

Creating Flexible Work Arrangements Through Idiosyncratic Deals

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A survey of 887 employees in a German government agency assessed the antecedents and consequences of idiosyncratic arrangements individual workers negotiated with their supervisors. Work arrangements promoting the individualization of employment conditions, such as part-time work and telecommuting, were positively related to the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (“i-deals”). Worker personal initiative also had a positive effect on i-deal negotiation. Two types of i-deals were studied: flexibility in hours of work and developmental opportunities. Flexibility i-deals were negatively related and developmental i-deals positively related to work–family conflict and working unpaid overtime. Developmental i-deals were also positively related to increased performance expectations and affective organizational commitment, while flexibility i-deals were unrelated to either.

Keywords: individualized working conditions, negotiated flexibility, professional development opportunities, proactive behavior

Fostered by contemporary practices in organizing and managing the workplace, the active role of employees engaging in constructive behaviors beyond their prescribed job duties has garnered considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Crant, 2000; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Going beyond prosocial behavior and the over-fulfillment of job requirements (Organ, 1988), employees have been shown to play a proactive role in shaping and customizing their on-the-job activities, work settings, and employment conditions (Lawler & Finegold, 2001; Rousseau, 2001a; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This customization is at least partly achieved through idiosyncratic deals (“i-deals”), where individual employees negotiate with an employer to adapt work arrangements to better meet their personal needs (Rousseau, 2005). Traditionally, human resource practices in the developed world have downplayed customization in favor of standardization (Pearce, 2001). However, the liberalization of labor laws and reduction in collective bargaining (Farber & Western, 2000), coupled with growing awareness of human capital’s value to firms (Cappelli, 2000), have made it more normative to craft i-deals in lieu of or as a supplement to standardized employment conditions. Still to date, few empirical studies systematically investigate the prevalence, antecedents, or consequences of i-deals.

The present study contributes to research on i-deals in several ways. Replicating previous results on the empirical distinctiveness of two commonly reported forms of i-deals—special flexibility in work hours and development opportunities (Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau & Kim, 2006)—it examines individual proactivity and organizational work practices as antecedents to the negotiation of i-deals. It tests theoretical assumptions on both the joint and differential effects of these two forms of i-deals on employees’ attitudes toward the organization, performance expectations, and conflict between work and private life. We focus on organizational and individual antecedents of i-deals as well as consequences relevant to both workers and the employer. Although theory identifies the specific factors investigated here to be critical for the negotiation and differential effects of i-deals (Rousseau, 2005), they are not comprehensive. Instead, we aspire to investigate factors relevant to i-deals in a highly regulated, bureaucratic setting where use of these arrangements is evidence of their potential for creating flexibility in work settings generally.

I-Deals: Idiosyncratic Terms in Employment

I-deals are a form of customization granting employees special conditions differing from peers doing similar work. Not limited to freelancers (Pink, 2002) or stars (Rosen, 1981), regular employees also seek out and bargain for special employment conditions that satisfy their personal needs and preferences. Although such deals can also arise at the time of hire or termination (Rousseau, 2005), the present study focuses on their emergence during ongoing employment. Defining features of i-deals include negotiation by individual workers and terms different from standard employment conditions (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). Another defining feature of i-deals is that they are intended to benefit both the employee and the firm by giving a valued worker something not otherwise obtainable through the firm’s standard practices (Rous-

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seau, 2001a, 2005). Other forms of personalized employment arrangements, such as favoritism or cronyism, lack the mutually beneficial quality of i-deals where individual and organizational interests are served simultaneously (Rousseau, 2005). I-deals vary in content and scope from a single feature to the entire set of conditions composing the employment relationship, ranging from minor adjustments in hours or duties to highly customized, “idiosyncratic jobs” (Miner, 1987). Contents of i-deals involve a wide array of resources, from tangible and universalistic (e.g., payment, material goods) to abstract and particular (e.g., status, recognition, social support). Previous research has identified two especially widespread forms of i-deals: flexible scheduling of work hours and special opportunities for skill and career development (Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau & Kim, 2006). The conditions that increase the likelihood of successfully negotiating such i-deals are the matter to which we now turn.

Organizational Factors Influencing I-Deal Negotiation

The ways an organization structures work can influence the likelihood that its employees successfully negotiate i-deals. Opportunities for i-deal negotiation may be limited in settings with interdependent and co-located employees doing similar work (Rousseau, 2005). Such settings may restrict employment conditions to standardized arrangements to avoid the justice issues that i-deals can raise among coworkers (Rousseau et al., 2006). I-deals may be harder to legitimate in such settings, being more readily interpreted as preferential treatment or favoritism. On the other hand, certain work structures can make it easier for workers to successfully negotiate employment conditions differing from their peers. Idiosyncrasy-promoting arrangements include remote or distributed work, non-comparability in work schedules or job duties, and more generally, the existence of various ways to structure work in the same organization.

