding who gets an i-deal and what to grant them (Sonpar et al, 2018). A form of anticipatory justice, leader perspectives on social comparison reflect a desire to create deals that others will judge to be fair.

Individual Needs

Theories focused on individual motives, interests, and needs are the third most common perspective applied to i-deals. This diverse body of i-deals research addresses the reasons why individuals pursue or accept i -deals in the first place. Much of it addresses the needs individuals attempt to meet via i-deals as in the case of Ng and Lucianetti (2016) who posit an array of needs

motivating i-deal pursuit from striving for achievement and status to communion and connection. Needs and the related construct of values also are used to account for why i-deals have the impact they do on such individual and workplace outcomes as commitment and extra-role performance (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Wu et al., 2022). Values, specifically traditionality with respect to a society's social values, also have been studied to account for differences in worker reactions to i-deals as both principals and as coworkers (Huo, Luo, & Tam, 2014). Across a broad array of needs theorized to be pertinent to i-deals, three need-based theories stand out as commonly used to explicate motives for i-deals pursuit: conservation of resources, work design, and self-enhancement.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory specifies how resources motivate the pursuit of i-deals. A basic tenet of COR theory is that people tend to conserve and invest in obtaining resources pertinent to their valued goals (Hobfoll, 1989). Anything an individual considers helpful in attaining a desired goal can serve as a resource (Halbesleben et al., 2014). This theory promotes the joint examination of individual resources (e.g., self-efficacy) coupled with local or micro (e.g., supervisory support) and organization-wide or macro (e.g., firm culture) resources. I-deals research on COR integrates employee, supervisory and organizational perspectives. For instance, Kelly et al. (2020) focused on schedule flexibility i-deals as a source of resources that can enhance employee performance. That study found supervisor's emotional support and a family-supportive climate both contribute to the creation of flexibility i-deals.

Work redesign theory addresses worker motivation to pursue intrinsic job satisfaction. Situated in a larger body of research on job design and job crafting, i-deals are theorized to be a means of altering a job's task and skill content (Hornung et al., 2014). Both task and development-related i-deals target worker duties, skills, and responsibilities, placing such i-deals in the context

of job design. Traditionally job design was conceived as a top/down process (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In the intervening 40 years, job design research has come to recognize bottom/up phenomena including job crafting (Wresniewski & Dutton, 2001). Task i-deals constitute a middle ground, as a product of codesign activity between employee and the organization typically represented by the supervisor or manager (Hornung et al., 2010) where the worker requires authorization or managerial support to make changes in job content (i.e., an i-deal).

Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) has been applied to i-deals in a two-pronged fashion. JD-R theory focuses on both the strain reduction workers can gain by adjusting their job content via negotiation as well as the incentive value of taking on responsibilities that can lead to future rewards such as promotion or pay increases. Along these lines, Bakker and Eerde (2022) adopt the lens of JD-R theory, treating as resources those i-deals that improve role clarity, autonomy, flexibility, or development to help tackle work demands and enhance employee well-being and performance.

Self-enhancement and signaling theories are used to explicate the more self-oriented motives underlying i-deals and their effects. Both self-enhancement (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009) and signaling theory (Guest et al, 2020) describe interpretive processes involved in attributing value to an individual (e.g., a positive self-view in self-enhancement or enhanced market value in signaling theory), in contrast to the comparisons to others inherent in social comparison. They are commonly studied as supplementary mechanisms along with social exchange to account for the positive effects of i-deals on affective commitment and extra-role performance (Ho & Kong, 2015; Liu et al 2010; Ng & Feldman, 2010).

These theories explicate how individuals may especially prize the status and recognition successfully negotiating an i-deal can incur. Ho and Kong (2015), using signaling theory as a

frame, find that being granted a developmental i-deal promotes a sense of personal competence while obtaining a financial i-deal does not. Ng and Feldman (2010) find that high self-worth individuals experience less organizational commitment after being granted an i-deal than do low self-worth counterparts, suggesting that differences in self-appraisal affects proneness to a sense of entitlement or obligation.

Self-enhancement has been conceptualized by Ostroom, Pennings and Bal (2015) as a motive for pursuit of i-deals by older workers, finding that i-deals serve to increase their employability. Related to self-enhancement, organizational self-esteem (OSE), the extent to which individuals feel themselves capable, effective and worthy organization members (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), is shown to be a mediator of the effects of i-deals on workplace behavior. OSE has positive effects for task-ideals, career, and incentive i-deals while effects are negative for flexibility i-deals (Sun et al. 2021). OSE also is shown to account for the effect of i-deals on helping behavior (Guerrero & Challiol-Jeanblanc, 2016).

