

Bargaining for Better Jobs: A Meta-Study on Antecedents and Outcomes of Individualized Employee-Employer Negotiations

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Abstract

Individualized employee-employer negotiations are the topic of an emerging literature on idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), person-specific work and employment conditions that result when individual employees seek out and employer representatives authorize deviations from standard human resource practices, e.g., working time arrangements and personnel development schemes. I-deals are based on procedural justice and mutual benefits to employee and employer, setting them apart from micro-politics and illegitimate preferential treatment of “playing favorites” and “old boy networks”. This meta-study was conducted to synthesize, i.e., to compile, aggregate, integrate, and evaluate, the results of a research program examining theoretical assumptions on i-deals in a series of eight empirical studies. Shared study features were a focus on antecedents and outcomes of successful negotiation, use of survey data, comparable instruments, and statistical methods. Information extracted from the studies was organized into a meta-model of individualized employee-employer negotiation. Antecedents were categorized as organizational (e.g., work arrangement), individual (e.g., proactivity), and interpersonal (e.g., leadership) factors. Outcomes were grouped into benefits for the individual (e.g., job satisfaction), organizational benefits (e.g., task performance), and mediating processes (e.g., work design). For these correlates, the quality of evidence was evaluated based on methodological criteria (e.g., single or substantiated result). Major findings of the assimilated meta-model are reviewed and implications for research and practice discussed. Calling attention to research limitations, boundaries and constraints of the program are delineated and reflections are offered on the challenges of integrating imperfectly compatible studies, connected to iterative, inductive-deductive, and partially opportunistic features of “real-world” research processes.

Keywords: Idiosyncratic deals, individual negotiation, antecedents and outcomes, individual and organizational benefits, meta-model, research synthesis

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Introduction

Individualized employee-employer negotiations are the topic of an emerging stream of literature on idiosyncratic deals, commonly referred to as “i-deals” (Rousseau, 2001, 2005; Liao, Wayne, & Rousseau, 2016). The purpose of this meta-study was to synthesize, that is, to compile, aggregate, integrate, and evaluate, the results of a research program on i-deals. Theoretical assumptions were examined and further developed in a series of altogether eight empirical studies, conducted between 2009 and 2015. The author played a leading role in this collaborative effort and synthesizing research outputs was part of the final program evaluation. This contribution consists of two parts. First, conceptual issues and theoretical assumptions of research on i-deals will be presented. In the second part, empirical studies will be reviewed and procedures for a qualitative integration of results into a meta-model of individualized employee-employer negotiation will be outlined. Further discussed are the practical relevance of synthesized results and challenges of integrating limitedly cumulative and imperfectly compatible studies, arising from iterative, inductive-deductive, and partially opportunistic features of real-world research processes.

Layers of Variability in Job Features

A starting point for the study of i-deals is the observation that job features vary, not only across organizations and positions, but also among job holders (Rousseau, 2005). *General features* are tied to formalized Human Resource (HR) practices, either *standardized* (e.g., facilities and benefits available to all employees) or *position-based* (e.g., bonuses and status privileges for managers). *Person-specific features* result from *self-enacted* or *negotiated* job modifications (e.g., work assignments, work hours, or learning opportunities). The distribution of standardized, position-based and person-specific layers of variability is influenced by a number of factors, e.g., labor laws, market standards, HR philosophy, egalitarian or hierarchical culture, hierarchical job level, degree of formalization, work characteristics, and actions of the job incumbent. The concept of i-deals is useful to analyze, explain, and predict how person-specific variability in job features develops through individualized bargaining processes.

Defining the Construct of Idiosyncratic Deals

I-deals have been defined as “voluntary personalized agreements of non-standard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employer regarding terms that benefit each party” (Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006; S. 978). Several aspects of this definition require some elaboration. *First, as voluntary agreements* mutual consent of employee and employer is assumed. I-deals are typically initiated proactively by employees and authorized by employer agents (e.g., supervisors, HR managers). Their contents can involve all aspects of employment, such as work schedule, workload, job content, learning and training opportunities, etc. *Second, as person-specific conditions* i-deals differ from standard practices and job features in similar positions. Heterogeneity refers to variety in contents, extent, composition, and ways of negotiation. Particularity emphasizes the personal meaning and value of such arrangements (e.g., personally interesting job content; work schedule suited to family situation). Uniqueness means that i-deals are limitedly applicable to universally valued and scarce (fixed-pie) resources, such as pay or promotions. Specifically, they are not intended as a tournament situation or to increase competition among

employees. *Third, mutual benefits* implies that both employee and employer interests are served. For employees i-deals offer a way of modifying work and employment conditions to better fit personal needs, goals, and/or preferences. Employers use i-deals to attract, retain, develop, and motivate qualified employees, to align HR practices with growing workforce diversity (e.g., gender, age, culture), and to increase HR responsiveness in competing on increasingly globalized labor markets.