A setting with an array of different work structures can promote the negotiation of i-deals by conveying a normative message to both workers and supervisors that idiosyncrasy in employment terms is legitimate (cf. Hochschild, 1997). Second, it can reduce negative reactions to i-deals on the part of co-workers by downplaying differences and limiting comparisons, a major obstacle to the negotiation of i-deals in highly standardized work settings. Third, such differences in employment conditions may contribute to worker motivation to seek i-deals in the first place. This is the case, for example, when a part-time worker negotiates the employer’s financial support for night classes she knows full-time workers receive automatically. In sum, idiosyncrasy is enhanced when individualized arrangements are the norm, comparability of employment conditions among coworkers is limited, and/or differences in employment arrangements within the firm alert individuals to opportunities to negotiate individualized arrangements. Thus, we postulate that work structures promoting idiosyncrasy in employment conditions will be positively related to the extent to which individual workers successfully negotiate arrangements differing from peers.

Hypothesis 1: Work structures promoting idiosyncrasy in employment conditions are positively related to worker negotiation of flexibility i-deals and developmental i-deals.

Personal Influences on I-deals

Workers can be predisposed to negotiate i-deals for many reasons including recognition of their own value to the company, individual needs that differ from peers, and other personal factors that incline them to assert their preferences (Rousseau, 2005). In any case, negotiating special terms requires employees to voice their needs and to request or bargain for them. Similar to related constructs such as taking charge to initiate workplace change (Morrison & Phelps, 1999) or the crafting of one’s job to better fit personal needs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), negotiating an i-deal is one form of proactive behavior. General proactivity, as embodied in the concept of personal initiative (PI; Crant, 2000; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997), fosters self-initiated, innovative problem solving, a potential precursor to i-deal negotiation. PI is conceptualized as a behavioral pattern characterized by the self-starting, persistent pursuit of personal and organizational goals and is associated with relatively stable individual differences (e.g., proactive personality; Frese et al., 1997). As proactive behavior, PI should predispose workers to devise, ask for, and negotiate arrangements benefiting themselves and their employers.

Hypothesis 2: Employee PI is positively related to negotiation of flexibility i-deals and developmental i-deals.

The Aftermath of I-Deals

By individualizing employment conditions according to their workers’ personal needs, employers provide individuals a special contribution, often involving symbolic and social-emotional elements (e.g., trust, appreciation, personalization; Blau, 1964; Haas & Deseran, 1981). In this manner, i-deals provide a basis for reciprocity between workers and the organization, with the negotiating supervisor usually acting as an agent of the latter (Gouldner, 1960; Levinson, 1965). This strengthened employment relationship results in a sense of obligation on the part of the employee to pay back the valuable contribution the employer has made (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Rousseau, 2001b). A stronger relationship can also derive from an i-deal creating future opportunities with the firm that the worker would not otherwise have enjoyed. On the basis of both reciprocity and opportunities for future exchange, i-deals are expected to strengthen the employment relationship. As emotional attachment is an important consequence of a successful exchange of personalized contributions, we postulate that i-deals in general have a positive effect on employee attachment and, particularly, on affective commitment to the employer (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

Hypothesis 3: Flexibility and developmental i-deals are positively related to worker affective commitment.

On the other hand, the impact i-deals have on both the recipient and the employer depends on the nature of the i-deal and the meaning ascribed to it. Previous research has found flexibility and developmental i-deals to be the most common, their incidence exceeding deals involving other work conditions such as pay or benefits (Rousseau, 2005). However, flexibility and developmental i-deals can differ in their consequences for worker and employer

depending on the resources involved and experiences encountered in the i-deal's aftermath.

The leeway workers enjoy from negotiating flexibility in their work hours can lead to better coordination and integration of work and private life—family responsibilities being a major reason that individuals seek flexibility (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Cullen, Kordey, Schmidt, & Gaboardi, 2003; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Mokhtarian, Bagley, & Salomon, 1998; Thornthwaite, 2004). Employees may use greater personal control over their work schedule to counterbalance peak and slack periods and to work in accordance with their personal preferences (e.g., starting late in the morning), increasing productivity while reducing the stress involved in doing their jobs (Dunham, Pierce, & Castaneda, 1987; Steward, 2000; Tietze & Musson, 2003).

Nonetheless, the fact that workers in contemporary firms commonly face increasing performance pressures in response to market conditions and demands for efficiency can make it difficult for workers to seek flexibility and for employers to grant it (Rousseau, 2006). Negative consequences can befall i-dealers whose flexible hours depart from widely held work norms (e.g., negotiating shorter work days in a firm where advancement requires putting in long hours). A worker who approaches the work role differently from peers—in terms of hours worked or availability to clients or colleagues—unintentionally may signal a lack of commitment to high performance (Landers, Rebitzer, & Taylor, 1996). Workers who negotiate flexible work arrangements can be subject to subsequent lower performance evaluations due to their non-conforming work practices (Perlow, 1997). This is particularly the case when performance is measured subjectively or not otherwise prorated based on the altered duties, hours, or other arrangements their i-deal entailed (Rousseau, 2005). High performers who successfully negotiated i-deals to balance work and family demands have seen their career opportunities subsequently diminished, as they are judged less committed or valuable than peers without such i-deals (Perlow, 1997). Although flexible arrangements might reduce work–family conflict, they also can diminish what the employer comes to expect from workers with these arrangements. This is particularly the case where flexible arrangements restrict worker visibility to their supervisor or their actual hours on the job. As a result of worker exercise of greater control over work time, we postulate that flexibility i-deals will be negatively related to both work–family conflict and overtime hours. Further, as flexibility i-deals signal both worker concern and employer consent for balancing work and private life, we expect employees with these i-deals to experience little pressure to increase their performance.

