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## Article

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Severin Hornung, Jürgen Glaser, Denise M. Rousseau\*

## **Interdependence as an I(-)Deal: Enhancing Job Autonomy and Distributive Justice via Individual Negotiation\*\***

Drawing on the concept of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), the study tests assumptions regarding interdependencies between individuals and organizations in determining work and employment conditions. I-deals are personalized arrangements individual employees negotiate with their employer. We suggest that workers use i-deals to make their jobs more intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Ex post negotiation is assumed to have positive effects on autonomy and distributive justice, which should mediate a positive relationship between i-deals and job satisfaction. Cross-sectional (N = 373) and longitudinal (N = 74) survey data support the hypothesized relationships. The potential of i-deals as a means for individualizing organizations and further research needs are discussed.

### **Interdependenz als I(-)Deal: Tätigkeitsspielraum und Verteilungsgerechtigkeit als Gegenstände individueller Aushandlungsprozesse**

Basierend auf dem Konzept der idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) werden wechselseitige Abhängigkeiten zwischen Organisationsmitgliedern und -strukturen in Form individueller Einflussnahme auf Arbeits- und Beschäftigungsbedingungen untersucht. I-deals sind personalisierte Bedingungen, die auf individuellen Aushandlungsprozessen und Übereinkünften zwischen einzelnen Beschäftigten und Vertretern der Organisation basieren. Es wird angenommen, dass i-deals von Mitarbeitern initiiert und ausgehandelt werden, um intrinsische und extrinsische Gratifikationspotenziale ihrer Arbeit zu erweitern. Positive Auswirkungen erfolgreicher Nachverhandlung (ex post i-deals) werden auf Autonomie und Verteilungsgerechtigkeit erwartet, von denen angenommen wird, dass sie zwischen i-deals und Arbeitszufriedenheit vermitteln. Hypothesen werden durch quer- (N = 373) und längsschnittliche (N = 74) Fragebogendaten unterstützt. Potenziale und Grenzen individueller Aushandlung als Mittel zur Individualisierung von Organisationen sowie offene Forschungsfragen werden diskutiert.

**Key words: idiosyncratic deals, individual bargaining, job autonomy, distributive justice, job satisfaction, cross-lagged panel analysis**

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## Introduction

Contemporary changes in work and employment are evident in the shift in risks and responsibilities from employers to individual employees (e.g., Kochan 2005; Rousseau 2006). Paternalistic notions of employer responsibility for employee welfare, characteristic for traditional modes of industrial employment, are increasingly replaced by a new psychological contract, emphasizing the contingent exchange of work performance for competitive payment and career development opportunities on internal and external labor markets (e.g., Hiltrop 1995; Sparrow 2000). Changing organizational paradigms, widespread deregulation of labor laws, and erosion of collective bargaining signal to workers the need to “pack their own parachutes” to secure a professional future (Arthur/Rousseau 1996; Hirsch 1987). This shift in risks and responsibilities is evident in new conceptualizations of wage labor, which draw on the domain of self-employment to describe that workers today act more and more like free agents on their own behalf (Pink 2002) or entrepreneurs of their own labor power (Pongratz/Voß 2003). At the same time there is growing scholarly interest in the proactive component of organizational behavior, emphasizing the active role employees play in interacting with and shaping their work environment (Crant 2000; Grant/Ashford 2008). Rather than being passive job recipients, employees adopt strategies to enhance their work, employment, and careers (e.g., Ashford/Black 1996; Griffin/Neal/Parker 2007; Parker/Collins, in press). One consequence of such self-initiated, change-oriented actions is the emergence of patterns of reciprocal determination or interdependence between individuals and the organization (e.g., Frese/Garst/Fay 2007). Interdependence in this sense implies that employees find ways to personally affect workplace conditions long regarded as beyond their control (Grant/Parker 2009; Wrzesniewski/Dutton 2001).

Contemporary organizations, on the other hand, are frequently faced with the challenges of attracting and retaining talent in competitive labor markets and managing an increasingly heterogeneous and diversified workforce (e.g., Hiltrop 1999; Williams/O'Reilly 1998). Societal trends of individualization have contributed to developments, which demand that human resource practices today need to cater to a progressively broader array of individual employee needs, preferences, and aspirations (e.g., Ester/De Moor/Halman 1993). Challenging standardization as a basis for efficiency in human resource practices, the task of individualizing the organization, i.e., customizing employment conditions to better fit the diverse needs of different groups of employees (e.g., age, gender, lifestyle, personal values, and career goals), has been identified as a central management challenge of the next decade (Lawler/Finegold 2001).

The concept of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) is a recent development in organizational research, which addresses issues at the intersection of the described trends in the changing nature of work and employment. I-deals are personalized and mutually functional arrangements obtained via processes of individual bargaining between employees and their employer (Rousseau 2005; Rousseau/Ho/Greenberg 2006). Resembling authorized deviations from organizational standard regulations and procedures, i-deals introduce an additional element of flexibility in human resource practices. As

such, they can be regarded as a specific form of interdependence, in which the influence individual workers exercise over features of their jobs manifests. In the present study, we test a set of hypotheses, which are based on the assumption that i-deals offer a way for employees to renegotiate both intrinsic and extrinsic features of their work and employment, making their jobs more autonomous and personally rewarding. A positive cognitive-affective evaluation of negotiated features, in turn, is suggested to result in higher levels of job satisfaction. Hypotheses are tested by analyzing cross-sectional ( $N = 373$ ) and longitudinal ( $N = 74$ ) survey data of hospital employees from the United States.

Our study contributes to previous research in several ways. It builds on the broader literature on proactive behavior, where seeking out i-deals has been acknowledged as one way, in which individual employees can take a self-regulating approach to person-environment-fit by initiating and negotiating changes to their job situation (Grant/Parker 2009). So far, however, only few empirical studies have actually investigated the impact of individuals in personalizing conditions of their work and employment. The present study provides support for the relevance of i-deals in this regard. It also presents the first longitudinal evidence of how i-deals can positively affect both intrinsic and extrinsic job features and employee responses at work. Finally, linking i-deals to the classic outcome of job satisfaction extends previous results on the mutual benefits of personalized arrangements that increase an individual's experienced quality of working life.