Paradigm Changes in Organizational Theory

Research on i-deals has witnessed a strong reception and swift uptake, which needs to be seen in the context of broader developments in theorizing on organizations (Liao et al., 2016). In simplified terms these developments can be described as paradigm changes in organizational theory (Barley & Kunda, 1992). The *classics of industrial administration and bureaucratic management theory* have purported a view of organizations emphasizing formal structures and rule-bound standardization of processes, geared towards equal treatment of constituents without regard of the individual person (Weber, 1968). This principle of formalistic impersonality essentially eliminated the living person from administrative theory—in favor of an abstract, technocratic, and mechanistic conception of organization. This changed in the following institutional era under the influence of the *human relations movement and socio-technical systems theory*. Based on the core postulate that organizations need to be viewed as social systems, the new paradigm stressed the emergent informal organization between the working individuals, the importance of social phenomena and team processes, and the need to reconcile traditional management approaches with humanistic ideals and values (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). It seems safe to say that human relations and socio-technical design have brought people back into theorizing on work and organizations. The following paradigm of *individualization and idiosyncrasy* went one step further, postulating that employees actively influence and shape organizational structures and working conditions. Important milestones in the development of a distinct perspective on individualization and idiosyncrasy in organizations include, for example, the work of Miner (1987), Lawler and Finegold (2000), and Feldman and Pentland (2003). The construct of i-deals was introduced by Rousseau (2001) around the same time as the influential research by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) on job crafting. The new paradigm emphasizes structural flexibility and change, destandardization, improvisation, emergence, and has identified procedural justice as an important management principle. Building on these concepts, i-deals direct attention to complex social interdependencies and dynamics, such that the interaction between employees and their jobs is embedded in employee-employer interactions of negotiating for person-specific job features with organizational agents.

Related Constructs and Research Streams

Although i-deals are a relatively recent topic of scientific inquiry, several research streams have formulated related assumptions or developed related constructs. For instance, the concept of task redefinition in *Job Characteristics Theory* (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) posits that most work assignments are only incompletely specified (e.g., task goals and work approaches) and need to be reinterpreted and, thus, psychologically “appropriated” by the working individual. A similar idea is inherent in *Organizational Role Theory* and has been developed in the concept of job role differentiation (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991), which describes work roles as “emergent”

social constructs, subject to processes of individual and collective redefinition and renegotiation with job constituents, such as customers, colleagues, or superiors. *Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory* (Scandura & Graen, 1984) has outlined how shared role definitions, differentiation of status, and individual privileges are established among members of work groups through social exchange and negotiation processes with the group leader. Not coincidentally, i-deals share assumptions with *Psychological Contract Theory* (Rousseau, 1995). Specifically, the nature of the psychological contract and obtained i-deals are assumed to be interdependent (e.g., transactional or economic vs. relational or non-material content) and i-deals may be viewed as “amendments” to the psychological contract, (e.g., to compensate or remedy perceived imbalances). A particularly important basis of i-deals is *Organizational Justice Theory* (Greenberg, 1987). Both streams emphasize the social-psychological importance of procedural over distributive justice, i.e., of unbiased, consistent, transparent, understandable, and considered decision processes over the distribution of resources or rewards in itself. Procedural justice is regarded as a necessary condition of functional i-deals (Rousseau et al., 2006). Aligning i-deals with principles of procedural justice lends legitimacy to constraints to distributive justice (e.g., equal treatment), resulting from taking into account broader individual contributions and efforts as well as personal needs and circumstances.