Hypothesis 4a: Flexibility i-deals are negatively related to work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 4b: Flexibility i-deals are negatively related to increased performance expectations.

Hypothesis 4c: Flexibility i-deals are negatively related to overtime hours worked.

Developmental i-deals, in contrast, involve an exchange of resources prone to reinforce or strengthen the worker's involvement and performance in the firm (Foa & Foa, 1975). Analogous to March and Simon's (1958) distinction between the decisions to participate and to produce, flexibility i-deals are more in line with retaining the services of a worker at a standard level of performance, while developmental i-deals both motivate and reward high performance. Employees negotiating special assignments or training to develop particular competencies may increase their value and standing in the eyes of the employer over time while enhancing their own performance and commitment to the organization. We postulate that developmental i-deals relate to both increased performance expectations and actual employee contributions in terms of extra hours invested in the job. Moreover, we expect that the higher work involvement associated with developmental i-deals increases the likelihood that work will interfere with the employee's family life.

Hypothesis 5c: Developmental i-deals are positively related to work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 5a: Developmental i-deals are positively related to increased performance expectations.

Hypothesis 5b: Developmental i-deals are positively related to overtime worked.

Method

Organizational Setting

The study was conducted in the public tax administration of the German state of Bavaria as part of an evaluation of the psychological impact of new work arrangements. With over 100 local offices, the administration employed about 20,000 tenured civil servants, roughly one-third of whom used their legally established right to work part-time (i.e., below 40 hours a week). Job qualifications, pay, career paths, and retirement age were highly regulated.

Two years prior to the study, the tax administration introduced a telecommuting program, allowing workers to work at home as well as in the office. This program was part of a larger effort to improve the structural rigidity of public employment and employees' quality of work life (Landler, 2007) as well as to help employees cope with an ongoing increase in their workload as the administration's aging workforce retired. Two divisions participated in the program: office accounting, where clerks process taxpayer forms; and field accounting, where auditors spend considerable time working away from the office examining businesses' tax records. In office accounting, total participants were restricted to 200 giving preference to those with social or health-related reasons (e.g., small children, caring for relatives, disabilities). Participating clerks were required to work in the office a minimum of 1 day per week. In field accounting, no restrictions applied. Auditors, who worked 3 days on average in the firms they inspected, were required to work in the tax office only once every 2 weeks.

In both divisions, individual program participation was granted for 3 years and home offices were fully equipped by the organization. Supervisors were required to specify daily hours in which

telecommuting employees were to be accessible in their home offices to colleagues and the public via telephone or e-mail. During the study, 200 clerks in office accounting and 740 auditors in field accounting participated in the program.

Sample

Surveys were administered via internal mail service to be completed voluntarily and on the job. In addition to participants in the telecommuting program, the human resource department selected comparison groups in conventional work arrangements on the basis of job and demographic similarity. For economic reasons, the ratio of telecommuters and comparison groups was set to 1:1 for office accounting and 2:1 for field accounting, a total of 1,510 distributed surveys. Questionnaires were pre-coded for division and telecommuting status, which was verified by asking participants also to provide this information. No discrepancy between pre-codes and participant reports was detected. The four subgroups will be referred to as home-based workers (telecommuters in office accounting), office workers (comparison group in office accounting), home-based fieldworkers (telecommuters in field accounting), and office-based fieldworkers (comparison group in field accounting). After deleting incomplete surveys, 887 employees provided usable data, yielding response rates between 53.0% and 65.0% in the four subgroups and an overall participation rate of 58.7%. All were lifetime employees performing computer-based tasks. Table 1 describes each subgroup. Chi-square and *t* tests compared categorical (gender, part-time) and continuous variables (age, tenure) across subgroups, finding no significant differences between telecommuters and conventional workers. Compared with office workers, fieldworkers tended to be men, older, and full-time.

Measures

All multiple-item measures used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very great extent*). Work structures facilitating idiosyncrasy in employment conditions were operationalized by using three dichotomous variables.

Part-time. Working part-time provides individuals employment conditions (hours, promotion, and development opportunities) different from the standard arrangements of full-timers. As such they are non-comparable with the majority of employees, and in a formal position that limits their opportunities. Such conditions are expected to facilitate idiosyncrasy. Participants indicated whether they were employed full- or part-time and also reported their contractual total work hours, dummy coded part-time (1) and full-time (0).