### **Idiosyncratic deals**

Idiosyncratic deals, or i-deals for short, are “voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party” (Rousseau et al. 2006, 978). Their defining attributes include: a) Individually negotiated; b) heterogeneous in content; c) varied in scope; and d) intended to benefit both employer and employee. I-deals occur when individual workers ask for and successfully negotiate with their (prospective or current) employer personalized arrangements that differ from the standard treatment their coworkers receive. That said, i-deals are generally understood to be initiated by the worker rather than the employer (Hornung/Rousseau/Glaser 2008). Negotiation implies that i-deals are based on a *mutual agreement* between the two parties to the employment relationship regarding the customization of certain job features (Rousseau 2005). In the negotiation process, individual employees bargain for themselves, whereas the employer is represented or personified by organizational agents possessing legitimate authority to grant the resources bargained for. Previous research has made a strong case for the important role of the direct supervisor as a negotiation partner for i-deals (e.g., Hornung/Rousseau/Glaser 2009; Rosen et al. 2008; Rousseau et al. 2006). However, personalized arrangements may also be negotiated with human resource representatives or higher level managers, who are in a position to authorize them. Negotiation of i-deals can take place both during the recruiting process (ex ante) as well in an ongoing employment relationship (ex post). In the following, we will focus exclusively on ex post bargaining in an already existing employment relationship. This mode of negotiation timing has been identified as the more relevant, as

it allows individuals to draw on insider-knowledge on their work and employment conditions and adapt their jobs to changing personal needs over time (Rousseau et al. 2006; Rousseau/Hornung/Kim 2009). As such, *ex post* i-deals refer to a *re*-negotiation of conditions the individual worker already finds him- or herself in.

The scope of i-deals varies and their content is heterogeneous. I-deals can take myriad forms, covering the range of resources exchanged in employment (Rousseau et al. 2006). Previous research assessed different forms of i-deal content, such as work schedules, development opportunities, and job tasks (Hornung et al. 2008, 2009, 2010). In the present study, we explicitly test the role of individual negotiation as a means through which workers can redesign heterogeneous aspects of their own jobs. Autonomy and distributive justice represent two important intrinsic (i.e., task-inherent) and extrinsic (i.e., task-external) job features. Traditional wisdom has it that these are conditions that workers are subjected to. According to perspectives of interdependence or reciprocal determination, however, employees can actively shape these features (Grant/Parker 2009; Frese et al. 2007). Individual bargaining is suggested as one way through which workers can construe their own jobs differently, making them more intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Before developing these hypotheses in more detail, a distinction of i-deals from related concepts seems warranted.

The theoretical postulate of mutual benefits for both employee and employer has been used to differentiate i-deals from dysfunctional person-specific arrangements, such as *favoritism* or *cronyism*, which are based on personal and political ties and, eventually, will have a detrimental impact on the organization (Greenberg et al. 2004; Rousseau 2005; Rousseau et al. 2006). In the case of i-deals, the authorizing supervisors and managers play the role of organizational *agents*, that is, they act on behalf of the employer to make sure the interests of both the individual and the organization are met. Although in reality “there is a gray area between i-deals and favoritism” (Rousseau et al. 2006, 980), Rosen et al. (2008) show that i-deals are empirically distinct from organizational politics. Subsequent research has provided evidence for the benefits of i-deals for workers and the employer, in terms of increased performance motivation, affective commitment, and citizenship behavior as well as higher work-life balance and work-related well-being (e.g., Anand et al., in press; Hornung et al. 2009, 2010).

I-deals are the consequence of employees taking initiative to bargain for valued resources they seek to obtain or expand in addition to what the employer’s standard practices would provide them with. As such, they relate to proactive behavior (Grant/Parker 2009; Hornung et al. 2008); more specifically, a category of proactive behavior aimed at increasing person-environment fit (Parker/Collins, in press). I-deals, however, are conceptually distinct from behavioral constructs such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski/Dutton 2001), career initiative (Seibert/Kraimer/Crant 2001), and job change negotiation (Ashford/Black 1996), as they do not refer to behavior *per se*, but to successfully negotiated *arrangements* that reflect both employee voice *and* employer authorization (Hornung et al. 2010). To stress this point, job crafting is related to i-deals as it refers to actions employees engage in to “alter the task and relational boundaries of their jobs to create work with which they are more satisfied” (Wrzesniewski/Dutton 2001, 181). The difference is that crafting is defined as “spontaneous,

unsupervised changes in jobs” (Lyons 2008, 25), whereas i-deals are individually negotiated with and authorized by employer agents. As such, it has been argued that i-deals offer the possibility of attaining broader and more substantial changes than self-enacted modifications, while simultaneously protecting workers from negative employer sanctions for rule breaking or overstepping competencies (Hornung et al. 2010). In their focus on worker behavior rather than employee/employer agreement, job crafting, career initiative and job change negotiation are distinct from i-deals. Moreover, each of these constructs focuses on specific features of the job (i.e., task and relational boundaries, career development, and tasks and role expectations, respectively). I-deals, in contrast are defined as being heterogeneous and thus include all sorts of customized arrangements.

I-deals are also distinct from individualized psychological contracts. I-deals are individually negotiated agreements regarding the personalization of certain employment features, whereas the psychological contract is defined as an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of the reciprocal exchange agreement that constitutes the employment relationship (Rousseau 1995 2001). In other words, the psychological contract is a *cognitive representation*, whereas i-deals refer to *customized conditions*. These two constructs are interrelated, but distinct. The kind of i-deals workers negotiate can influence their beliefs regarding the psychological contract as well as the quality of the employment relationship (Hornung, et al. 2008; Rousseau et al. 2009). Concurrently, the perceived nature of the employment may determine if and what kind of i-deals are sought out and how they are interpreted (Anand et al., in press; Hornung et al. 2009). Lastly, it needs to be pointed out that for the concept of i-deals it is irrelevant whether customized employment features are formalized or not (i.e., put in writing, included in the formal employment contract, or incorporated in a job description). The degree of formalization will typically depend on the organizational context and content of the personalized arrangement (e.g., customized work tasks vs. monetary rewards) and is not a defining feature of i-deals. The decisive criterion for i-deals is that workers individually negotiate special arrangements that make their jobs better fit personal needs, preferences, and/or aspirations (Rousseau 2005). Having defined the construct of i-deals and its distinguishing features, we turn to their potential impact on both intrinsic and extrinsic job features and, subsequently, the employee’s evaluation of his or her work situation.