Numerous parallels exist between i-deals and *Proactive Organizational Behavior* (Parker & Collins, 2010), an umbrella term for a broad range of intensively researched and increasingly differentiated constructs, all emphasizing the active role of individuals in shaping their work environments. For instance, early work on proactive socialization tactics (Ashford & Black, 1996) has developed a taxonomy of actions organizational newcomers engage in to find out how to enact their work role, including information seeking, relationship building, positive reframing, and negotiation of job responsibilities. The construct of job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) has provided the blueprint for discretionary, autonomous, or self-enacted modifications of task, relational, and cognitive job boundaries (e.g., adding or dropping tasks and collaboration interfaces). Personal initiative (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997) operationalizes proactive behavior aimed at effecting positive changes as part of the self-starting, future-oriented, and persistent pursuit of personal and organizational goals. Personal initiative represents an individual orientation towards autonomy as well as an active performance concept—and has been considered both as an antecedent and an outcome of i-deals. Parker and Collins (2010) have introduced the term of proactive person-environment fit behavior as an overarching category for behavioral constructs focusing on actions aimed at changing the work situation and/or oneself to improve fit with the job. The behavioral aspects of initiation and negotiation of i-deals correspond with this conceptualization.

Authorized and Functional Arrangements

Conceptualized as a form of legitimate unequal treatment, i-deals refer to personalized work arrangements that are both *authorized and functional* (Rousseau et al., 2006). These two dimensions are particularly useful to distinguish i-deals from related workplace phenomena. I-deals are created through interpersonal negotiation between individual employees and employer agents, entitled to authorize the resources bargained for. Further, these arrangements are assumed to contribute, overall and on aggregate, to the achievement of organizational goals, such as productivity, capacity

for innovation, employee motivation, loyalty and retention, etc. Based on procedural justice and mutual contributions and benefits, i-deals are distinct from manifestations of *organizational micro-politics*, that is, dysfunctional authorized arrangements, such as favoritism, cronyism, and “old boy” networks (e.g., undeserved rewards, based on personal relationship rather than employee contributions and needs). These forms of illegitimate preferential treatment are at odds with procedural justice, and detrimental to broader organizational interests and goals (e.g., organizational injustice and discrimination, employee dissatisfaction and cynicism).

Further, i-deals can be distinguished from behavioral concepts that are not based on negotiation and authorization, but on autonomous or “self-discretionary” actions of employees, aimed at affecting changes in the working environment. In the case of functional forms of *proactive behavior* (Parker & Collins, 2010), such changes take the form of voluntary actions of active performance, contributing to organizational efficiency and/or effectiveness (e.g., adopting a broader job role by supporting colleagues, providing extraordinary customer service, making suggestions, or implementing improvements). In contrast, in the case of *counterproductive behavior* or deviance (Marcus & Schuler, 2004), self-discretionary changes typically manifest in withheld contributions, neglect of job duties, or illegitimate appropriation of resources (e.g., engaging in personal activities during work hours, unexplained absence from the job, or workplace theft). With regard to i-deals, functionality and authorization are theoretically distinct, but mutually interdependent criteria. Explicit authorization by organizational agents acting (in good faith and on behalf of the employer) as negotiation partners to employees, ensures that these arrangements remain advantageous for both sides. This means that i-deals are functional partly because they rely on employer authorization, and, at the same time, become authorized partly because—or, rather, *if*—the underlying special arrangements promise to be functional from an organizational point of view.

Bottom-up and Top-Down Processes

Another way to think about i-deals is based on contrasting different sources of idiosyncrasy. From this perspective, employee-employer negotiations are a hybrid between *top-down* and *bottom-up* processes (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigl, 2010). Organizational HR practices and programs promoting individualization are typically initiated and implemented “top-down” by the employer. Examples of HR practices introducing variability in job features are part-time work, working time accounts, development or training budgets, self-organizing teams, individual goal setting, and cafeteria benefit plans. At the other end of the spectrum are changes that are initiated and enacted “bottom-up” by employees through discretionary proactive and deviant behavior. In that case, person-specific variability in job features results from individual interpretations, use, expansion („stretching“), or overstepping of one’s zone of autonomy and discretion. This can refer to differences in the way job duties are performed, compliance with rules and regulations, use of working time arrangements, or involvement in training and learning opportunities. Combining characteristics of formal organizational and self-enacted discretionary individualization, i-deals are initiated bottom-up by employees and are authorized top-down by employer agents. Representation of employee and employer interests is assumed to ensure that these arrangement are mutually beneficial.

Review and Synthesis of Empirical Studies

Included in the present review are eight empirical studies the author was involved in, published between 2009 and 2015. Shared features were: a) A focus on antecedents and outcomes of i-deals at the individual level; b) use of standardized survey instruments, developed and continuously improved as part of the research program; c) a study design based mostly cross-sectional, single-source data (exceptions are Studies 5, and 6, which included the analysis of longitudinal data, as well as Study 7, which used supervisor ratings of job performance); d) statistical methods of confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, using the software AMOS (an exception was the alternative regression-based approach in Study 8; Studies 4 to 8 included mediation analyses; moderator effects were examined in Study 8). The scope of the research was international. Data were gathered in the USA, Germany, and China. An emphasis in settings and occupations was on hospitals and health care workers. Only Studies 1 and 2 were conducted in a public administration setting and Study 8 used a convenience sample of working parents. Several studies used overlapping data sets in different cross-sectional and longitudinal configurations and with different sets of focal constructs. Overall, the presented program was based on the analysis of ten cross-sectional samples, comprising altogether 2779 observations, and two longitudinal data sets, including 165 cases. However, only six samples were independent, obtained in five distinct organizational, occupational and/or cultural settings, based on N = 1990 persons in total. Non-independence of samples, however, was of minor concern here, first, because overlaps in analyzed relationships between studies were kept to a minimum, and, second, because the presented meta-study did not include a quantitative aggregation of statistical results.

Scope and Foci of the Research Program

Heterogeneity and variety of i-deals means an abundance in manifestations of personalized employee-employer agreements and in the ways in which these are arrived at or emerge. Thus, the scope of the research program was not comprehensive and reflects prior theoretical assumptions. With regard to negotiation contents, the focus was on the two broader types of flexibility and developmental arrangements. *Flexibility i-deals* generally refer to an individually customized working time schedule, but can also include number of work hours, workload reduction, or work location. *Development i-deals* broadly refer to learning opportunities and have been further differentiated into personalized work tasks and individual career support. I-deals on monetary or economic aspects, such as pay, promotions, or other material rewards were not explicitly investigated. In terms of negotiation processes, the focus was on employee-initiated, rather than employer-initiated arrangements, negotiated *ex post*, in an ongoing employment relationship, rather than *ex ante*, at the time of hire. Further, studies focused on successful negotiation, i.e., employee initiation and employer authorization, not taking into account negative implications of failed negotiations and unfulfilled, broken, or revoked personalized agreements.

Portfolio of Included Studies

Study 1 (Rousseau, Hornung, & Kim, 2009) investigated differential effects of negotiation timing and content of i-deals on employee perceptions of social and economic exchange with the organization. This study was the first systematic

empirical examination of i-deals and reports the initial development of the survey instrument and the testing of theoretical assumptions developed by Rousseau et al. (2006). Included aspects of i-deals were ex ante and ex post negotiation, paid work hours, and development opportunities. The sample consisted of N = 265 employees from all areas of a general hospital in the USA (e.g., nursing, administration, support).

Study 2 (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008) tested a model of organizational and individual antecedents and outcomes of flexibility and development i-deals in the context of a telecommuting program in a government administration in Germany. This was the first study on i-deals outside the USA and was based on data from N = 887 public employees. Examined antecedents included structural work features (e.g., part-time, telecommuting, and external assignments) and employee proactivity (personal initiative); outcomes were work-family conflict, affective commitment, voluntary overtime hours, and supervisor performance standards.

Study 3 (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2009) represents the second part of Study 2 and focused on the perspective of supervisors authorizing i-deals. It used the same setting as Study 2 and tests a similar model, based on the responses of N = 263 public managers. Studies were separated as a requirement of the peer-review process.

Study 4 (Hornung et al., 2010) introduced the concept into the work design literature by presenting a model of task i-deals, work characteristics (control, complexity, and stressors), and indicators of well-being and active performance (work engagement and personal initiative). The relationship with the direct supervisor (LMX) was included as a basis of i-deals. The model was confirmed in a subsample of N = 189 hospital employees from Study 1 and a second sample of N = 135 German hospital physicians.

Study 5 (Hornung, Glaser, & Rousseau, 2010) was a reanalysis of the data from study 1. Based on a pooled cross-sectional sample of N = 373 and a smaller longitudinal data set of N = 74, the study reports, how improvements in job autonomy and distributive justice act as mediators between ex post negotiation of i-deals and enhanced job satisfaction. Backing up investigated relationships with a battery of cross-lagged path models, this study provided the first longitudinal results on i-deals.

Study 6 (Hornung, Glaser, Rousseau, Angerer, & Weigl, 2011) reported a model of employee-oriented leadership, development and flexibility i-deals, and quality of working life (work engagement and work-family conflict) among hospital physicians in Germany. This study was primarily a replication of previous results and was based on samples of N = 159 and N = 142 from two waves of a survey study, as well as a longitudinal subsample of N = 91; data partly overlapped with Study 4.

Study 7 (Hornung, Rousseau, Weigl, Müller, & Glaser, 2014) extended previous results by introducing a more elaborated measure and model of work design through i-deals. The model was tested in a sample of N = 187 clinical hospital staff working in a psychiatric-neurological clinic in Germany and included supervisor ratings of job performance. Development i-deals were divided into personalized work tasks and career support. Specific outcomes and intermediating processes were modeled for task (job autonomy and performance), career (skill acquisition and occupational self-efficacy), and flexibility i-deals (reduced work overload and psychological strain). The supervisor relationship (LMX) was confirmed as an antecedent of all three forms.

Study 8 (Tang, & Hornung, 2015) developed a model of flexibility and development i-deals, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, work engagement, and mutual enrichment between the work and family domain. The model was tested in a convenience sample of N = 179 working parents from southern China. Theoretical assumptions regarding an important role of i-deals in the complex interactions between work and family life were supported. Personal initiative was confirmed as an antecedent of i-deals, especially in combination with a supportive family background.

Synthesizing a Meta-Model of I-deals

Structured summaries of all eight studies were created in a standardized format, including sample information, control variables, analyzed antecedents, dimensions of i-deals, mediating constructs, outcomes, and main results. Next, statistical parameters were extracted, compiled in a compendium of tables, and subsequently reorganized into a meta-model of individualized employee-employer negotiations. Antecedents were categorized into individual (e.g., personal initiative), organizational (e.g., work structures), and interpersonal (e.g., leader relationship) factors. Outcomes were grouped into benefits for the individual (e.g., reduced work-family conflict), benefits for the organization (e.g., task performance), and mediating processes (e.g., work design). For all correlates the quality of evidence was rated according to methodological criteria (e.g., singular or replicated results). Based on this meta-model, the following summary of results, limitations, and implications was derived.

Dimensions of I-deals

A central objective of the research program was to identify those aspects of work and employment conditions that are most commonly subject to personalization through i-deals. The development, psychometric assessment, and continuous improvement of survey measures, thus, was an integral part of the research. Established and validated was the distinction between agreements expanding individual working time flexibility (i.e., scheduling or distribution of work hours) and those providing personalized support for professional development (i.e., job content, training, and learning and performance goals). Less well studied were other time-related arrangements, e.g., targeting the number of paid work hours and workload reductions. In later studies, developmental agreements were differentiated into task and career i-deals. Additionally, general scales on ex ante versus ex post negotiation confirmed that the latter, negotiated in ongoing employment relationships, were both more common and psychologically relevant than the former, made at the time of hire.

Antecedents of I-deals

The best established individual antecedent of i-deals is employee proactivity, operationalized in terms of personal initiative. Although some studies have found effects of other personal attributes, such as gender and age, these results were somewhat context-specific. With regard to interpersonal or contextual factors, the quality of the work exchange relationship with the direct supervisor (LMX) seems to be the most critical aspect of the social capital required for successfully negotiating personalized arrangements. Less clear-cut were results on the organizational factors facilitating or constraining the use of i-deals. Whereas structural forms of de-

standardization, such as part-time work and telecommuting, seem to support primarily the negotiation of flexibility i-deals, in some settings a higher standing in the organizational hierarchy was associated with a greater extent of developmental arrangements. However, in some instances, a higher prevalence of development or career i-deals was also observed among less privileged groups of employees, such as part-timers and temporary workers, suggesting that individual negotiation may partly be used to overcome or compensate for experienced disadvantages.