Telecommuting. By virtue of the program's focus on creating workplace flexibility, individual telecommuters are better positioned to obtain supervisor permission for employment arrangements differing from their peers. The program itself signals flexibility's legitimacy, while its newness and lack of well-established routines provide opportunities for customization. Because telecommuters spent considerable time outside the tax office, their arrangements also are less visible to coworkers. Together these features are expected to promote idiosyncrasy in the employment conditions telecommuters enjoy. Participation in the telecommuting program was obtained from the questionnaire's pre-coding and verified by employee self-report, dummy coded telecommuting (1) and conventional work (0).

Fieldwork. Although fieldwork necessitated spending time in auditees' workplaces, idiosyncrasy should be enhanced by the distributed nature of this work and the limited time fieldworkers spend in the tax office itself, both of which limit coworker scru-

Table 1
Description of Accounting Employees Working Inside and Outside the Office

Group	Office accounting division	Field accounting division
Conventional work form	Office workers, <i>N</i> = 106 (response rate: 53.0%) <i>Demographics:</i> Gender: 58.5% female, 41.5% male Age: 43.01 years Organizational tenure: 18.11 years <i>Working-time (contract):</i> Full-time: 64.2%, average 40.0 hr/week Part-time: 35.8%, average 26.0 hr; range 16.0–36.0 <i>Location of work (% of working time):</i> Tax-office: 100.0%	Office-based fieldworkers, <i>N</i> = 206 (response rate: 55.7%) <i>Demographics:</i> Gender: 16.5% female, 83.5% male Age: 44.21 years Organizational tenure: 18.04 years <i>Working-time (contract):</i> Full-time: 87.9%, average 40.0 hr/week Part-time: 12.1%, average 28.0 hr; range 16.0–36.0 <i>Location of work (% of working time):</i> Tax-office: 40.0%, field (organizations): 60.0%
Telecommuting program	Home-based workers, <i>N</i> = 130 (response rate: 65.0%) <i>Demographics:</i> Gender: 56.2% female, 43.8% male Age: 41.32 years Organizational tenure: 15.81 years Telecommuting since: 1.45 years <i>Working-time (contract):</i> Full-time: 60.0%, average 40.0 hr/week Part-time: 40.0%, average 23.0 hr; range 10.0–36.0 <i>Location of work (% of working time):</i> Tax-office: 21.1%, home-office: 78.9%	Home-based fieldworkers, <i>N</i> = 445 (response rate: 60.1%) <i>Demographics:</i> Gender: 12.4% female, 87.6% male Age: 44.13 years Organizational tenure: 16.79 years Telecommuting since: 1.87 years <i>Working-time (contract):</i> Full-time: 90.8%, average 40.0 hr/week Part-time: 9.2%, average 29.5 hr; range 20.0–36.0 <i>Location of work (% of working time):</i> Tax-office: 15.9%, field (organizations): 58.9%, home-office: 25.2%

tiny. Division membership was assessed via questionnaire pre-coding and verified by employee self-report, dummy coded field division (1) and office division (0). In addition (not included in our analyses), respondents also reported hours per week typically spent in the tax office, home office, or in the field visiting the businesses they audited. Table 1 reports the average distribution of time across workplaces for the groups studied.

I-deals. Using a German translation of Rousseau's measures (e.g., Rousseau & Kim, 2006), employees indicated the extent to which in their current jobs they had "asked for and successfully negotiated individual arrangements different from their peers" in terms of flexibility i-deals (two items) and development i-deals (four items). Flexibility items included "Flexibility in starting and ending the workday" and "Individually customized work schedule." Developmental items were "On-the-job activities," "Training opportunities," "Special opportunities for skill development," and "Career development."

PI. PI was assessed via the original German version of Frese et al.'s (1997) seven-item scale. Items include "Whenever there is a chance to get actively involved, I take it" and "I use opportunities quickly in order to attain my goals."

Affective commitment. The German version (Büssing, 2002) of a five-item measure (subscale from Penley & Gould's (1988) Organizational Commitment scale) tapped workers' positive affective attachment to the organization. Items include "I am dedicated to this organization" and "It is my personal responsibility to help this organization achieve success."

Increased performance expectations. Three items measured whether employees believed that their direct supervisor's expectations for them had increased with respect to "quality of work," "meeting deadlines," and "attaining goals." The wording of this customized measure reflected one motivation for the survey, understanding how program participation related to staff perceptions of the tax administration's increasing performance demands.

Work-family conflict. Work interference with family and personal life was measured with a German version of Netemeyer, Boles, and McNurrian's (1996) five-item scale, containing statements such as "The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life," and "The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities."

Overtime. Participants were requested to report their average weekly hours of voluntary, unpaid overtime as a behavioral indicator of their contribution to the organization.

Demographic variables. Along with a dichotomous gender measure, age and organizational tenure were obtained by participants recording the appropriate number of years and months, which we converted to a metric scale (e.g., 10.5 equals 10 years and 6 months).

Results

Scale Analyses

Scale analyses were conducted in several steps by using multi-group CFA to assess (a) our measures' factor structure, (b) measurement invariance between subgroups permitting testing hypotheses in one combined sample, and (c) extent of common method bias. Results indicate good psychometric quality, comparability of subgroups, and modest common method bias (Appendix A). Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities for the combined sample are shown in Table 2. Note that the reported extent of flexibility i-deals is moderate ($M = 2.33$), while development i-deals are lower ($M = 1.64$). This pattern reflects two features of the study's context: (a) attempts to make civil-service work more attractive by supporting workplace flexibility and (b) financial and other constraints on developmental opportunities. The demographic variables gender and age correlate with i-deals and thus are controlled in our analyses.