## Hypothesis

### *Intrinsic job features: I-deals enhancing job autonomy*

Job content is an important domain for personalized arrangements (e.g., Miner 1987; Rousseau 2005; Hornung et al., 2010). Autonomy is probably the most intensively researched task-related or intrinsic job characteristic (e.g., Fried/Ferris 1987; Sauter/Hurrell/Cooper 1989), defined as “the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the processes to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman/Oldham 1980, 79). Beneficial effects of autonomy for intrinsic motivation, health, and well-being of the working person are well-documented (e.g., De Lange et al. 2003; Spector 1986; Van der Doef/Maes 1999). Supporting the fulfillment of basic human needs for personal

control and self-determination (Ryan/Deci 2000), autonomy is a resource that workers value and strive to maintain or expand (e.g., Ashford/Black 1996). For example, Frese et al. (2007) have shown that personal initiative, a proactive performance concept, is not only an outcome of a positive occupational socialization, but that individuals with high personal initiative also find ways to influence their work characteristics, increasing the level of control and complexity their jobs offer. Seeking out i-deals is a form of proactive and autonomy-oriented behavior, directed towards improving one's personal situation at work via means of individual bargaining. As a key intrinsically rewarding work feature, the level of autonomy a job offers is a likely focus of renegotiation – or, put differently, i-deals provide a way for employees to enhance their autonomy at work.

Hypothesis 1: Negotiation of ex post i-deals will relate positively to job autonomy.

### ***Extrinsic job features: I-deals enhancing distributive justice***

The importance of job content notwithstanding, wage labor is by definition not motivated intrinsically, but performed in exchange for compensation. The subjective equity in the allocation of organizational rewards relatively to one's own contributions is expressed in the concept of distributive justice (Adams 1963). In the narrower sense used here, distributive justice is defined as “the perceived fairness of the amounts of compensation employees receive” (Folger/Konovsky 1989, 115). An extensive amount of research on equity theory has provided evidence that employees arrive at their evaluations of outcome fairness through social comparison processes and actively strive to create or maintain balanced exchange agreements by adjusting their input to avoid under- and overpayment (e.g., Adams 1963; Goodman/Friedman 1971). In contemporary organizations, individual bargaining offers an alternative approach to achieving distributive justice. Although it is widely acknowledged that monetary rewards are frequently subject to individual negotiation, giving rise to a host of studies using experimental designs or analysis of archival data, this assumption has seldom been tested in field research (e.g., Stuhlmacher/Walters 1999). Differing from related constructs that exclusively focus on specific content, such as job tasks (Ashford/Black 1996), i-deals have been theorized to comprise heterogeneous resources, that require employer authorization to attain, such as pay or expanded authority over decisions (Rousseau 2005; Rousseau et al. 2006). In addition to intrinsic job features, such as autonomy, compensation is an important domain of individualized workplace arrangements (Babcock/Laschever 2003; Greenberg, et al. 2004; Rousseau 2005). As a fundamental extrinsically rewarding employment feature, we suggest that distributive justice may be subject to and partly be an outcome of individual bargaining processes. Put differently, we propose that i-deals can provide a way for workers to negotiate for personalized compensation, thus subjectively improving fairness in the allocation of organizational rewards.

Hypothesis 2: Negotiation of ex post i-deals will relate positively to distributive justice.

### ***Evaluation of negotiated job features: Enhanced job satisfaction***

General job satisfaction is commonly defined as a positive work-related attitude, based on a favorable cognitive-affective evaluation of one's job as a whole (e.g., Cranny/

Smith/Stone 1992). The tremendous attention that research has paid to this construct is due to its importance for both employees and employer. As a positive affective state, job satisfaction is an important aspect of worker well-being and mental health (e.g., Warr 2007). Furthermore, job satisfaction is positively related to job performance, employee retention, and organizational outcomes (e.g., Harter/Schmidt/Hayes 2002; Judge et al. 2001; Koys 2001). Note that, although the happy-productive worker thesis has been subject to some dispute, the meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2001) has revealed a corrected mean correlation between job satisfaction and performance of  $r = .30$  across 312 samples. Additionally, a prolific line of research has established job satisfaction as a precursor of voluntary acts of *contextual* performance or citizenship behavior, which are essential for the efficient functioning of organizations (e.g., Ilies et al. 2009).

Based on the assumption that workers negotiate to create work arrangements that better fit their personal needs and goals, enhanced job satisfaction is anticipated as an consequence of i-deals. Moreover, successful i-deals have been theorized to result in a win-win situation, benefiting both parties to the employment relationship (Rousseau et al. 2006). Due to its mutually positive implications, job satisfaction is a well-suited outcome to test this postulate. However, we also suggest that a positive effect of i-deals on job satisfaction is not primarily attributable to the personalized treatment or individual consideration that these arrangements imply *per se*, but through the mediated effect i-deals have on work and employment conditions. A large number of empirical studies as well as meta-analytical results have established robust links between job satisfaction and both job autonomy (e.g., Bond/Bunce 2003; Spector 1986) and distributive justice (e.g., Cohen-Charash/Spector 2001; McFarlin/Sweeney 1992). As such, the relationship between i-deals and job satisfaction is likely to be mediated via the cognitive-affective evaluation of the achieved enhancement of intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding job features, i.e., higher job autonomy and distributive justice. Summarizing our arguments above, we suggest that:

- Hypothesis 3: Negotiation of ex post i-deals will relate positively to job satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between ex post i-deals and job satisfaction will be mediated by perceived job autonomy (H4a) and distributive justice (H4b).

## Method

### *Setting and sample*

The data originate from two waves of an employee survey in a private general hospital in the northeastern United States conducted between mid-2001 and mid-2003. The site was chosen partly because of its transitional situation. The hospital was faced with the challenge of attracting, motivating, retaining a qualified workforce in a tight labor market and in spite of economically difficult circumstances. Financial problems had forced it to freeze or cut back wages and limit investments in human resource programs. At the same time, it strove to expand the range of medical services it offered to maintain competitive with other health care providers in the region. Cost containment, structural changes towards flatter hierarchies and efforts to develop a more participatory and empowering working culture were part of the organization's long term



strategy. Such changes typically imply a weaker psychological structure of the working situation (e.g., increased insecurity, underspecified job roles, or unclear responsibilities), where employees need to make sense of and fill in the “white spaces”. Taken together with the hospital’s moratorium on across-the-board pay increases and formal promotions, this transitional situation was expected to increase the impetus and opportunity of workers to negotiate personalized arrangements.

