

Do We Get More When We Give More? The I-deals Relationships in the Workgroup

Context

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Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are special terms of employment successfully negotiated between individual employees and their employers that benefit both parties (Rousseau et al., 2006). Providing i-deals is a unique tactic to attract, motivate, and retain valued employees that organizations adopt to manage increasingly complex work environments and tremendous cost constraints (Hornung et al., 2010). Studies have shown that i-deals are related to employees' attitudes, behaviors, and health (e.g., Anand et al., 2018; Erden Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019; Kong et al., 2020; Taser et al., in press). However, with a notable exception (i.e., Anand et al., 2022), no study has examined the influence of workgroup extent of i-deals and especially group i-deals variability on group performance as well as the nomological network in which such relationships occur.

Advancing i-deals theory demands attention to the following question: what type of i-deals distribution in the group promotes group performance? We contend that the relationship between i-deals and workgroup performance is theoretically important because of the tension between what i-deal recipients might gain vis à vis potential negative consequences on coworkers (Kong et al., 2020; Ng, 2017). Though positive relationships have been found between i-deals and supportive recipient behavior on the job (e.g., Ho & Kong, 2015), little is known about how these differentiated arrangements affect group performance. Our proposed conceptualization of i-deals at the group level transforms how OB scholars probe i-deals by contextualizing it at a broader context of the workgroup membership rather than the isolated individual or dyadic examination. To unravel the connection between i-deals and workgroup performance, we draw upon social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to model the interplay between the group extent and variability of i-deals and group performance.

Our study follows five objectives. First, we strive to understand the possible effect of workgroup i-deals distribution on group performance. Specifically, we propose to examine the effect of group i-deals extent vs. group i-deals variability on overall group performance. Second, we propose to identify the mechanism through which the effect of i-deals extent vs. variability transmits to group performance. Third, we aim to understand when group i-deals extent vs. variability translates into group conflict and further group performance. Fourth, we aim to empirically test the ledger model of social relationships for the first time and examine whether group i-deals variability is a stronger predictor of group performance. Fifth, we examine whether the contextual effect of group task interdependence moderates the relative importance of the effect of group i-deals extent vs. variability on group performance. We argue that:

- Those workgroups in which the majority of members have secured preferred work arrangements are likely to perform well by virtue of the widespread opportunity to meet personal needs.
- I-deals variability in the workgroup hinders group performance.
- The opposing effects of i-deals extent and variability on group performance translate through group conflict climate.
- Workgroup task interdependence moderates the mediating effect of workgroup conflict climate on i-deals extent/variability-group performance relationship.
- The destructive effect of i-deals variability on group performance is stronger than the constructive effect of i-deals extent.
- The relative importance of i-deals extent vs. i-deals variability on group performance is moderated by the contextual effect of workgroup task interdependence. The research model is represented in Figure 1.

A pilot study of data collected from 316 employees embedded in 59 workgroups and a main study data of 1244 employees nested in 232 workgroups supported our predictions.

Our study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, we investigate i-deals dynamics at the group level of analysis (as suggested by Liao and colleagues, 2016). Second, we contribute to the literature by identifying one mechanism through which i-deals properties at the group level translate to group performance. Third, we contribute to the i-deals literature by asking the question of when i-deals properties at the group level affect the group conflict climate and further group performance by introducing the workgroup task interdependence to our theoretical framework of group i-deals-performance relationship. Fourth, our theorizing and test of the negative asymmetry of social relationships proposition is an important contribution to the literature. As suggested by previous research (i.e., Labianca & Brass, 2006), negative social relationships may be more important than positive social relationships in explaining an important outcome of interest by organizational researchers – group performance in our case. We will even move one step further and contend that the boundary condition of group task interdependence influences the relative importance of social liabilities and social assets on the outcome of group performance, extending both social ledger and relative importance frameworks.

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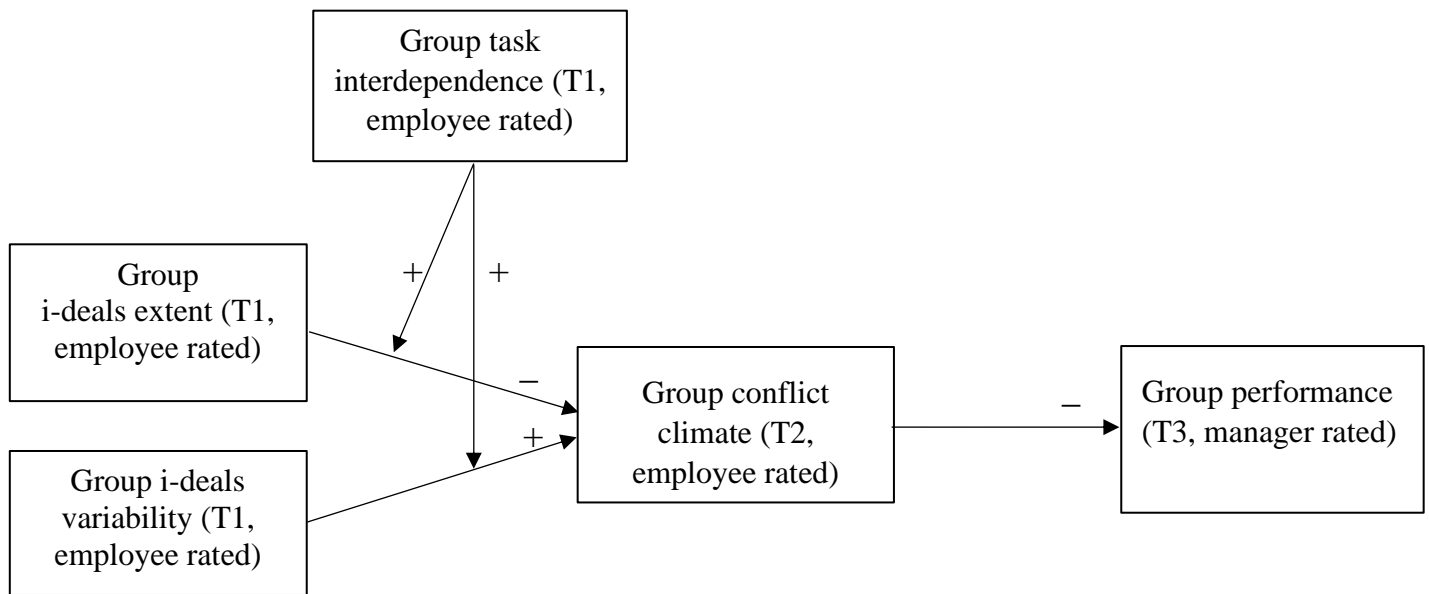


Figure 1. *Research Model*