Model Testing

Hypotheses were tested via a structural equation model, based on the measurement models and additional manifest variables (Figure 1). For the one-item measure of Overtime, an assumed reliability of .80 was modeled by using a common procedure restricting error variance and the factor loading of one-indicator latent variables (James, Mulaik & Brett, 1982; Kenny, 1979). Goodness-of-fit measures displayed in Figure 1 indicate satisfactory model fit. We note that in our sample female employees are

Table 2
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Accounting Employees ($N = 887$)

Variable	#	<i>M</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender (f)	1	25.1%		—											
2 Age	1	43.61	8.34	-.29**	—										
3 Organizational Tenure	1	17.11	10.75	-.12**	.64**	—									
4 Part-time	1	17.5%		.53**	-.12**	-.04	—								
5 Telecommuting	1	64.8%		-.09**	-.02	-.06	.05	—							
6 Fieldwork	1	73.4%		-.44**	.11**	.01	-.32**	.12**	—						
7 Personal Initiative	7	3.72	0.50	-.05	.10**	.06	-.09*	.17**	.00	.85					
8 I-Deals Flexibility	2	2.33	1.33	.24**	-.13**	-.04	.37**	.25**	-.29**	.10**	.82				
9 I-Deals Development	4	1.64	0.75	-.00	-.10**	-.04	.09**	.06	-.05	.10**	.40**	.87			
10 Work-Family Conflict	5	2.10	0.79	.07*	-.05	-.02	.07	-.29**	-.10**	-.19**	-.05	.09**	.92		
11 Affective Commitment	5	3.01	0.71	-.07*	.23**	.18**	-.06	.08*	.08*	.17**	-.02	.07*	-.06	.75	
12 Performance Expectations	3	2.74	0.89	-.00	.09**	.08*	.03	-.24**	-.11**	.02	.02	.06	.06	.03	.86
13 Overtime	1	1.67	1.91	.05	.05	.04	.03	-.06	-.05	.14**	-.04	.07	.08*	.08*	.10**

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

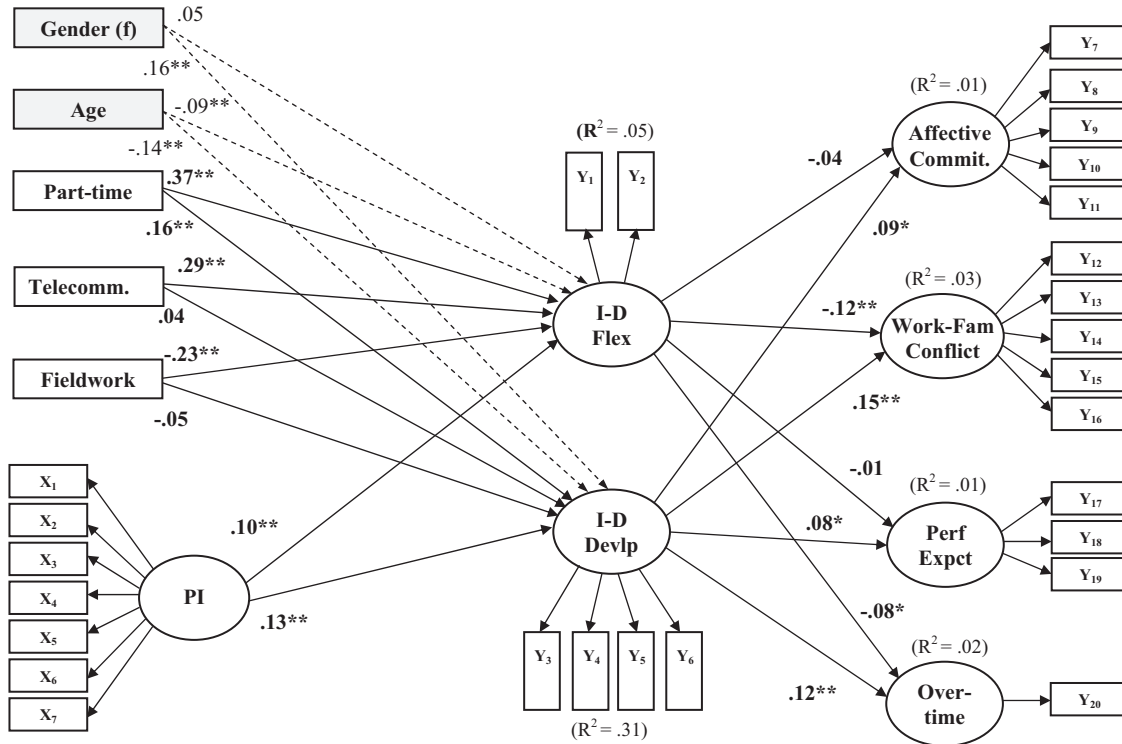


Figure 1. Structural model ($N = 887$). Model fit: $\chi^2(435) = 1,323.68^{**}$; $\chi^2/df = 3.04$; incremental fit index = .92; Tucker–Lewis index = .91; comparative fit index = .92; root-mean-square error of approximation = .048; 95% confidence interval = .045, .051. Intercorrelations of independent variables are omitted from the diagram; control variables are shaded gray. PI = personal initiative; I-D = idiosyncratic deals; flex = flexible scheduling; devlp = developmental opportunities; perf expt = performance expectations; affective commit. = affective commitment. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

more likely to negotiate flexibility i-deals, while age relates negatively to both types of i-deal.