In the first wave (T1), 166 out of 350 (47.42%) employees from all functional areas (e.g., clinical, clerical, and support staff) participated. As commonplace in the healthcare system of the United States, physicians were not employed by the hospital and thus not included in the survey. The second wave (T2) was conducted two years later and the response ratio was 207 out of 400 (51.7%). Annual turnover was about 20 percent. Through personal identifier codes provided by the participants, 74 repeat responders were matched. To optimize the utility of available data, hypotheses were tested both in the pooled cross-sectional sample from both waves (N= 373) as well as in the smaller longitudinal (N=74) sub-sample. Reported median age and organizational tenure were “46 to 50 years” and “6 to 10 years”. Most participants (85.0%) were female and worked full-time (79.9%). Overall, 26.5% reported a High School diploma, 12.6% a Registered Nurse diploma, 30.8% an Associate degree 21.2% a Bachelor degree and 5.1% a Master’s degree; 3.8% did not state their level of education. Chi-square tests indicated no meaningful differences in the distributions of demographic information between the two waves or between one-time participants and repeat responders.

### **Measures**

*Ex Post I-deals.* Ex post negotiation of i-deals was measured with two general items developed by Rousseau and Kim (2006). A sample item is “After I started working here, I have been able to negotiate special arrangements that suit me personally“. All instruments in the study used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “Not at all” to 5 = “To a very great extent”. Cronbach’s alpha of the ex post i-deals scale was .82 in the pooled sample.

*Job Autonomy.* Autonomy was assessed with the three-item scale from the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman/Oldham 1975; e.g., “The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work”). Reliability was .81.

*Distributive Justice.* Four items were adapted from the established instrument by Moorman (1991) to measure distributive justice (e.g., “I am rewarded fairly considering the job responsibilities I have“). Internal consistency was high at .94.

*Job Satisfaction.* General job satisfaction was assessed with two widely used items developed by Cole (1979; e.g., “All in all, I am satisfied with my job”). Reliability in the overall sample was .80.

*Control variables.* Dichotomous variables assessed gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and part-time employment (0 = full-time, 1 = part-time). Age was measured with eleven (1 = “below 21 years” to 11 = “over 65 years”), organizational tenure with ten (1 = “a year or less“ to 10 = “more than 30 years“), and education with five categories (1 = “high school diploma” to 5 = “master’s degree“).

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics and correlations*

Tables 1 and 2 provide correlation matrices and descriptive statistics for the pooled cross-sectional sample and the longitudinal subsample. Table 1 also includes a dummy

**Table 1: Zero-order correlations pooled cross-sectional sample**

	M	SD	Time <sup>2</sup>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender <sup>1</sup>	—	—	.06									
2. Age <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.01	-.06								
3. Tenure <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.08	-.04	.47**							
4. Education <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.00	-.13*	-.03	-.03						
5. Part-time <sup>1</sup>	—	—	.00	-.12*	-.04	-.10	.05					
6. Ex Post I-deals	2.31	1.26	.04	-.05	-.17**	-.13*	.04	.23**	[.82] <sup>3</sup>			
7. Job Autonomy	3.65	0.94	.09	.00	.10	-.01	.12*	.03	.22**	[.81] <sup>3</sup>		
8. Distributive Justice	2.71	1.04	.07	-.07	.10	-.05	-.03	.10	.31**	.29**	[.94] <sup>3</sup>	
9. Job Satisfaction	3.36	1.06	.06	-.16**	.09	-.16**	.05	.08	.33**	.46**	.48**	[.80] <sup>3</sup>

N = 373; \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05; <sup>1</sup>categorical variables; <sup>2</sup>time of measurement (T1/T2 = 0/1); <sup>3</sup>Cronbach's alpha.

**Table 2: Zero-order correlations longitudinal subsample**

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. Gender <sup>1</sup>	—	—													
2. Age <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.09												
3. Tenure <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.06	.50**											
4. Education <sup>1</sup>	—	—	-.35**	.01	-.08										
5. Part-time <sup>1</sup>	—	—	.03	-.07	-.17	.15									
6. Ex Post I-deals T1	2.24	1.29	-.05	-.32**	-.25*	.10	.32**	[.86] <sup>2</sup>							
7. Ex Post I-deals T2	2.49	1.24	-.07	.01	.11	-.05	.10	.43**	[.82] <sup>2</sup>						
8. Job Autonomy T1	3.67	0.96	.09	.04	-.11	.11	-.17	.08	-.10	[.82] <sup>2</sup>					
9. Job Autonomy T2	3.72	0.89	-.13	.15	.08	.07	-.03	.28*	.26*	.29*	[.75] <sup>2</sup>				
10. Distributive Justice T1	2.73	0.97	-.11	-.01	-.13	-.03	-.03	.37**	.12	.20	.13	[.90] <sup>2</sup>			
11. Distributive Justice T2	2.97	0.99	-.08	.21	.14	-.18	-.03	.26*	.30*	-.13	.28*	.46**	[.94] <sup>2</sup>		
12. Job Satisfaction T1	3.41	1.04	-.12	-.03	-.19	.07	-.03	.25*	.11	.40**	.11	.55**	.13	[.84] <sup>2</sup>	
13. Job Satisfaction T2	3.42	1.02	-.22	.27*	.04	.06	-.08	.15	.34**	.01	.37**	.30**	.49**	.25*	[.74] <sup>2</sup>

N = 74; \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05; <sup>1</sup>categorical variables; <sup>2</sup>Cronbach's alpha.

variable for the time of measurement (0 = T1, 1 = T2), which did not correlate with any of the assessed constructs. Demographic information correlated with study variables in several cases and therefore was controlled for in the analyses. In the longitudinal sample, pairwise t-tests assessed mean changes over time. A significant increase was observed only in Distributive Justice ( $M_{T1} = 2.73$ ,  $SD_{T1} = 0.97$ ;  $M_{T2} = 2.97$ ,  $SD_{T2} = 0.99$ ;  $t(70) = 1.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but not in Ex Post I-deals ( $M_{T1} = 2.24$ ,  $SD_{T1} = 1.29$ ;  $M_{T2} = 2.49$ ,  $SD_{T2} = 1.24$ ;  $t(71) = 1.53$ ,  $p > .05$ ), Job Autonomy ( $M_{T1} = 3.67$ ,  $SD_{T1} = 0.96$ ;  $M_{T2} = 3.72$ ,  $SD_{T2} = 0.89$ ;  $t(71) = 0.40$ ,  $p > .05$ ), or Job Satisfaction ( $M_{T1} = 3.41$ ,  $SD_{T1} = 1.04$ ;  $M_{T2} = 3.42$ ,  $SD_{T2} = 1.02$ ;  $t(70) = 0.47$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Scale analysis**

Subsequent analyses were conducted using AMOS 17.0 with maximum likelihood estimation (e.g., Byrne 2001). In a first step, scales were subjected to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Initially, this was done in a two-group analysis, where data from each of the two waves constituted a separate group (N = 166 / 207). Examined fit indices complied with conventional standards. Relative chi-square was below 3.0 ( $\chi^2(76) = 135.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.79$ ); Normed Fit Index (NFI = .95), Incremental Fit Index (IFI = .98), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .98) were above .90; and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .046) was below .080. Subsequently, measurement invariance was tested by constraining model parameters to be equal across the two groups and examining changes in chi-square (e.g., Byrne 2001). No significant decrease in fit resulted from imposing equality constraints on factor loadings, factor variances, and factor covariances ( $\Delta\chi^2(17) = 21.06$   $p > .05$ ). This measurement invariance indicates that the factor compositions as well as the factor correlations are similar in the two waves and combining them is methodologically legitimate.

**Table 3: Items and factor loadings (CFA)**

Factors & Items	Factor Loadings
<b>Ex Post I-deals (Rousseau/Kim 2006)</b>	
I have been able to negotiate with my supervisor to create an employment arrangement that suits me personally	.87
After I started working here, I have been able to negotiate special arrangements that suit me personally	.80
<b>Job Autonomy (Hackman/Oldham 1975)</b>	
The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work	.90
My job permits me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work	.85
The job denies me any chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work	.56
<b>Distributive Justice (Moorman 1991)</b>	
I am rewarded fairly considering the job responsibilities I have	.92
I am rewarded fairly in view of the amount of experience I have	.91
I am rewarded fairly considering the stresses and strains of my job	.86
I am rewarded fairly for the amount of education and training I have	.86
<b>Job Satisfaction (Cole 1979)</b>	
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	.86
I would recommend this job, if a good friend of mine told me he/she was interested in working in a job like mine	.79

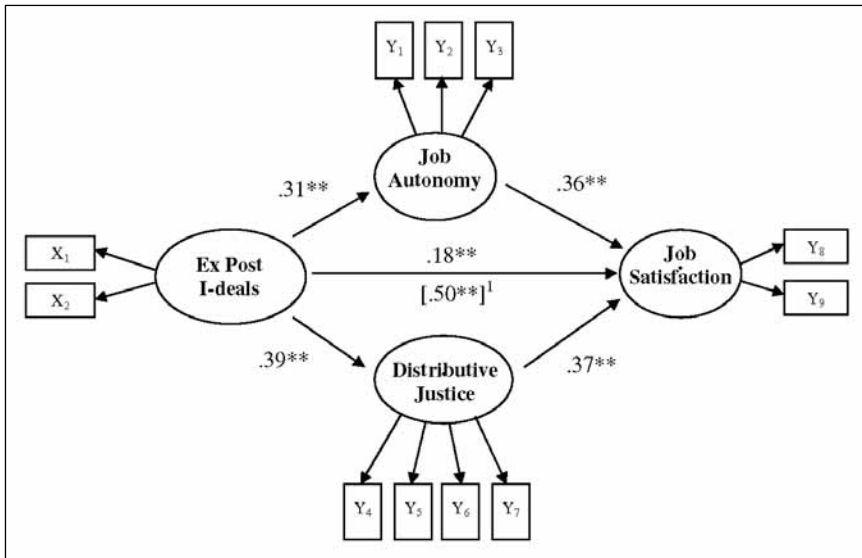
Notes: N = 373;  $p < .001$  for all factor loadings.

A repeated CFA in the pooled sample (N= 373) yielded equally adequate results ( $\chi^2(38) = 89.89, p < .01; \chi^2/df = 2.37; NFI = .96; IFI = .98; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .061$ ). With the exception of the reverse coded autonomy item, which showed a moderate factor loading of .56, all items loaded highly (.79 or above) on their latent constructs. Complete CFA results are reported in table 3.

**Cross-sectional effects**

For cross-sectional hypothesis testing, the CFA model was transformed into the latent-variable structural model shown in figure 1. Gender, age, tenure, education, and part-time were controlled on all variables. Fit was adequate ( $\chi^2/df = 2.46; NFI = .94; IFI = .93; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .063$ ) and all paths corresponded to our expectations. Ex Post I-deals related positively to both Job Autonomy ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ) and Distributive Justice ( $\beta = .39, p < .01$ ), which, in turn, related positively to Job Satisfaction ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$  and  $\beta = .37, p < .01$ ). Upon adding the latter two paths, the initial effect of Ex Post I-deals on Job Satisfaction was reduced from  $\beta = .50$  to  $\beta = .18$  (both  $p < .01$ ), indicating partial mediation according to Baron and Kenny (1986). As an alternative approach to mediation, Sobel-tests determined the significance of indirect effects (Sobel 1982). Results indicated that indirect effects of Ex Post I-deals on Job Satisfaction were mediated via both Job Autonomy ( $\beta_{ind} = .11, z = 3.47, p < .01$ ) and Distributive Justice ( $\beta_{ind} = .14, z = 4.28, p < .01$ ). We conclude that cross-sectional analyses provide full support for all four hypotheses.

**Figure 1: Cross-sectional effects**



Notes: N = 373; \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05; ¹direct effect of Ex Post I-deals before adding effects of Job Autonomy and Distributive Justice; control variables not displayed.

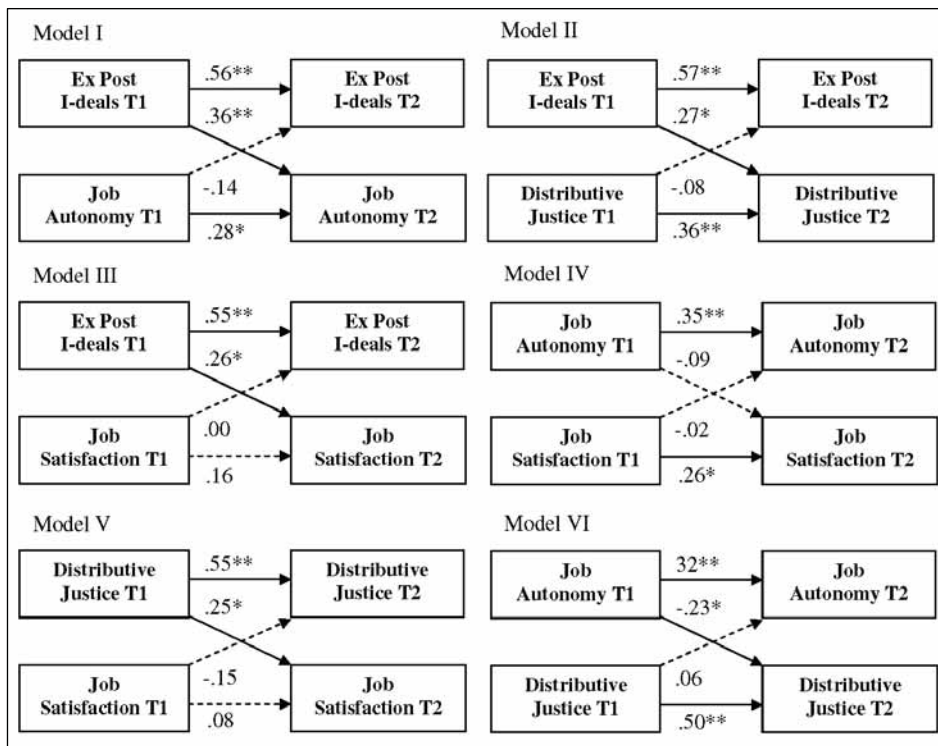
Control variables had several significant effects. Negotiation of Ex Post I-deals was negatively influenced by age ( $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ ) and positively by part-time employ-

ment status ( $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ). Job Autonomy was affected by age ( $\beta = .17, p < .01$ ) and education ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ); Distributive Justice by age ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ); Job Satisfaction by gender ( $\beta = -.16, p < .01$ ), age ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ), and organizational tenure ( $\beta = -.20, p < .01$ ).

**Cross-lagged effects**

Acknowledging that cross-sectional analysis does not allow inferences on the causal direction of effects, the available longitudinal data were used to strengthen the case for our model. For all five paths in the model as well as for the non-hypothesized relationship between Job Autonomy and Distributive Justice, cross-lagged path models on the level of manifest variables were calculated (see figure 2). All control variables were included in each model; with zero degrees of freedom, no fit indices were estimated.

**Figure 2: Cross-lagged effects**



Notes: N = 74; \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05; control variables not displayed.

Corresponding with hypothesis 1, Ex Post I-deals T1 had a positive lagged effect on Job Autonomy T2 ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ), whereas the reverse effect was non-significant ( $\beta = -.14, p > .05$ ). Supporting hypothesis 2, Ex Post I-deals at T1 were associated with perceptions of higher Distributive Justice at T2 ( $\beta = .27, p < .05$ ), without indication of a reverse causal relationship ( $\beta = -.08, p > .05$ ). In line with hypothesis 3, Ex Post I-deals T1 turned out to be an even better predictor of Job Satisfaction T2 ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ) than Job Satisfaction T1; again, no significant reverse effect could be detected ( $\beta$

= .00,  $p > .05$ ). Whereas the longitudinal association between Distributive Justice T1 and Job Satisfaction T2 confirmed cross-sectional results ( $\beta = .25, p < .05$ ; reverse direction:  $\beta = -.15, p > .05$ ), no relationship was found between Job Autonomy T1 and Job Satisfaction T2 ( $\beta = -.09, p > .05$ ; reverse direction:  $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ). Explanations for this unexpected finding may be found in the non-hypothesized longitudinal relationship between Job Autonomy and Distributive Justice. As it turned out, workers with higher Job Autonomy at T1 reported significantly lower Distributive Justice at T2 ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ; reverse direction:  $\beta = .06, p > .05$ ). Accordingly, only four of the five postulated paths in our model received support through cross-lagged path analysis.

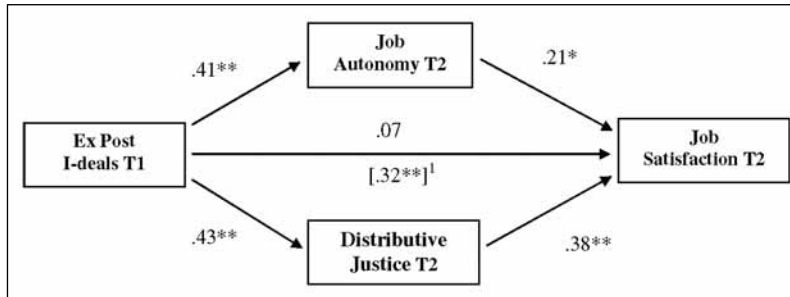
### *Lagged and synchronous effects*

Finally, a mixed path model was specified, incorporating lagged effects of Ex post I-deals T1 on Job Autonomy T2 and Distributive Justice T2 as well as synchronous effects of Job Autonomy T2 and Distributive Justice T2 on Job Satisfaction T2 (see figure 3). This configuration was based on the assumption that Job Satisfaction is a more instantaneous affective-cognitive response to current job features, whereas the negotiation of i-deals has been shown to have consistent and sustaining effects on Job Autonomy and Distributive Justice over the course of our study. Again, control variables were included and the model attained acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(1) = 1.48, p > .05$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.48$ ; NFI = .99; IFI = .99; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .082; note that for simple path models with few degrees of freedom and low sample size non-significance of the absolute chi-square is a better indicator of fit than more complex indices, which may not be reliable estimates; e.g., Kline 1998). Ex post I-deals T1 had positive effects on Job Autonomy T2 ( $\beta = .41, p < .01$ ) and Distributive Justice T2 ( $\beta = .43, p < .01$ ), both of which related positively to Job Satisfaction T2 (Autonomy T2:  $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ; Distributive Justice T2:  $\beta = .38, p < .01$ ). With regard to control variables, we found that Ex post I-deals T1 were influenced negatively by age ( $\beta = -.24, p < .05$ ) and positively by part-time employment ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ), whereas age related positively ( $\beta = .30, p < .05$ ) and Education negatively ( $\beta = -.28, p < .05$ ) to Distributive Justice T2.

Differing from cross-sectional results, mediation analysis sensu Baron and Kenny (1986) showed that, taken together, Job Autonomy T2 and Distributive Justice T2 fully mediated the positive effect of Ex post I-deals T1 on Job Satisfaction T2. That is, the direct effect of Ex post I-deals on Job Satisfaction ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ) vanished almost completely ( $\beta = .07, ns$ ) upon adding the mediating pathways. Compared to the indirect effect via Distributive Justice T2 ( $\beta_{ind} = .16, z = 2.55, p < .05$ ), however, the indirect effect via Job Autonomy T2 only attained marginal significance ( $\beta_{ind} = .09, z = 1.72, p = .085$ ). According to previous results, the weak association between Autonomy and Job Satisfaction is likely to be caused by an observed tension between autonomy and distributive justice in our sample. However, as MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002) have demonstrated, Sobel-tests may also be overly conservative. Based on extensive simulation studies, these authors have proposed revised critical z-values (e.g.,  $z' < 0.97$  for  $p < .05$  and  $z' < 1.10$  for  $p < .01$ ), according to which our result should be regarded as highly significant. We conclude that, some

constraints with regard to H4a notwithstanding, both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses provide empirical support for all four hypotheses.

**Figure 3: Lagged and synchronous effects**



Notes: N = 74; \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05; ¹direct effect of Ex Post I-deals T1 before adding effects of Job Autonomy T2 and Distributive Justice T2; control variables not displayed.

## Discussion

This study contributes to the emerging literature on i-deals as an important factor in the exchange between employees and employer, wherein individual workers engage in proactive negotiations regarding conditions of work and employment. It provides evidence that workers bargain individually to improve their intrinsic and extrinsic job features, resulting in enhanced job autonomy, distributive justice, and job satisfaction. Moreover, it shows that there is a connection between ex post i-deals and job satisfaction, which is mediated via the attainment of more personally rewarding work and employment conditions. As such, our study empirically confirms that job content and material rewards are two important domains for personalized agreements, which increase employees' opportunity to derive satisfaction from their jobs. Showing that successful negotiation of i-deals leads to higher job satisfaction over time further supports the core assumption that personalized job arrangements can be beneficial for both employees and their employer.

Challenging traditional notions of standardization, i-deals offer a practical, worker-initiated approach to job redesign and increased person-job fit. An implication of our study for organizational efforts to raise job satisfaction is highlighting the importance of employee involvement and voice to suggest and implement personally relevant job-level changes. As employees are likely to negotiate for resources they currently most need or value (e.g., time flexibility, job autonomy, compensation, or development opportunities), personalized changes in work and employment conditions should contribute disproportionately to increasing person-environment fit and thus may be a decisive factor in the cognitive-affective evaluation of job quality. In research on job satisfaction personalized job features should be considered as an additional source of variance, aside from individual differences and answering tendencies, when interpreting dissimilar worker responses to formally comparable jobs or positions.

I-deals resonate with the current *Zeitgeist* of individualization and flexibility in organizational practices. Managers authorizing i-deals, however, are reminded that the positive effects of i-deals were contingent on the degree to which these arrangements enhanced worker autonomy and justice perceptions. Moreover, their potential for increasing person-job fit and organizational flexibility notwithstanding, it seems premature to advocate i-deals as a recipe for replacing Tayloristic working structures with custom-tailored jobs. I-deals can offer supplements to, but do not substitute for well-designed jobs, pay and working time systems. In terms of classic organizational theory, they can be understood as “secondary elasticities” breaking with the Weberian principle of formalized impersonality, which states that organizations should operate strictly without regard of the individual person (Weber 1968). The normative ideal behind the concept of i-deals is that personalization can give rise to a humanization of work, which takes into account and is responsive to the differing and changing personal needs and preferences of employees (Hornung et al. 2008, 2010). Linking i-deals to increased job satisfaction over time strengthens the empirical base for the positive effects of individual negotiation as a way to customize job features.

The concept of i-deals is normative insofar as it is based on the assumption that mutually beneficial agreements between individual workers and employers are generally feasible. However, it is also a descriptive category, as personalized workplace arrangements have always existed, not only in small and family businesses or for star employees and top management, but also for rank-and-file workers in traditional modes of industrial or administrative employment (Rousseau 2005). Nonetheless, concerns that their broad and widespread use in increasingly deregulated and dynamic work settings may lead to an environment, where personally adequate conditions depend on an individual’s negotiation skills and bargaining power seem warranted. The question of bargaining leverage illustrates that i-deals are embedded in power-dependence relationships. Moreover, they are also tied into the social network of the organization, unit or work group, and thus may affect social comparison processes, justice perceptions, and relationships among employees.

Procedural fairness is a crucial factor to ensure that i-deals remain functional for the organization (e.g., Greenberg et al. 2004). Excessive, inconsistent, or biased authorization of i-deals is bound to evoke tensions within the workforce (Rousseau et al. 2006). Based on social network analysis, Lai, Rousseau, and Chang (2008) have shown that co-worker tend to accept the i-deals their peers receive, *if* they anticipate that under similar circumstances they would be able to negotiate comparable arrangements. This finding implies that unequal or differential treatment of employees tends to be socially acceptable, if it complies with the procedural justice principles of distributing resources under consideration of the specific situation and according to individual needs. Nonetheless, the openness or secrecy with which i-deals are made, how they are communicated to co-workers, and consequences of employee perceptions regarding the basis on which i-deals are granted in an organization warrant more research. Future studies examining the impact of i-deals on unit- and organizational-level outcomes would make an important contribution to answering the question how i-deals affect overall organizational climate and cooperation of workers with their employer and each other.



To some extent our study can dispel concerns that i-deals are granted exclusively to a small group of elite workers or star employees. In the present study, i-deals were negotiated to a larger degree by part-timers and younger workers. This result basically replicates previous findings. In a large-scale study on i-deals in the German public administration, Hornung et al. (2008) also found that part-time employment correlated positively and age negatively with the negotiation of i-deals regarding both personal working time flexibility and professional development opportunities. These findings were interpreted as evidence for the assumption that workers in de-standardized work arrangements may be able to capitalize on the higher idiosyncrasy credit (e.g., Hollander 1958) they receive by their peers and thus find it easier to further personalize their jobs. More recently, however, it has been argued that the higher prevalence of i-deals among part-timers could also mean that these workers tend to seek out special arrangement to offset or prevent lower quality treatment compared to full-time employees (Hornung et al. 2010). The fact that younger employees showed higher propensity to negotiate corresponds with assumptions that the proliferation of i-deals is partly attributable to societal value changes towards individualism and revised mental models regarding the nature of employment relationships (e.g., Arthur/Rousseau 1996; Ester et al. 1993; Hirsch 1987).

The longitudinal nature of our study allows inferences regarding certain dynamics associated with the hospital's changing environment. As pointed out above, the hospital under study went through a transition phase characterized by intensive economic pressure, changes in structures and human resource practices, and high turnover. Among repeat responders the overall level of perceived distributive justice had significantly increased during the two years between the first and the second wave. However, we also found that level of education and job autonomy at T1 related negatively to distributive justice at T2. That is, workers in more privileged jobs tended to experience decreased outcome fairness over time. This result may partly be explained by the compensation structure of the hospital. The majority in our sample were rank-and-file workers (e.g., staff nurses, technical, and administrative staff) receiving wages (i.e. hourly pay), whereas head nurses, department supervisors, and managerial staff were salaried and exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act (i.e., not receiving overtime pay). Not only may the two payment systems have been affected differently by the organization's attempts to cut costs, but it is also obvious that working longer hours – a logical implication coping with high turnover and the organization's strategy to expand its services – has opposite consequences for the total compensation of non-exempt versus exempt workers. Part-timers and younger workers, in particular, may have taken advantage of this situation to negotiate for better earning opportunities in terms of both the quantity and quality of work (e.g., shift and overtime rates, special duty supplements).

Although i-deals may have played a role in the shift towards higher distributive justice experienced especially by less qualified workers with initially lower levels of autonomy, this inference warrants cautious interpretation, as the observed result pattern may also be attributable to other factors. Nonetheless, the possibility that the negotiation of i-deals, in aggregate, may have systematically affected the structure of reward systems and work design is in line with an evolutionary perspective on organizational

design as a dynamic process of variation and improvisation (Weick 2001). One important function of i-deals may be to establish precedents and alter organizational practices over time (Rousseau 2005). Cumulatively in the long term, functional i-deals thus may become a vehicle for broader organizational developments, fueled by the interplay between individuals and their jobs.

### *Limitations*

Contrasting with previous approaches, which have explicitly measured different content of i-deals, such as development opportunities, flexibility in work hours, and job tasks (Hornung et al. 2008, 2010), this study used a general measure of ex post negotiation to predict the consequences of personally negotiated workplace arrangements. Although this operationalization may be perceived as a weakness of our study, we posit that it actually constitutes one of its distinctive strengths. If we had operationalized i-deals in terms of any specific content (e.g., individualized job tasks or personalized rewards), the relationships with investigated dependent variables would be more prone to bias arising from common method variance (e.g., Podsakoff et al. 2003). In other words, in this study, the heterogeneous nature of i-deals was explicitly tested and confirmed in the empirical relationships between a neutral i-deals measure and the established constructs of job autonomy and distributive justice; the content of i-deals thus became evident in the dependent variables. Nonetheless, we acknowledge the need to improve the measurement of i-deals. Promising developments towards a refined measurement of both general and content-specific ex post i-deals have been reported recently by Rosen et al. (2008).

In the present study, we have been able to show that empirical relationships between i-deals and job autonomy, distributive justice, and job satisfaction not only exist in cross-sectional observations, but are also evident over time. Cross-lagged panel analyses are considered to be among the more rigorous quantitative methods in organizational research due to following advantages: a) temporal separation of measurement points minimizes the problem of common method variance; b) controlling for autocorrelations factors out effects from individual response tendencies; and c) simultaneous testing identifies the predominant causal direction in the hypothesized relationships (e.g., De Lange et al. 2003; Taris 2000). As turnover during the study was relatively high, the size of the longitudinal subsample was moderate. The practical problems in obtaining longitudinal samples, however, are widely acknowledged. Although we cannot rule out selection effects in the longitudinal sample (e.g., employees with lower job satisfaction could have left the organization), we note that: a) empirical evidence on bias caused by selection effects is low (e.g., Wei/Cowan 1988); and b) our longitudinal sample size of  $N = 74$  is well above the median of  $N = 68$ , reported by Schmidt (1996) for studies in the field of personnel psychology. Further, objections may be raised against our method of pooling two non-independent data sets in the cross-sectional analyses. However, these are dispelled by the fact that – by imposing the respective equality constraints in the two-group CFA model and noting that the resulting chi-square change was non-significant – we have established measurement invariance across the two waves with regard to factor loadings, variances, and cova-

riances. The correlational pattern among study variables thus was equal in both waves and analyzing the samples separately or pooling them does not alter our findings.

Although all our hypotheses received some empirical support, cross-lagged panel analysis did not confirm a longitudinal effect from job autonomy on job satisfaction. This unexpected and counterintuitive finding may be explained by the fact that autonomy T1 related negatively to distributive justice T2. As outlined above, organizational dynamics in the study's context seem to have left workers in more qualified and autonomous jobs with lower perceptions of distributive justice relative to the overall sample, where perceived outcome fairness even had increased. Due to this tension between job autonomy and distributive justice, the former apparently did not turn out as a longitudinal predictor of job satisfaction. Cross-sectionally, however, the positive correlation between autonomy and satisfaction corresponded with theory. Another shortcoming is limited available demographic information. Inclusion of more detailed job and employment data (e.g., occupational group, hourly wage or salaried) would have allowed more specific inferences about the role of structural influences.

Generalizability is an important issue. The present study was conducted in an organization under transition, where *i-deals* may have been used to substitute for adequate general policies and processes. Considering the pace of change and the prevalence of crisis in contemporary firms (e.g., Burke/Cooper 2000), however, it does not seem unlikely that practices of organizational design as improvisation are progressively becoming more the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, the construct of *i-deals* has been developed in the United States where labor laws and trade unions traditionally play a weaker role than in many European countries. Previous studies, however, have shown that *i-deals* can also be found in highly regulated work settings such as the German public administration (Hornung et al. 2008) or state-owned companies in China (Huang/Niu/Lee 2009). We have made the point that *i-deals* should be most effective, if they build on well-designed organizational standard practices and structures. Nonetheless, it remains both a matter of concern and an open question, if and under which circumstances *i-deals* can complement or will undermine processes of collective bargaining and the resulting broad-scale improvements in working conditions. From a labor control perspective one would suspect that *i-deals* may be used as an instrument of "divide et impera", which erodes solidarity and collective action among workers (Braverman 1975). Moreover, linking *i-deals* to individual job satisfaction may not dispel these concerns, as it has been argued that, satisfaction, although commonly treated as an indicator of subjective well-being, may also be interpreted as a sign that employees are "complicit in their own subjugation" (Fineman 2006, 282). By definition, the concept of *i-deals* focuses on employment relationships on the individual level. Despite its optimistic assumption about the feasibility of mutually beneficial deviations from standard organizational practices, however, it neither negates conflicting interests of workers and employers, nor the embeddedness of these arrangements in market- and/or power-dependence relationships. To gain more insights into the underlying issues of power and social relationships in individual bargaining, possible tensions or synergies with collective agreements, and the specific strategies workers use to negotiate *i-deals*, qualitative research, comparable to the work on job crafting

(e.g., Berg/Wrzesniewski/Dutton, 2010), as well as different theoretical and interdisciplinary perspectives on i-deals are called for.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary changes in the nature of employment entail heightened and new demands (e.g., ambiguity, insecurity, overload), but may also open up opportunities for workers to impact and individualize features of their jobs. I-deals emphasize the active role of workers as co-creators of the organization, rather than passive job recipients. According to a famous quote, people may be well-advised to develop grace to accept things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things, which should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish one from the other. The optimistic message our study conveys is that in today's increasingly weaker structured workplaces, more features may be subject to individual influence and change than classic organizational theory assumes.

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