Outcomes of I-deals

The most substantiated outcome of flexibility i-deals was a reduction of stressful work-family conflict, confirming that these arrangements are negotiated to offset overburdening job demands and support employees' work-life balance. Further correlates included less overtime and lower work pressure, which was associated with reduced cognitive and emotional strain, as well as higher extrinsic work motivation, which was found to contribute positively to work-to-family enrichment. Although there is some concern that flexibility i-deals lead to lower quality treatment by the employer (e.g., work assignments, training opportunities, promotions, etc.), no clear-cut indication for this was found. However, i-deals increasing or decreasing the number of paid work hours turned out to have negative implications for the quality of the employment relationship. Specifically, lower employee perceptions of social exchange with the organization and higher salience of economic aspects confirmed that i-deals are limitedly applicable to material or monetary aspects. Whereas flexibility i-deals appeared to benefit more directly the individual worker, developmental arrangements showed associations with outcomes that conventionally are more strongly the focus of organizational interests, such as employee attachment (i.e., affective commitment and social exchange perceptions), intrinsic motivation (i.e., work engagement), and performance (i.e., supervisor performance expectations, ratings of task performance, and voluntary overtime). Differentiating between task and career i-deals allowed a more specific allocation of outcomes connected to performance and learning, but this distinction was based on a single study and needs to be interpreted with caution. The same holds true for potential negative side-effects of increased work-family conflict, which were found in one study only.

Intermediating Processes

Some evidence was found suggesting that changes in extrinsic (e.g., distribution of rewards) and intrinsic (e.g., job autonomy) job features, respectively the activation of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational processes, mediated the relationship between i-deals and positive outcomes (e.g., work engagement and job satisfaction). Most substantiated in this regard was a mediating role of work characteristics, specifically higher autonomy or control at work, more complex or challenging work tasks, and lower levels of work stressors. Accordingly, i-deals have been advocated as an instrument for differential and dynamic approaches to work redesign.

Limitations and Challenges

Several limitations and challenges need to be mentioned. Rooted in the observation of individualized employee-employer negotiations as a factual workplace phenomenon, research on i-deals lacks a strong theoretical basis. Accordingly, the reviewed studies

have drawn on different models and concepts, such as social exchange, leadership, and work design, but defy integration into a coherent overarching and unifying theoretical framework. Further, focusing on individual-level outcomes involves the risk of neglecting relevant systemic or collective effects (e.g., implications for organizational climate). Methodological constraints arise from the context-specific inclusion of different items, contents, and dimensions of i-deals. As mentioned before, overlapping samples between studies are due to multiple analyses of the same data in different configurations and with alternative sets of focal constructs. To some extent, these limitations are attributable to the characteristics of “real world” research processes, unfolding in an iterative, stepwise, and retrospective, rather than a linear, planned, and prospective fashion. Potential biases can further arise from the amalgamation of interchanging phases of deduction and induction (i.e., theorizing and data analysis), combined with partially opportunistic elements, such as field access, sampling, and publication opportunities. Arguably, however, these are quite general issues and by no means limited to or even characteristic for this particular research.

Practical Implications

Evidence for the occurrence and relevance of personalized work arrangements was found in all organizational, occupational, and cultural contexts, raising questions regarding the practical implications of i-deals in contemporary workplaces. Results show that the perspectives of negotiating employees and authorizing supervisors on antecedents and outcomes of i-deals tend to converge. Both employees and managers need to pay attention to specific outcomes and potential side effects of different types of agreements. One way to avoid negative consequences is to try to balance flexibility and development by tying non-standard working time arrangements to learning opportunities and goals—and vice versa. Managers are cautioned that the use of individual negotiation as an instrument of employee-oriented leadership is contingent on prerequisites—most importantly, adherence to principles of procedural justice.

Concluding Remarks

The construct of i-deals was introduced by Rousseau (2001, 2005), based on the phenomenon of individualized employee-employer negotiations. At the outset of the presented research program, empirical evidence on i-deals was limited to indirect and anecdotal accounts. Reviewed studies represent an initial wave or “first generation” of quantitative research on i-deals, which has provided the impetus for a rapidly growing body of international research. Nonetheless, at this point it is still unclear whether i-deals can live up to the promise of transforming technocratic or “Tayloristic” work structures into personalized „custom-tailored“ jobs. There is some indication that the benefits of i-deals can best be realized if such arrangements are used as “secondary elasticities” to increase the responsiveness and flexibility of a well-designed HR management system. However, there is also a risk that i-deals aggravate existing inequalities and differences in status and power (e.g. core and peripheral employees), if misused as a cost-efficient way for a case-by-case upgrading of “no frills” work contracts, which otherwise have been stripped of traditional employee benefits.

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