Hypothesis 1, that work practices promoting idiosyncrasy have a positive effect on i-deal negotiation, was tested with three dummy-coded manifest variables, Part-Time, Telecommuting, and Fieldwork. Accordingly, Part-Time had positive, significant effects on Flexibility ($\beta = .37, p < .01$) and Developmental I-Deals ($\beta = .16, p < .01$). Telecommuting had a positive, significant effect on Flexibility I-Deals ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) but not on Developmental I-Deals ($\beta = .04, ns$). Contrary to expectations, Fieldwork had a significant negative effect on Flexibility I-Deals ($\beta = -.23, p < .01$) but no significant effect on Developmental I-Deals ($\beta = -.05, ns$). Evidence for Hypothesis 1 therefore is mixed and warrants further discussion below.

Hypothesis 2 was modeled by paths from PI to both forms of i-deals with positive, significant effects on both Flexibility ($\beta = .10, p < .01$) and Developmental I-Deals ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), fully supporting Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 posited positive effects of i-deals on Affective Commitment and was partially supported (Developmental $\beta = .09, p < .05$; Flexibility I-Deals $\beta = -.05, ns$). Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 postulated differential individual and organizational consequences of the two forms of i-deals. Consistent with Hypotheses 4a and 4c, Flexibility I-Deals related significantly and negatively to both Work–Family Conflict ($\beta = -.12, p < .01$) and Overtime ($\beta = -.08, p < .05$). Hypothesis 4b,

that Flexibility I-Deals relate negatively to Increased Performance Expectations, was not supported ($\beta = -.01, ns$). Consistent with Hypotheses 5a, 5b, and 5c, Developmental I-Deals had significant, positive effects on Work–Family Conflict ($\beta = .15, p < .01$), Increased Performance Expectations ($\beta = .08, p < .05$), and Overtime ($\beta = .12, p < .01$). Following common practice, we compared our hypothesized model with several alternative causal models (Appendix B), none of which proved to be superior to our model.

Discussion

Our study demonstrates that i-deals occur even in settings such as the civil service known for personnel rules and standardization. It also suggests that work structures can foster as well as inhibit i-deals. Part-timers demonstrated greater customization of their employment via i-deals than did full-timers with regard to both flexible scheduling and developmental opportunities. The latter result may be partly due to the lower level of formal development available to part-timers via standard organizational practices (Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1997), a limitation part-timers can overcome via negotiation. Part-timers may have capitalized on their lack of comparability with full-timers to further negotiate flexibility with respect to work hours. Telecommuters also used their leeway to work at home as a basis to negotiate more far-

reaching flexibility beyond the scope and rules of the program. Interviews with supervisors indicated that this “add-on” flexibility involved customized scheduling and occasional suspension of mandatory times at home or in the office. Feldman and Pentland (2003) provided evidence of the ways individual workers shape how personnel routines are executed. Employees can create opportunities beyond personnel policy’s formal strictures by expanding and re-interpreting its scope via the negotiation of i-deals (Rousseau, 2006). Such may be particularly true for newly established practices such as telecommuting in this study.

Other work structure effects were contrary to our hypotheses. Field accountants, with jobs characterized by high autonomy, reported less flexibility via i-deals than did their office-based counterparts. This may be due to time constraints clients impose on auditors, by limiting work to weekdays and conventional office hours (Glaser & Hornung, 2004). Job crafting, however, may be an additional explanation, as field accountants are less closely monitored by their supervisors and may be able to create their own flexible schedule without seeking permission for it (Rousseau, 2005; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The lack of an effect from telecommuting or fieldwork status on developmental i-deals may be due to the organization’s personnel practices, with limited possibilities for training, career development, and promotion. In such cases, workers whose part-time status restricts formal opportunities for training and development may be able to negotiate opportunities commensurate with those of their full-time counterparts, while telecommuters and fieldworkers may generally realize the developmental opportunities afforded full-timers, leaving little room for negotiation.

Although more research on organizational influences is needed, results call attention to the opportunities work context can provide to negotiate i-deals as well as the constraints it can impose. Our findings caution against treating i-deals as monolithic: They take various forms differing in their incidence depending on contextual factors. It is clear that more theory-building is needed with regard to how work structures and other features of the organizational context influence the importance workers ascribe to i-deals, the employer’s willingness to grant them, and their visibility and relevance to coworkers. In contrast, the evidence for proactive behavior as an individual antecedent of i-deals is far less ambiguous than that for organizational antecedents. As expected, the self-starting and persistent pursuit of goals, characterizing high levels of PI, can take the form of seeking and successfully negotiating i-deals.