In effect, an array of individual differences including stable traits and dynamic states are theorized to motivate both i-deal seeking and their effects on workplace outcomes.

Implications

The array of theories represented in i-deals research are the conceptual lenses scholars have drawn on to explicate phenomena related to i-deal negotiation, granting and aftermath. Each has advanced inquiry into i-deals phenomena, while at the same time revealing some blindspots.

Despite the prevalence of social exchange theory in i-deals research we observe that there are boundaries on its applicability. Exchange often occurs outside of social relations as in the case of market-based transactions (Macneil, 1985). Early conceptualization of i-deals recognized that individualized deals can arise in the context of market transactions, as in the case of i-deals

negotiated ex ante between employer and job applicant (Rousseau, 2005). However, little research has examined the dynamics of such i-deals (for an exception see MacKintosh & McDermott, this issue). Moreover, research observes that not all i-deals motivate reciprocity (Hornung et al., 2009). To date, explanations offered for i-deals that do not enhance a relational connection between the parties have evoked the resources involved (economic conditions such as pay and benefits as opposed to relational support) or the conditions under which the i-deal negotiation occurs (e.g., during recruiting or when threatening to quit; Rousseau, 2005).

Social comparison highlights matters of fairness across individual and collective levels of i-deal allocation, calling attention to the social costs associated with i-deals. It also operates in the minds of leaders shaping how they seek to influence workers to accept, avoid, or otherwise accommodate to i-deals. The centrality of social comparison to i-deal phenomena raises an important contextual issue, how well organizational practices facilitate the sharing of information regarding work conditions, benefits, and reward allocations pertinent to i-deals—particularly since workers are motivated to monitor their standing relative to others (Day, 2013; Festinger, 1954).

Multiple theories related to human needs have been brought to bear in understanding the creation, negotiation, and aftermath of i-deals. Some need theories explicate the motives behind specific i-deals (e.g., task -ideals and job design theories) while others like signaling theory call attention to the competitive motives that increase the social costs of i-deals. Job design theories applied to i-deals highlight the co-creation of job and task design, an overlooked aspect of how work is organized between worker and manager. Just as job crafting research calls attention to the effect that individuals can have on shaping their duties and responsibilities (Wresniewski & Dutton, 2001), i-deals research highlights the joint effects of individuals and their employer in

creating individualized conditions, though little theory yet exists to account for the role of i-deals in the job design process.

As conceptual tools, theories not only advance research but also can promote blindspots when the theory a scholar adopts highlights parts of a phenomenon while leaving non-theorized facets in the dark. Although the theories above focus on the influence of relationships, individual needs, and social comparison, all largely ignore a fundamental aspect identified in negotiation research, the role of the relative power of the actors involved (Simosi et al, 2021). Power can influence i-deals in several ways. The first is how market-related power (Frank, 1985; Frank & Cook, 2010) positions some workers to negotiate particularly favorable i-deal terms. Power is a well-established factor in negotiation processes (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Simosi, Rousseau & Weingart, 2021). Workers with alternative job prospects can lever the external market advantage bestowed by scarce skills, while leverage also comes from having high standing in the organization through one's position, reputation, or seniority. Although labor economics theory has been used to understand i-deal phenomena (e.g., Lee, Bacharach & Rousseau. 2014), research seldom addresses issues of power, either internal to the organization or market-based, where i-deals are concerned (see Ayeni, Aldossari & Chaudry, this issue, for an exception).

A blind spot in social exchange-based work is the neglect of longer-term consequences for i-dealers or the organization from the granting (or denying) of i-deals. Repeated denials of i-deals can marginalize workers and limit their relationship with the organization to an economic exchange. In contrast, long-term effects on grantees can be positive in the case of pay growth and promotion opportunities or lead those granted accommodations to be viewed as lower contributors impeding their later career success.

Another blind spot is the effect of secrecy or disclosure regarding i-deals. As Day (2013) argues, coworkers are motivated to identify referent others and compare outcomes received. Organizational secrecy policies frustrate this desire and make obtaining accurate information difficult, increasing the likelihood of perceived inequity and unfairness. Lack of accurate data makes it difficult to appeal unfair actions, eroding workplace trust (Colella et al., 2007) while transparency related to benefits coworkers access reinforces it (Cloutier & Vilhuber, 2008; Colquitt, et al., 2013). Nonetheless, little research addresses organizational communication practices where i-deals are concerned.

In sum, i-deals research has broadened its theoretical focus to build on and go beyond the social exchange perspective with which it began (Liao et al., 2016; Rousseau et al. 2008). It has expanded into social information processing and diverse individual needs from intrinsic motivation and stress reduction to self-enhancement. Increasingly, studies combine several theoretical perspectives to better understand i-deal-related phenomena. For instance, Kong, Ho and Garg (2020) integrated conservation of resources and social comparison perspectives to explicate the dynamics within coworker dyads and effects on consequences. Liao et al (2017) similarly integrate social exchange, social comparison, LMX and justice theories to explicate i-deal-related phenomena. In that spirit, this Special Issue seeks to promote diverse theoretical lenses regarding the dynamics of i-deals for individuals, teams, and other collectives.

Special Issue Articles

Our Special Issue Call sought understudied, invisible, and potentially ‘dark’ aspects of i-deals. Authors were asked to bring to the fore these neglected aspects. We received submissions grounded in different theoretical frameworks and employing a variety of research designs. This

Special Issue is organized by levels, starting with focusing on invisible and understudied issues at the individual-level, and moving to articles that examine understudied matters at the team-level, multilevel and societal-level. Table 2 summarizes each article.

-----TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE-----

Tomprou, Simosi and Rousseau shed light on the under-studied effects i-deals can have on an individual employee's future pay and promotion opportunities. To do so, they investigate the perspective of the i-deal grantor (i.e., line manager), a frame of reference largely ignored (for an exception, see Hornung et al., 2009) and use both policy-capturing and survey methods. This article sheds light on *potential longer-term effects of i-deals* on an i-dealer's career by providing evidence of how managers make pay raise and promotions decisions in the aftermath of i-deal creation. Findings indicate that managers tend to interpret developmental i-deals as a positive signal regarding the recipient's performance and future contributions. In contrast, managers tend to interpret reduced workload i-deals as signals of low contribution and limited future potential, thereby reducing the likelihood of raises and promotions. However, this adverse effect of reduced workload i-deals appears to be mitigated where pay raises are concerned--for workers who help their peers. This article highlights the differential consequences i-deals can have on subsequent reward allocations due in part to the signals each i-deal type conveys regarding the i-dealer's present and future contributions. Long-term and cumulative consequences of i-deals are not yet studied, but Tomprou et al call attention to their consequential implications for workers over time.

Focusing on workers over the age of fifty, Sykes-Bridge et al contribute to the seldom studied aspect of i-deals: why older employees seek them in the first place. This study untangles several stages of i-deal creation in an under-studied population heterogeneous in its circumstances

and needs. Their findings suggest several motivations on the part of older workers: to improve work-life balance, repair psychological contract breach and help better craft their retirement. At the same time the presence of high job-role autonomy was a negative influence on the motivation of older workers to request i-deals. In the context of older workers, these authors find that several factors affect the likelihood of an i-deal being granted: the requester's value to the organization, positive employee-manager relationships, and the creation of mutually beneficial arrangements. These factors support the i-dealer's perception of the likelihood their request will be granted (called 'feasibility'), itself a predictor of actual i-deal granting. Feasibility perceptions were informed by organizational practices and policies related to i-deals, by co-worker i-deal experiences, and by job constraints.

Integrating employer (HR and line managers) and i-dealer (employee) perspectives, MacKintosh and McDermott's article expands consideration of stakeholder perspectives. This study explores both employee and employer (e.g., manager and HR) needs for the creation of i-deals, needs that do not necessarily fully align. It investigates the commonly studied ex post i-deal negotiated while workers are on the job as well as the understudied ex ante i-deal negotiated during the hiring process. Using a qualitative design, the article addresses the reasons motivating i-deal requests and their granting or rejection by the managers and HR representatives. Findings support a model of two i-deal pathways, based on logics that are either market-based or supportive. These pathways are partially based on the timing of the deal and characterized by different negotiation processes and outcomes.

Vossaert, Ansel and Ho shift our attention to another understudied aspect of i-deals: team-level responses. Using a two-wave survey, the authors focus on intra-team dynamics and examine the role of contextual factors. They identify how various stakeholders (i.e., the organization,

supervisors, and team members) shape i-deal outcomes. Findings suggest that the prevalence of i-deals within a team has the potential to unite or divide it as a function of the interplay between the team's power structure and organizational i-deal scarcity.

Van Waeyenberg, Brevel, De Winne and Marescaux broaden our focus by studying coworkers, their attributions and fairness perceptions regarding allocation of flexibility i-deals. Combining social comparison and justice frameworks in an experimental design, this article finds both upsides and downsides to flexibility i-deals, depending upon the reasons perceived for their creation and the fairness of their allocation. In so doing, the study offers insights into possible dark sides by highlighting how i-deals may prove divisive within work units.

Along these same lines, Saldivar and Liao's theory paper recalls an early argument in the i-deals research (Greenberg et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 2006), that i-deals can have negative effects within groups. Developing the implications of i-deals at the group level, they propose that i-deals can be differentiated both in relative individual-to-coworkers terms (i.e., how individual group member i-deals compare to coworkers), and b) within-group terms (i.e. the degree of within-team variability in actual and perceptual terms). They further conceptualize these two forms of differentiation along the three dimensions (i.e., content, quantity, and magnitude). These conceptualizations advance understanding how i-deals operate beyond the individual level. Saldivar and Liao posit that whether within group i-deal differentiation is detrimental or beneficial depends on i-deal content, quantity, magnitude, and manifestation of these differences at an individual or group level.

Ayeni, Chaudry and Aldossari's article addresses the under-explored issue of i-deal timing and the opportunities presented to adapt existing organizational practices and policy. They apply institutional entrepreneurship as a theoretical lens to highlight the negotiation and change tactics

lens in the distinctive setting of Nigeria with its unique context of highly skilled, well-educated workers creating talent wars in the internal and external labor markets. The article highlights the negotiation and change tactics participants deploy to create i-deals that solve both individual and organizational problems. Crucially, these tactics are examined vis-a-vis the temporal context of i-deals by combining the macro (settings where individuals, teams and firms operate) and micro (their constitutive parts) perspectives.

Finally, in their policy article Kossek and Kelliher highlight from a social justice perspective the adverse societal consequences i-deals can have. Flexibility accessed via i-deals can depend on individual bargaining power, which is inequitable in the context of workers who need employment flexibility and inefficient for organizations dependent on these workers. The authors describe alternative policy arrangements that better support access to flexible work arrangements across occupations. Despite the expansion of flexible working arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic, current forms of hybrid working and workplace flexibility still tend to be implemented in ways that promote inequality. To avoid this, the authors advocate for all workers to access flexibility, rather than limiting it to knowledge workers. They argue for collectively-bargained i-deals where flexibility is crafted within a broadly applicable framework, drawing on the notion of collective rights as applied in gender equity bargaining in countries such as New Zealand and Australia. These i-deals grounded in a collective context support flexibility in a manner that brings the benefits of i-deals to more societal stakeholders (e.g., employer, employees, family, society).

Implications for I-deals Theory and Research

Building on insights offered by our authors and this review, we offer several directions to advance i-deal research.

I-deals from a career perspective. Perhaps the most central contribution yet to be made in i-deals research is investigation of i-deals phenomena from the long trajectory of a career perspective. A career is “an evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989:8), providing on-going context for i-deals to play a role. The Tomprou et al (this issue) investigation of managerial judgments in the aftermath of granting i-deals demonstrates that such arrangements can have both positive and negative effects on career-related outcomes, particularly promotion opportunities. Career success has been conceptualized as “accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experience over time” (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005:179), and i-deals negotiated at a particular point in a career can enhance that success. But career as an unfolding sequence of experiences over time has not yet been the focus of i-deals research, suggesting that we are overlooking the potential cumulative effects of certain kinds of i-deals over time while focusing instead on episodic effects. Frank and Cook (2010) observe that workers advantaged by early career success or “star”-like prominence can enjoy sustained advantage over and above their counterparts—the cumulative effects that require investigation of career trajectories to uncover. To date, we know that career goals and employability can be served by employees seeking i-deals (e.g., Bal et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2013; Ostrom et al., 2016). Still, we need more research that follows i-deals over time to observe their fuller range of implications. It is likely that the array of i-deals individuals negotiate over time can have cumulative effects.

Mapping the heterogeneity of i-deals. Drilling down into the variety of i-deals by the circumstances under which they were negotiated enriches understanding of their range of forms

and consequences. MacKintosh and McDermott (this issue) identify how ex ante and ex post i-deals differ in their psychological mechanisms and consequences. Other kinds of i-deals fruitful for future study include those deals actually initiated by managers rather than employees themselves, deals that raise issues of ethics (or why some deals don't), and the types of i-deals more likely to be denied than granted. Basic information about prevalence of various deals across organizations, occupations, demographics, and levels would itself be valuable.

New contexts and populations. Under-researched contexts and populations were a theme in this special issue because research on i-deals to date largely focuses on professionals and knowledge workers in developed countries. Given the versatility of i-deals for solving employment-related problems, we speculate that they also play a role in small business settings in both the developed and less developed world if for no other reasons than the lower incidence of formal policies or standard practices. As yet, however, these settings are seldom studied. Along these same lines, whether i-deals exist in any regularity for workers in precarious employment like independent contractors, freelancers, and unskilled labor is largely unknown, nor has the phenomena associated with i-deals among low-status workers been investigated, although one study suggested that they are likely to be less common (Perlow, 1995). Other settings might have regulatory constraints on the granting of i-deals as in the case of government employment or unionized settings. How i-deals might arise there and their content and consequences in regulated settings is relevant given that norms supporting individualization of employment may be weaker (Rousseau, 2005). Going beyond developed countries to investigate the role of i-deals in low-income countries can enhance our understanding of i-deals in the context of international employment and HRM. We note that Katou, Budhwar, and Patel (2021) find use of career i-deals in the Greek crisis economy where employers are otherwise hard pressed to offer attractive benefits

to workers who also have few alternative job opportunities. Such research identifies potential new roles and functions for i-deals in employment broadly.

Internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholders in i-deals research have been limited to the employee, coworkers, the immediate manager or supervisor, and other employer representatives like HR and higher-level managers. Despite research from the point of view of managers (Hornung, et al, 2009; Tomprou et al, this issue), the perspective of managers regarding the i-deal process, their own motives and anticipated consequences is less well studied (see Laulie, Tekleab, & Lee, 2021 for an exception). Similar attention could be afforded HR representatives who often are consulted and may influence the conditions of i-deal negotiation. Organization-level HRM research demonstrates that commitment-oriented HR practices are associated with lower levels of psychological contract violation than are other HR practices (Sonnenberg et al., 2011). In this respect, the practice of negotiating i-deals can be seen as a strategic choice within a broader HRM strategy, making HR representatives and senior leaders relevant stakeholders of i-deal negotiations.

Families are a relevant but overlooked stakeholder in research on i-deals. Families of employees with i-deals can be affected by these deals as evident in findings that developmental i-deals can create work family conflict (Hornung et al, 2009). Kossek and Kelliher (this issue) note that families are an overlooked in implementing employment flexibility; we suggest families are likely to be impacted by other forms of i-deals as well from developmental and task i-deals that can increase demands placed on employees at work to i-deals allocating material resources from company cars to salary increases. Last, another external stakeholder of i-deals is the public, particularly participants in the external labor market where publicity surrounding the deals granted star employees can create a sense of winners and losers—impacting the meanings ascribed to work

and success in the larger society (Frank & Cook, 2010). The social construction of - for example - what it means to be a “star” can inform how people think about i-deals and how special it might be to have one. Note that van Waeyenberg et al (this issue) demonstrate that coworkers ascribe different meanings to a colleague’s i-deals and these meanings in turn affect their social and emotional responses. Similar processes can occur more collectively as in the case of meanings ascribed in societies to the practice of negotiating i-deals. In effect, i-deals can be thought of as socio-symbolic objects, much like “family/friendly workplaces” or “great place to work”, which have socially-created meanings (Lawrence & Phillips, 2021). As socio-symbolic objects, i-deals are the targets to which social actors like employees or job applicants direct their thoughts and feelings; the social patterns that make up i-deals as socio-symbolic objects can change over time, for example from rare or hidden to prevalent or normative. The social patterns of meanings associated with i-deals are provocative topics for future research.

The negotiation process. Little empirical attention has been paid to understanding the process of negotiating i-deals (Simosi, Rousseau & Weingart, 2021). We ask what negotiation strategies do successful *and* unsuccessful i-dealers use? In this special issue two articles highlight negotiation tactics, including opportunistic use of timing in successful bargaining (Ayeni et al, this issue) and the accumulated obligations deployed in the crafting of retirement and pre-retirement working conditions (Sykes & Bridge this issue). In-depth study of i-deals through the lens of negotiation research remains a promising opportunity (cf Simosi et al, 2021).

Team-level dynamics of i-deals. Team-level dynamics raise two sets of issues for future i-deals research. First, teams and groups are a context for i-deals with the inherent social comparison of deals allocated among their members. We noted that i-deals research using a social comparison lens is increasing, promoting use of work-group samples to capture the relational dynamics in the

comparison process. We note that although individuals are motivated to compare themselves with others (Day, 2012), social comparison can be amplified by environmental cues and demographic factors promoting faultines within groups (cf Lau & Murnighan, 1998) and inhibited by relational bonds among group members (cf Anand et al, 2018). Such attributes of groups and teams are important contextual factors in team-level investigation of i-deals as are organizational features like i-deal scarcity that give context to within-team allocations of i-deals (Vossaert et al, this issue).

Second, as a function of such factors as strategic roles, past performance, and standing in the organization, teams themselves have their own distinctive exchanges and team-level psychological contracts with the larger organization (Laulié & Tekleab, 2016). These distinctive exchanges open up the possibility of team-level i-deals (or “we-deals” if you like) based on negotiation of special rewards, privileges, and opportunities to be accessed by team members. To date, no research exists on team-level i-deals, accessed by members as a function of their team’s relationship with the larger organization. Note a key feature of i-deals is the access to conditions of employment different from peers, which in this case would be differential treatment of a particular group through allocation of customized employment features to its members not granted to members of other comparable groups.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion. The diversity perspective is to date underrepresented in i-deals research, with the exception of attention to older workers (Bal et al., 2010; Sykes & Bridges, this issue). Given that the resources on offer influence the process and outcomes of i-deal creation (Simosi et al., 2021), it is important to examine the access demographic groups have to different i-deal types as a function of factors like gender, race, religion, or nationality. Just as women have been disadvantaged in the past relative to men based on differences in bargaining behavior (Babcock & Laschever, 2009), we must consider the potential for i-deals to exacerbate inequality

for other disadvantaged groups. At the same time, since i-deals can also be used to solve problems workers face, they have potential for promoting career success and well-being for those whom a firm's current HR practices are inadequate.

Societal implications. Societies differ in the supports and risks to which their members are exposed. Societal features including social welfare institutions and employment policies promoting at-will employment or job security influence the interest workers have in shaping their conditions of employment. It has been noted that American workers absorb more risk than workers in many other developed countries as a function of weak labor laws and limited social supports (Leana, 2019; Rousseau, 2006). More research is needed from a sociological and societal perspective on the institutional boundary conditions that shape the need for and use of i-deals (see Kossek & Kelliher, this issue). How do the risks workers face and their power relations in the labor market and within organizations affect the negotiation of i-deals (see Ayeni et al. this issue for insights into societal effects)? In her formulation of the construct of i-deals, Rousseau (2005) noted that i-deals have value where workers have personally distinctive needs but can be an inefficient and unreliable remedy for needs workers have in common. The role of i-deals in resolving the dilemmas contemporary workers and firms face is likely to be impacted by the institutional context and constraints it imposes. We call for more research that takes an intersectional lens to the socio-cultural, political, and economic forces that can shape i-deals.

Last but not least: theoretical integration. I-deals research as we saw above is host to myriad theories to account for the motivations shaping their negotiation and their consequences for the principals (employee and employer) and other stakeholders (e.g., coworkers). Note the theoretical work of Salvador and Liao (this issue) integrates an array of theories and existing research to craft a multi-level view of i-deals. The theoretical pluralism that characterizes i-deals

research underscores the connection that i-deals have to a broad array of workplace phenomena. It also complicates formation of a broader understanding of i-deal dynamics and functioning. At the individual-level alone, we observe over a dozen theories and psychological mechanisms to have been empirically supported. It may be early days in pursuit of the big picture regarding i-deals as a phenomenon in employment and society, but the opportunity for synthesis is approaching.

Conclusion

I-deals theory and research are grounded in trends toward individuation of work, migration of risk from employers to workers, and recognition of how workers influence their employment experiences. We hope this Special Issue with its eight provocative articles helps to better inform the scholarly, practical and policy conversations these trends motivate.

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Table 1. Illustrated Example of the Current Research on I-deals.

Level of Analysis	Antecedents	Outcomes
Organizational level	Internal labor markets (Lee et al., 2015) Pay transparency (Wong et al., 2022) Entrepreneurial orientation (Tuan, 2016) Organizational ambidexterity (Tuan, 2016) Availability of customized work arrangements within the organization (Erden Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019) Job constraints (Hornung et al., 2009) Work characteristics (Hornung et al., 2014) Supervisor emotional support (Kelly et al. 2020)	Organizational climate (Wong, et al., 2022) Client satisfaction (Bal & Boehm, 2019) Work-family conflict (Erden Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019) Justice climate (Lai et al., 2009) Family-friendly environment (Kelly et al. 2020)
Team level	Group-level heterogeneity (Lee et al., 2015) Unfairness perceptions (Anand et al. 2021) Age diversity (Bal& Boehm, 2019) Within-group value congruence (Anand, et al.2018)	Team effectiveness (Rofcanin et al., 2017) Unit climate (Bal et al., 2012). Team performance (Anand et al., 2021; Vidyarthi et al., 2016) Team cohesion (Vossaert et al. 2022) Collective commitment to organization (Bal& Boehm, 2019).
Individual level	Employee personal initiative (Hornung et al. 2008; Liu et al., 2013) Leadership style (Rofcanin et al. (2018) Employee motivational goals (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016) Leader-member exchange (Anand et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2017)	Job satisfaction (Liao et al., 2017) Organizational commitment (Katoa et al. 2021; Marescaux et al., 2013) Justice perceptions (Marescaux et al., 2019; Marescaux, et al. 2013) Work-family conflict or enrichment (Wang et al., 2019; Hornung et al., 2008) Job performance (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016; Rofcanin et al., 2018; Taser et al., 2021; Anand, et al., 2018) Helping behavior (Liao et al., 2017) Employee creativity (Wang et al., 2018) Emotional exhaustion (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Kong et al., 2020) Deviant behaviors (Kong et al., 2020; Marescaux et al. 2018; Ng 2017) Occupational self-efficacy (Hornung et al., 2014)

Table 2. Content and Characteristics of Special Issue Articles.

Article	<i>Tompron, Simosi & Rousseau</i>	<i>Sykes-Bridge, Bordia, Garcia, Amarnani & Bordia</i>	<i>MacKintosh & McDermott</i>	<i>Vossaert, Ansel & Ho</i>	<i>Van Waeyenberg, Brevel, De Winne & Marescaux</i>	<i>Saldivar & Liao</i>	<i>Ayeni, Chaudhry & Aldossari</i>	<i>Kossek & Kelliher</i>
Aim	Investigate how managers make reward allocations for i-deal recipients	Examine the various stages of i-deal development among older workers	Explore the inputs, processes, and outcomes of i-deal creation from the employee and employer perspectives	Examine if i-deals help or hinder team outcomes	Show co-worker reactions to flexibility i-deals via attributions and fairness perceptions	Develop multi-level theory	Examine how temporal context impacts the creation of i-deals at various time points.	Address societal interests and tensions in flexible arrangements
Level of analysis	Individual	Individual	Individual and organizations	Multi-level	Individual	Multi-level	Multi-level	Societal
Theory	Social exchange	None	Social/economic exchange	Resource scarcity	Social comparison		Institutional entrepreneurship	Social justice
Methods	Policy capturing study & survey	Qualitative	Qualitative comparative case study	Two-wave survey	Vignette experiments	Theory	Qualitative multi-case	Policy
Sample	US Managers (N1=116) (N2=174)	Australian workers over 50 (N=82)	UK employees, managers & HR (N=42)	Belgian teams (N=166) & employees (N=1,016) from 40 organizations	Belgian employees (N1 =260; N2=211)	-----	Nigerian knowledge workers (N=62)	-----
Stakeholders	Employees & managers	Employees, managers & HR	Employees, managers & HR	Org., teams & employees	Coworkers	Individual-group	Individuals, coworkers, managers, and HR	Society, orgs., occupations, employees
Unique Contribution	Potential adverse career	A model of i-deal emergence, and a	Two i-deal pathways premised on	Prevalence of i-deals in team can unite or	Flexibility i-deals can have both negative	Group-level outcomes	Under-studied context (Nigeria) and	Societal implications of i-deals. Need for

	consequences of some i-deals	novel antecedent - feasibility.	whether economic or relational exchange.	divide team due to interplay of team power structure and organizational i-deal scarcity.	and positive effects on co-workers due to basis and allocation fairness.		issue (i-deal timing)	supportive policy
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