Consistent with theory (Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2006), the two types of i-deals studied were differentially related to employee outcomes. As expected, workers with flexibility i-deals worked less unpaid overtime and had less work–family conflict than those without this i-deal. However, this i-deal’s expected consequence of lower performance expectations turned out to be a non-issue. One explanation for the lack of a negative effect of flexibility i-deals on performance expectations lies with organization-specific practices. The tax administration offered its workers few performance-based rewards and promotion opportunities, which in turn might have limited the downside of flexibility i-deals in contrast to previous findings in the United States (cf. Perlow, 1997). Note also that our measure tapped *increased* performance expectations rather than their overall level. Thus though we demonstrate that perceived expectations did not increase with

flexibility i-deals, we cannot test whether they actually declined in the deals’ aftermath. Moreover, flexibility i-deals were not related to affective commitment, despite the employer’s policy of granting them to create a more attractive workplace. Perhaps more time needed to elapse before certain consequences, positive or negative, became evident. On the other hand, the tax administration’s active efforts to legitimate flexibility by creating a critical mass of fellow workers enjoying its benefits may have caused flexibility to be seen as normative rather than idiosyncratic, reducing its signal value as an indicator of employment quality. In contrast, developmental i-deals demonstrated positive effects on worker commitment and contributions to the organization, while exacerbating work–life conflict. Our results suggest that the consequences of i-deals depend on the type of i-deal and the circumstances of its creation.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant note. We cannot make causal inferences because our data are cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies are needed to identify appropriate time lags for effects and their causal order. Generalizability is also a concern due to national differences in practices regarding individualized employment arrangements (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000), our distinctive governmental setting, and the survey’s timing to coincide with a program intended to legitimate flexibility. Ranging between one and three percent, this study’s explained variance of dependent variables is fairly small, attributable to low variance in the i-deals measures due to highly standardized practices in public employment. Taking into account the relative novelty of the subject and constructs under study as well as the ongoing methodological discussion on statistical significance versus variance explained in field research, we regard this to be a limitation but not a major concern (e.g., Fichman, 1999). Also, the translation of i-deal measures developed in the United States offers the advantages of standardization and comparability. However, it may be better to customize the assessment to capture setting-specific i-deals.

As i-deals are a relatively new construct, this study raises issues for future organizational research, including (a) closer inspection of how work structures impact i-deals; (b) investigation of the impact of peers, their perceptions, and own employment arrangements on i-deal negotiation and its aftermath; (c) examination of the “i-deal that wasn’t,” that is, antecedents and consequences of unsuccessful attempts to negotiate individual arrangements; (d) supervisor motives in granting i-deals; (e) identification and study of other i-deal types, antecedents, and consequences; and (f) simultaneous consideration of employee and supervisory perspectives.

Conclusion

Idiosyncratic deals are not limited to workers in competitive markets or non-bureaucratic firms. The social forces motivating i-deals impact workers broadly, including dual wage/career families challenged to balance work and home life (Klein, Berman, & Dickson, 2000; Kochan, 2005; Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000) and limitations on the developmental opportunities that workers increasingly value (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Observing idiosyncratic arrangements in the German civil service affirms that i-deals

are a widespread phenomenon, broadly applicable for work–life balance and workforce motivation and development.

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Appendix A

Scale Analyses

Psychometric Qualities

Cronbach's alphas for all scales and subgroups range from .70 to .93, meeting the requirements of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). To evaluate model fit, we applied the usual cutoffs of 3.0 for relative chi square, .90 for comparative fit indices (incremental fit index [IFI], Tucker–Lewis Index [TLI], comparative fit index [CFI]), and .08 for root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), for which we also report 95% confidence intervals (CIs). In the first step, multi-group CFAs assessed the factor structure of the i-deals measures and the remaining four multi-item scales separately. In both cases, the hypothesized factor structure showed good fit, while the indiscriminating one-factor solutions did not. Similar results were obtained when all six scales were combined into one multi-group CFA (see Table A1).

Measurement Invariance

To test if combining subgroups is justified, we assessed factor-loading invariance by setting path coefficients equal across groups in the multi-group CFAs. Following Byrne (1998), we did not impose equality constraints on the covariances and error terms to avoid being overly restrictive. Model comparisons used significance of the chi-square statistic and change in CFI, which should

be below .10 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Lievens, & Anseel, 2004). Equality constraints on factor weights did not significantly impede model fit for any of the tested measurement models, indicating that common meaning exists across subgroups. Therefore, combining them into a single sample is legitimate.

Common Method Variance

Combining all observations into one sample ($N = 887$), we tested the hypothesized six-factor solution against a one-factor model. As in previous analyses, our fit indices show the inadequacy of a one-factor solution, affirming that common method variance does not undermine the empirical distinctiveness of our constructs. For a more rigorous test, we combined those two models by adding an unmeasured single latent method factor connecting all items into the six-factor measurement model (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). This addition significantly decreases the chi-square statistic, which is influenced by sample size and reductions in model parsimony (Table A1). However, the addition of the latent method factor did not alter the significance of factor loadings and covariances nor do any items load significantly on it. We conclude that the validity of our results is not threatened by common method bias.

(Appendixes continue)

Table A1
Results of Scale Analyses

CFA	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	95% CI	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$
Multi-group CFAs (<i>N</i> = 106 / 130 / 206 / 445)										
I-deals: 1 factor, unconstrained	626.50**	48	13.05	.75	.68	.75	.117	.109, .125**		
I-deals: 2 factors, unconstrained	106.77**	44	2.43	.97	.96	.97	.040	.031, .050		
I-deals: 2 factors, equal meas. weights	90.56**	32	2.83	.98	.95	.97	.046	.035, .057	12	16.21
Other scales: 1 factor, unconstrained	5,258.37**	680	7.73	.41	.34	.41	.087	.085, .090**		
Other scales: 4 factors, unconstrained	1,028.56**	656	1.57	.95	.94	.95	.025	.022, .028		
Other scales: 4 factors, equal meas. weights	1,070.64**	704	1.52	.95	.95	.95	.024	.021, .027	48	42.08
All scales: 1 factor, unconstrained	9,216.49**	1224	7.53	.22	.17	.21	.086	.084, .088**		
All scales: 6 factors, unconstrained	1,699.11**	1136	1.50	.95	.94	.95	.024	.021, .026		
All scales: 6 factors, equal meas. weights	1,760.44**	1196	1.47	.95	.94	.95	.023	.021, .025	60	61.32
CFAs in combined sample (<i>N</i> = 887)										
All scales: 1 factor	7,205.61**	299	24.10	.33	.27	.33	.161	.158, .165**		
All scales: 6 factors	663.12**	284	2.34	.93	.96	.96	.039	.035, .043		
All scales: 6 factors, common methods factor	596.93**	258	2.21	.97	.96	.97	.037	.033, .041	26	93.27**

Note. Four-factors refer to Personal Initiative, Work-Family Conflict, Affective Commitment, and Increased Performance Expectations. Six factors refer to the same constructs plus the two i-deals factors. IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix B

Alternative Model Testing

We tested our model against four plausible alternatives (Table B1). PI and the more variable work practices of part-time and telecommuting were modeled as outcomes of i-deals (alternative models 1 and 2). For both models, the chi square shows significantly worse fit, with model 2 yielding an uninterpretable solution due to consistently low comparative fit indices (IFI, CFI, TLI). In model 1, neither flexibility i-deals ($\beta = .07$, *ns*) nor developmental i-deals ($\beta = .07$, *ns*) predicted PI. Next, all postulated outcomes were modeled as antecedents and as mediators between the controls and work practices on the one hand and i-deals on the other (alternative model 3 and 4). Whereas differences in CFI do not allow for discriminating model fit, model 4 has a significantly higher chi-square discrepancy than does the postulated model. Only alternative model 3, where all variables predict i-deals, shows a significantly lower chi-square. This improvement, however, is attributable to the large num-

ber of unanalyzed correlations (undirected paths) among independent variables and decreased model parsimony, which is known to inflate model fit. Table B1 also provides the parsimony ratio (p-ratio), with lower values indicating more complex models. As the rule of parsimony in structural equation modeling generally advises researchers to discard complex models in favor of equally plausible, more parsimonious ones (Kline, 1998; Preacher, 2006), model 3 is not a preferred solution. Additionally, fewer of the structural paths in the model attain statistical significance, and its pattern of effects is inconclusive (e.g., a negative effect of work-family conflict on developmental i-deals, but no effect on flexibility i-deals). As can be inferred from the other three alternative models, reversing causality for the postulated antecedents and outcomes of i-deals does not yield better fit. In sum, the evidence from alternative model testing remains consistent with our theoretical assumptions.

Table B1
Results of Alternative Model Testing

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	95% CI	<i>p</i> ratio	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$
Postulated model	1,323.68**	435	3.04	.92	.91	.92	.048	.045, .051	.82		
Alternative model 1 ^a	1,372.33**	440	3.12	.92	.90	.92	.049	.046, .052	.83	5	48.65**
Alternative model 2 ^b	1,666.46**	444	3.75	.89	.87	.89	.056	.053, .059	.84	9	342.78**
Alternative model 3 ^c	1,049.91**	405	2.59	.95	.93	.94	.042	.039, .046	.77	20	273.77**
Alternative model 4 ^d	1,437.97**	423	3.39	.91	.89	.91	.052	.049, .055	.80	10	114.29**

^a Personal Initiative as outcome of i-deals

^b Part-Time and Telecommuting as outcomes of i-deals

^c Work-Family Conflict, Affective Commitment, Overtime, Increased Performance Expectations as antecedents of i-deals, correlating independent variables

^d Work-Family Conflict, Affective Commitment, Overtime, Increased Performance Expectations, and Personal Initiative mediating between Age, Gender, Part-Time, Telecommuting, Fieldwork and i-deals

Note. IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval.