How do weekly obtained task i-deals improve work performance?

The role of relational context and structural job resources

Key words: Within-person study, i-deals, co-worker support, job resources, work performance

ABSTRACT

Previous research on idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) has treated them as concrete events, arguing that these i-deals shape employment relationships and impact on work performance over long periods of time. However, some types of i-deals may be negotiated and shaped over short periods of time. The aim of this research is to understand the social context within which these types of i-deals unfold and influence employee work performance. Focusing on task i-deals and adopting a weekly diary design approach, we explore the role of relationship quality with co-workers and managers that matter for the obtainment of task i-deals and how obtained task i-deals translate into work performance, over weeks. To explore our research questions, we collected weekly diary data (over seven weeks; n = 67 employees; 67 co-workers and 23 managers) from employees, their co-workers and managers. The results from multi-level analyses demonstrate that weekly reports of co-worker support matter more to obtain task i-deals than employee's relationship quality with their manager. Furthermore, results underline that weekly structural job resources explain how and why obtained task i-deals lead to enhanced work performance over weeks. HR managers and practitioners can design task i-deals as short-term intervention tools to drive work performance.

Key words: Idiosyncratic deals, co-worker support, job resources, work performance, leader-member exchange differentiation.

Weekly task i-deals

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The role of relational context and structural job resources

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Introduction

In the context of dynamic and competitive work environments, idiosyncratic deals (i.e., i-deals) can provide employees with a wide range of individualized work arrangements including but not limited to flexibility in terms of time and location of their workplace (i.e., flexibility i-deals) and career growth opportunities through changing configurations of task and work responsibilities (i.e., task i-deals; Rosen et al., 2013). Although research on i-deals is growing notably (Anand et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2017) it has focused primarily on i-deals obtained over a long time frame such as six months (Rofcanin et al., 2017), one year (Ng & Feldman, 2012) or two years (Hornung et al., 2010). While this body of research is valuable, it overlooks the possibility that employees may obtain i-deals over shorter periods of time. Furthermore, as suggested by Rousseau et al. (2006), i-deals do not necessarily rely on discrete arrangements made on single occasions. On the contrary, arrangements may evolve and mold into a different deal over relatively short periods of time. In this paper we consider obtained i-deals over weeks. We thereby focus on task i-deals which, in contrast to other types of i-deals, are particularly more likely to be negotiated over shorter periods of time.

The first goal of this study is to understand the role of a supportive work environment in facilitating the obtainment of task i-deals at the weekly level. Although managers grant the terms agreed on these arrangements and therefore are key parties in an i-deal negotiation process (Bal & Rousseau, 2015), co-workers also play an important role (Lai et al., 2009). The support elicited from co-workers signals their agreement of the obtainment of task i-deals, which are, by nature, non-standard work practices that deviate from the norms in organizations (Rousseau et al., 2016). To understand what factors facilitate the obtainment of task i-deals at the weekly level, we focus on the role of perceived co-worker support and leader-member exchange social comparison (i.e., LMXSC) and integrate these into our model. The former denotes the extent to which employees feel valued and supported by their

co-workers. The latter underlines how employees perceive and situate their relationships with the manager in comparison to the relationships co-workers have with the same manager (Anand et al., 2010). Informed by social information processing theory (Vidyarthi et al., 2010), we aim to show that i-deals do not unfold in a dyadic vacuum (Bal & Rousseau, 2015) and that co-workers, as well as managers, influence the obtainment of i-deals (Ng, 2017; Rofcanin et al., 2017).

The second goal of this study is to explore how obtained task i-deals are associated with work performance of employees at week level. We integrate structural job resources to account for how task i-deals relate to improved work performance of employees on a weekly basis. Structural job resources include skills, capabilities and professional development opportunities at work (Tims et al., 2013). Our focus on structural job resources is driven by the tenet that task i-deals are intended to provide employees with resources that help them excel at their tasks and perform effectively (Bal & Rousseau, 2015). We draw on the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989) to explore the content of task i-deals from a resource perspective. Our adoption of a weekly design and focus on obtained task i-deals from a resource perspective helps to explain how and why task i-deals may enhance work performance of the recipients (Liao et al., 2016). This is important since prior research on i-deals has mainly built on the reciprocity argument of social exchange theory (Liao et al., 2016) or the signalling functions of i-deals to explain how and why i-deals impact on the work performance of the recipients.

The main contribution of our study is that we explore obtained task i-deals from a resource perspective and capture their dynamic nature at week level. We thereby contribute to the gain cycle principle of the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2018). This principle suggests that under the right environmental conditions that support, enrich and stimulate resources, employees are likely to acquire, accumulate and invest further resources. Such

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relationships show that a gain cycle is established. We explore task i-deals at the weekly level in order to consider the dynamic nature and weekly variability of these relationships. We thereby seek to offer contributions to research that adopts within-person design in exploring proactive work behaviors such as i-deals and to practice by focusing on the motivational and performance implications of weekly i-deals. Figure 1 depicts our conceptual model.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Theory and hypothesis development

Weekly task i-deals and associations with weekly work performance

I-deals are 'voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party' (Rousseau, 2005, p. 23). Thus, i-deals have three defining features: (1) they are negotiated individually, (2) they are intended to benefit both employee and employer, and (3) they vary in scope (Liao et al., 2016).

Research on i-deals to date has mainly focused on discrete arrangements made on single occasions, either ex-ante or ex-post. However, an employee may negotiate a variety of idiosyncratic features as his/her personal work needs, preferences, and conditions change over time (Rousseau et al., 2006). Such negations will involve repeated bargaining because ongoing i-deals are likely to encompass small or big adjustments in cycles of inducements and contributions (Rousseau, 2005). In this research, we focus on task i-deals and argue that employees can obtain task i-deals over weeks, at within-person level.

From the perspective of COR theory, the characteristics of obtained task i-deals can be conceptualised as resources that are of value to employees and which they will seek to maintain and accumulate (Hobfoll, 1989; Las Heras et al., 2017). The COR theory distinguishes between resources according to the extent to which they are transient versus stable. One end of this

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spectrum refers to volatile resources, which are fleeting, dynamic and temporal (Hobfoll, 2002). An example of this type of resource is supervisor emotional support which depends on the capacity and availability of a supervisor (e.g., Kelly et al., 2020). The other end of this spectrum refers to structural resources which are stable and long-term oriented. An example of this type of resource is obtaining promotion or a new responsibility in a project for a long term.

The provision of task i-deals is likely to vary depending on the availability of these resources in the organisation and the capacity of the supervisor to grant these i-deals. However, a key tenet of the COR theory is that in order to accumulate resources and achieve a gain spiral, employees are likely to transition volatile resources into structural resources (i.e., stable resources) and for this reason, engage in proactive efforts to obtain them over relatively shorter periods of time (Kelly et al., 2020).

Drawing on this rationale, we argue that task i-deals are volatile resources and employees are likely to negotiate them over weeks to accumulate and transform these types of i-deals into structural resources. Weekly task i-deals are likely to vary from week to week. Examples may include taking on extra responsibility to manage the performance and work engagement profiles of the client company, working on tasks that fit one's skills better and enjoying flexibility in how one completes his or her tasks. These task i-deals, obtained over weeks, are likely to provide employees with new work opportunities (e.g., working across different but related projects, gaining new skillsets), career growth trajectories and contribute to their work performance. While the consequences and benefits of weekly obtained task i-deals may not be observable every week, these task i-deals accumulate into a larger pool of resources over time and turn into stable resources which are called "resource caravans" (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The mediating role of perceived co-worker support in the association between socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and task i-deals

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In the following we introduce and theorize the role of socially connecting behaviors and perceived co-worker support in the obtainment of weekly task i-deals. Socially connecting behaviours refer to the concern employees show for others and are characterized by employees' self-initiated interactions (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012). These behaviors involve helping co-workers, and caring for, as well as socializing with them. Engaging in socially connecting behaviors signals to the managers that employees care for the well-being of their colleagues and may be more likely to share the benefits of granted i-deals with them (Rofcanin et al., 2017). This is because working in a resourceful work environment facilitates reciprocity and triggers mutual trust and respect among employees (Turner et al., 2010).

We argue that in weeks employees demonstrate socially connecting behaviors with co-workers, these co-workers are more likely to feel supported. Our reasoning is built on the principle of COR theory that people attempt to obtain, retain and protect resources. Stress occurs when they lose resources (Hobfoll, 1989). The gain spiral (or enrichment) principle of COR theory suggests that possessing resources leads to the generation of other resources within the same domain. A recent review of COR theory underlines that resources are transient and dynamic (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and that the accumulation of resources can unfold in a dynamic fashion, culminating in the concept of "resource caravans". During weeks in which employees care for and help their co-workers in work-related matters, co-workers, who are in receipt of these relational resources, are likely to feel motivated and positive, and therefore perceive enhanced co-worker support.

Furthermore, we propose that in weeks employees perceive higher co-worker support, they are more likely to obtain task i-deals. Social support from co-workers involves the perceived availability of resources on which an employee can draw on when the work demands grow (Van Daalen et al., 2006). During weeks in which employees feel supported by their co-workers, they are more likely to feel positive, energized and confident about

approaching their managers to negotiate and obtain task i-deals. This situation signals that in weeks when employees feel the support of their co-workers, they can rely on them to ensure work is completed. This suggests that co-worker support is a significant relational resource that makes employees feel secure and valued in seeking task i-deals at the week level (Petrou et al., 2017; Rofcanin et al., 2019).

To illustrate, imagine a work context where employees work in close collaboration with each other. Reflecting the dynamic nature of business settings, there are likely to be weeks when employees offer more help to their co-workers regarding their work tasks and communicate with them about job related matters. Employees receiving social support are more likely to feel supported. During such weeks, these employees may therefore feel more positive and energetic and thus more likely to approach their managers in order to obtain task i-deals to perform their duties better in these weeks. However in weeks when these employees feel less supported by their co-workers due to the lower extent of socially connecting behaviours exhibited toward them, they are less likely to approach their managers to obtain task i-deals from their managers. In these weeks, these employees are not likely to feel and perceive the relational support and confidence from their co-workers.

Our first hypothesis therefore is:

H1: Co-worker support will mediate the positive association between employees' socially connecting behaviors and obtained task i-deals, at weekly level

The mediating role of structural job resources in the association between obtained task i-deals and work performance

We argue that at the weekly level, structural job resources mediate the associations between obtained task i-deals and work performance. Structural job resources involve the development of skills and abilities, utilizing one's capacities to the fullest and proactively deciding how one completes his or her tasks (Tims et al., 2012). The resource caravan

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concept of the COR theory suggests that the dynamic accumulation of resources generates further resources. In this respect, the content and characteristics of what is obtained with task i-deals are resources themselves. These are unique, personalized and valued developmental opportunities that employees seek to receive and accumulate over weeks. As a result of obtaining task i-deals at weekly level, employees are expected to generate further skill sets and work opportunities which enable them to perform their duties better. Hence, structural job resources resulting from obtained task i-deals become instrumental in the work domain and therefore improve work performance.

While there is a lack of research on the within-person nature of task i-deals (and i-deals in general), indirect support for our arguments comes from between-person research conducted on i-deals: Task i-deals have been shown to enhance work-related kills, enable employees to achieve better person-job fit (Bal & Dorenbosch, 2015) and to relate positively to work performance (Lemmon et al., 2016). Another study at the between-person level which considered task i-deals involving training and development, however, found no relationship with work performance (Anand et al. 2018). While research at the between level is therefore suggestive of a positive relationship between task i-deals and work performance (Liao et al., 2016), the mechanism underpinning this relationship needs further exploration. We thus argue that in weeks when employees obtain higher extent of task i-deals are likely to accumulate structural job resources (i.e., skill and developmental opportunities) which are then likely to be invested in one's work tasks to improve work performance during the same week.

To illustrate, over certain weeks employees may receive agreements on task-related terms (i.e., obtained task i-deals) which help them access structural job resources. These structural job resources enable employees execute their tasks better and achieve job-skill fit, all of which contribute to enhanced work performance during the same week. However, there

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are likely to be weeks during which employees do not obtain any arrangements regarding their tasks and hence are not granted any opportunities to excel their skill sets or develop new capabilities in these weeks. As a result, their work performance is likely to suffer during these weeks.

Our second hypothesis is:

H2: Structural job resources will mediate the positive relationship between obtained

task i-deals and work performance, at weekly level.

The moderating role of LMXSC perceptions on the association between socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and obtained task i-deals

Perceptions of LMXSC indicate an employee's subjective evaluation of the quality of their LMX relationship with their manager compared to the quality of the LMX relationship of co-workers with the same manager. The higher the perceptions of one's LMXSC, the better an employee feels about this relationship (and vice versa regarding the feelings of co-workers; Marescaux et al., 2019). Building on this logic, we expect co-workers who have lower perceptions of LMXSC compared to these of the i-deal recipient (i.e., high LMXSC perceptions of the employee receiving task i-deals) to perceive the provision of task i-deals less fair at the week level. In a relationship characterized by high LMXSC perceptions, managers are more likely to respect, support and trust an employee (Cobb & Lau, 2015) which is an indication that co-workers are likely to feel less fairly treated from an interpersonal point of view. Moreover, a stronger LMXSC relationship between an i-deal recipient and the manager suggests that employees who receive task i-deals are more likely to be listened to and given opportunities to raise their voices (Elicker et al., 2006). These elements are essential to ensure procedural fairness and thus co-workers are less likely to feel that procedural fairness has been adhered to in granting task i-deals to the an employee. Finally, a relationship context of high LMXSC perceptions between an employee and a

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manager means that this employee has greater chances of accessing resources, which raises doubts about distributive fairness of task i-deals granted to an employee (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Combining these arguments, we thus argue that employees who have higher perceptions of LMXSC in general, are less likely to be supported by their co-workers in negotiating and obtaining task i-deals over weeks.

In contrast, employees who have lower perceptions of LMXSC are more likely to feel supported by their co-workers in negotiating and receiving task i-deals over weeks. A low LMXSC relationship between a manager and an employee indicates that a manager's trust, respect and concern are not focused only on one employee (e.g., i-deal recipient) but distributed across the co-workers. In such a context, co-workers are more likely to feel treated fairly from an interpersonal point of view because the manager does not trust and respect only one employee. Furthermore, low LMXSC perceptions suggest that co-workers, in addition to the employee, are also provided with a platform to raise their concerns and suggestions. Thus, co-workers are more likely to feel treated fairly from a procedural justice perspective in the provision of task i-deal to an employee (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012). Finally, in a context where employees perceive low LMXSC managers are likely to invest in and provide resources to co-workers too. This suggests that co-workers are likely to feel treated fairly from a distributive justice angle (Cobb & Lau, 2015). Drawing on these arguments, we argue that employees who have lower LMXSC perceptions in general, are more likely to feel supported by their co-workers in negotiating and obtaining task i-deals weekly.

Our third hypothesis, therefore, is:

H3: The mediation of co-worker support between socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and obtained task i-deals (all weekly level) will be moderated by an employee's perception of LMXSC: This mediation is weaker for employees with

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high LMXSC and stronger for employees with low LMXSC.

Method

Participants and procedure

We conducted a weekly diary study. Participants included employees and their managers from two growing consulting companies in Istanbul, Turkey. Sixty-three employees who were in direct contact with clients as part of their jobs, constituted our sample. Twenty participants were human resource management consultants providing assessment services to clients, and forty-three were software development employees offering R&D consulting to clients. Prior to commencement of this study, one of the authors visited the general managers of these two companies and sought permission to undertake the study in return for an executive summary of the results. The researchers guaranteed the participants full confidentiality and anonymity of the results. Of the sixty-three employees, 67 per cent were male. The average age of participants was 32.5 years (SD = 4.2), and their average tenure in the company was 3.2 years (SD = 4.4).

Employees were working in teams with a range of three to seven co-workers, offering consultancy services to their clients. They were physically located at their clients' premises for most of the week. These employees had been assigned to projects prior to the study. The structure, size and participants of the team members stayed the same throughout the data collection phase. Following the approvals of the managers, we administered our surveys physically. We first translated the survey items into Turkish to ensure that participants' levels of English would not bias their responses (Brislin, 1986). We then discussed our wording and the content of the items with four researchers from related fields of study. Following the recommended procedure to ensure face validity (Prieto, 1992), we made minor adjustments, after which a professional translator back-translated the survey.

We collected data at the general level, and at the week level. Before collecting week-

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level data, we asked participants to fill out a one-shot survey. Weekly surveys began one week after the initial survey. We collected lagged data within each week. On Mondays, employees provided data on socially connecting behaviors with co-workers, and co-workers who worked closely with employees and who worked in the same project same over the course of data collection, provided co-worker support data regarding the employees. On Wednesdays, employees provided data on the obtained task i-deals as well as on structural job resources. In total, sixty-three employees provided data on connection with co-workers, obtained task i-deals and job resources. Sixty-three co-workers provided data on co-worker support towards employees and forty-six managers evaluated the work performance of the employees. These managers were responsible from employee performance and client satisfaction. As such, while these managers were not working with the employees in the lieu of the clients, they maintained close contact with them via e-mail, communication and face-to-face meetings on Fridays. Twenty out of forty-six managers evaluated the performance of more than one employee and on average, supervisors evaluated the performance of 1.36 employees.

Diary surveys were completed during working time and returned through their office post boxes. We obtained performance data from an employees' managers every week on Fridays. Data from these various sources were later matched on the names of the employees. The final data we used in the analyses included sixty-three employees over a seven-week period (N = 441).

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). At each data collection point, we asked our participants to think about the past week when completing the corresponding scale.

Weekly measures

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Socially connecting behaviors with co-workers (α = 0.78). Using Kiefer and Barclay's (2012) scale which originally measured socially disconnecting behaviours with co-workers (three items) and which has been adapted to measure socially connecting behaviours by Rofcanin et al. (2017), employees were asked to evaluate the extent to which they had helped their co-workers, initiated social interactions and connected with them at work. These co-workers are the employees who worked in the same project during the course of data collection. One example is: 'Last week, I connected with my co-workers.'

Co-worker support (α = 0.80). Van Veldhoven and Meijman's (1994) three-item scale was used to assess perceived co-worker support. Every week, team members (sixty three members), who worked in the same project during the data collection phase of this project, reported the degree to which they had provided support to the employee during the previous week (an average value is created representing the evaluation of all co-workers of an employee in a team; the size of teams ranged between 3-6). One example item is: 'Last week, this employee could rely on me if he or she faced difficulties at work.'

Obtained Task I-deals (α = 0.83). To measure the extent to which task i-deals were obtained over weeks, we asked employees to state the degree to which they had acquired these i-deals from their line managers that differed from what their co-workers already had (five items; Rosen et al., 2013). An example item is: 'Last week, I successfully obtained extra responsibilities that take advantage of my unique skills.'

Structural Job Resources (α = 0.85). We used five items from the increasing structural job resources sub-dimension of the job crafting measure developed by Tims et al. (2012), as used in job crafting research using a weekly diary design (Petrou et al., 2017), to evaluate the extent to which employees developed their capabilities, used their skills to their fullest capacity and benefited from new opportunities at work. An example item was: 'Last week, I developed my capabilities.'

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Work performance (α = 0.80). Managers evaluated the work performance of the employees using four items from Gilboa et al.'s (2008) scale. An example item was: 'Last week, this employee's performance was consistently of high quality.'
Person level measures

LMXSC perceptions (α = 0.94). We used six-item measure developed by Vidyarthi et al. (2010) and used in recent i-deals research (Vidyarthi et al., 2016), to measure the extent to which employees perceive that their relationships with their manager is better and higher quality compared to the relationships co-workers have with the same manager (e.g. 'I have a better relationship with my manager than most others in my work group'). We measured this variable once, before the weekly-surveys began.

Control variables

In running our analyses, we controlled for the existence of two consultancy companies and two different professions (i.e., HRM and software). We also controlled for team size (range = 3–6; average = 4.5) and some individual-level demographics of employees and their managers (age, gender and number of years working with supervisors).

TMX relationship quality (α = 0.92). Research has shown that team–member exchange (TMX) relationship is positively associated with i-deals (Vidyarthi et al., 2016; Anand et al., 2010). To strengthen the validity of our findings, we therefore controlled for TMX quality with 10 items from Seers (1989; 'I frequently take actions that make things easier for other members of my team').

Time and lagged behaviors. Variability in work performance may be explained by either variability in the predictor variables or other theoretically relevant variables, or simply by the passage of time. Diary studies may account for the confounding effects of time by using a time index as a covariate in the model's estimation. This strengthens the assumption of putative causality investigated among constructs marked by high fluctuations in these

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constructs over time (Bolger et al., 2003; Ohly et al., 2010).

Moreover, in order to exclude alternative explanations, lagged measure of our outcome variable –work performance for the prior week –was included in our analyses (Bolger et al., 2003; Ohly et al., 2010). Including these control variables made no significant difference to the results of our hypotheses; hence, we excluded them from our analysis (Becker et al., 2016).

Analytical Strategy

Due to the nested data structure (i.e., weeks at Level 1 nested within persons at Level 2), we tested our hypotheses using multilevel structural equation modelling using M-plus version 11 (MSEM; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). The results of traditional multi-level modelling analyses does not deconstruct variance at the within and between person levels. Multilevel structural equation modelling safeguards against a potential conflation of effects by separating the within- and between-person portion of a given Level 1 variable (i.e., termed multilevel effect decomposition). Following best-practice recommendations (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010), we centred all Level 1 predictors and control variables around their within-person mean and all Level 2 predictors and control variables around the grand mean. As MSEM allows us to test all of our hypotheses simultaneously in one model (Preacher et al., 2010), we fitted a two-level model in which the within portions of socially connecting behaviors with co-workers, co-worker support, obtained task i-deals, job resources, work performance, and weekly control variables were modelled at Level 1, whereas the between-portions of LMX social comparison, as well as individual level control variables were modelled at Level 2. As Hypothesis 1 and 2 involved multilevel mediation, they were tested by constructing confidence intervals (CIs) around the product term of the respective a- and b-paths using the Monte Carlo method (Preacher & Selig, 2012). This was done by drawing 20,000 replications from the sampling distribution of the product term using

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a computational tool by Selig and Preacher (2008). Multilevel mediation is supported in case the CIs for the multilevel mediation effect excludes zero (Preacher & Selig, 2012; Preacher et al., 2010). For moderated mediation, we included the interaction term between socially connecting behaviors and LMXSC perceptions as well as between co-worker support and LMXSC perceptions (Preacher et al., 2010).

Results

Table 1 depicts the mean, standard deviation, correlation and internal reliability values of our study variables.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

To determine whether multilevel analysis was appropriate, we followed two steps. First, for our dependent variables, we evaluated the deviance statistics. We built two separate models for our dependent variables using random intercept modelling (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). The model at Level 1 did not involve nesting of weeks in persons. We then compared this model with a model at Level 2 which did involve nesting. The deviance statistics demonstrated that the model at Level 2 fitted the data significantly better (for work performance, Δ-2*log = 81.965, p < 0.001; for obtained i-deals, Δ-2*log = 72.386, p < 0.001) compared to a model at Level 1. Second, we calculated the within-person variances (ICC1)'s of our weekly variables: socially connecting behaviors with co-workers (34%), co-worker support (35%), obtained task i-deals (30%), structural job resources (41%) and work performance (38%). The results supported the use of multilevel analysis.

To ensure that our study variables were conceptually distinct, we conducted a series of multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (MCFA). Specifically, at the within-person level we included socially connecting behaviors with co-workers, co-worker support, obtained task i-deals, structural job resources and work performance. On the between-person level, we included trait LMX social comparison and trait TMX. The MCFA results demonstrated good

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fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999) for the study model ($\chi 2(263) = 367.02$, $p < 0.001$, TLI = 0.97, CFI = 0.97, SRMRwithin = 0.04, SRMRbetween = 0.06, RMSEA = 0.03). In accordance with best practice recommendations (Heck & Thomas, 2015), we also assessed the fit of two alternative models. Thus, in the first alternative model we combined socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and co-worker support into a single factor (Alternative model 1: $\chi 2(267) = 610.40$, $p < 0.001$, TLI = 0.90, CFI = 0.91, SRMRwithin = 0.05, SRMRbetween = 0.06, RMSEA = 0.05).

For the second alternative model, we combined obtained task i-deals and structural job resources into a single factor (Alternative model 2: $\chi 2(267) = 881.67$, $p < 0.001$, TLI = 0.82, CFI = 0.84, SRMRwithin = 0.08, SRMRbetween = 0.06, RMSEA = 0.07). The factorial structures of both alternative models were found to be inferior compared to our measurement model and we concluded that the factorial structure of the measurement model exhibited the best fit with the data.

In addition, we also examined level-specific fit following recommendations by Rye and West (2009). To evaluate the fit of Level-1 variables only, we added the aforementioned weekly variables on Level 1 and created a saturated model on Level 2. The resultant level-specific fit for Level 1 was acceptable ($\chi 2(320) = 375.28$, $p < 0.05$, TLI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98, SRMRwithin = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.02). Furthermore, in order to evaluate fit for Level 2 variables, we added the aforementioned individual level variables on Level 2 without adding any variables on Level 1. The resultant level-specific fit for Level 2 was adequate ($\chi 2(103) = 116.92$, ns., TLI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98, SRMRbetween = 0.06, RMSEA = 0.02). Taken together, MCFA results for both overall and level-specific fit provide support of the distinctive factor structure of our study variables.

Hypotheses testing

Regarding hypothesis 1, MSEM results including 95% Monte Carlo CIs revealed that

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socially connecting behaviors with co-workers were positively related to co-worker support (γ = 0.27, SE = .07, t = 4.10; p < .001). Co-worker support was positively associated with obtained task i-deals (γ = 0.35, SE = .05, t = 6.69; p < .001) and co-worker support mediated the relationship between socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and obtained task i-deals (Indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI Low = 0.04; CI High = 0.15). Hypothesis 1 was supported. Furthermore, and in support of Hypothesis 2, we found that obtained task i-deals positively related to structural job resources (γ = 0.52, SE = .07, t = 7.22; p < .001), structural job resources were positively related to work performance (γ = 0.38, SE = .07, t = 5.72; p < .001), and that structural job resources mediated the relationship between task obtained i-deals and work performance (Indirect effect = 0.20, 95% CI Low = 0.11; CI High = 0.31).

Hypothesis 3 proposed that person-level LMXSC perceptions of an employee moderates the mediation of co-worker support between an employee's socially connecting behaviors with co-workers and obtained task i-deals, over weeks. To test this hypothesis, we assessed both the first-stage and second-stage interactions: The interaction term between LMXSC perceptions and socially connecting behaviors with co-workers was not significant. Similarly, the interaction term between LMXSC perceptions and co-worker support was not also significant. These findings fail to support hypothesis 3.

Discussion

Our research supports the view that employees may obtain task i-deals over weeks. Specifically, the findings from weekly diary data suggest that task i-deals are re-bargained weekly and these deals continue to evolve. The examples and themes that emerged from the accounts of participants[1] support this conceptualization of dynamic task i-deals obtained over

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[1] In order to explore and delineate the types of task i-deals obtained, we conducted post-hoc semi structured interviews (lasted 9.5 hours in total) with the randomly selected employees who engaged in the weekly diary design. Before the interviews commenced, participants were ensured of the confidentiality and were made sure that no one else, other than the researchers, could access their data. In total, we interviewed 5 employees: 3 of them were female and average age was 34 years old.

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weeks: Employees re-negotiate and obtain their task i-deals in order to gain new opportunities at work, develop new skill sets and participate in projects in which they can perform better. Examples included working across different projects, participating in training and development programs and taking initiatives to ensure client satisfaction. Furthermore, employees who were successful in obtaining task i-deals put in more effort to expand, modify and evolve their existing task i-deals, pointing to the processual nature of these individualized work arrangements. These findings contribute to the conceptualization of task i-deals by showing that these deals and the conditions under which they unfold, are not necessarily tied to one event (Rousseau et al., 2006; 2016). Rather, they can represent an on-going process, involving the addition of new and sometimes modified arrangements on top of the baseline task i-deals.

Accounting for this dynamic nature of obtained task i-deals, our first aim was to explore the impact of social context within which they unfold. Our findings demonstrate that in weeks when employees connected socially with their co-workers, and consequently received co-worker support, they were more successful in obtaining task i-deals (H1). This finding contributes to recent studies which have begun to explore the importance of co-workers in understanding how employees obtain i-deals, albeit at between-person level. Focusing specifically on task i-deals, the findings in Rofcanin et al. (2017) showed that socially connecting behaviors with co-workers enabled employees to obtain more task i-deals. Their finding was explained with the fact that managers felt more positively about the task i-deals of employees who engaged in socially connecting behaviors with their co-workers. The findings in this study demonstrate that in weeks employees engage in socially connecting behaviors with co-workers they are more likely to obtain task i-deals because they perceive greater support from their co-workers during the same week. While the findings of Rofcanin et al. (2017) point to different sources of support, i.e., managers versus co-workers,

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the weekly nature of the current data should be taken into account to understand and make sense of possible discrepancies between these two studies. A possible explanation could be the context of consultancy work: In such environments, employees are likely to work closely with co-workers and interact with them frequently (e.g., possibly over weeks) in contrast to their limited-contact relationship with their managers.

Furthermore, our second aim was to understand the moderating role of LMXSC perceptions on how and when task i-deals are obtained at the week level. Our findings revealed that an employee's general level of LMXSC perceptions do not influence how and when task i-deals are obtained over weeks. This finding contrasts a growing body of research on i-deals which have integrated the role of LMX or related constructs at between-person level and demonstrated that they mattered for the obtainment and consequences of i-deals (e.g., Liao et al., 2017; Anand et al., 2018; Vidyarthi et al., 2016). While our results revealed the moderating impact of LMXSC perceptions to be non-significant, this may be due to the one-time measurement of LMXSC perceptions compared to rest of the variables of the model which are measured weekly. Interestingly, the findings in Anand et al. (2018) demonstrate that task i-deals may shape the quality of LMX all measured at between-person level. Hence in contrast to this research, it may be that the changes in obtained task i-deals over weeks may change the LMXSC perceptions of recipients during the same weeks, potentially rendering this variable as dynamic as other variables in our model. Taken together, these findings emphasize that supportive relationships with co-workers at week level may matter more than employees' general relationship quality with their managers (i.e., LMXSC perceptions), despite the latter's central role in granting deals (Anand et al., 2018; Vidyarthi et al., 2016).

A third goal of this study was to explore the relationship between obtained task i-deals and work performance of recipients at week level. Prior research adopting between-person

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designs emphasized that such i-deals contribute to employees' work performance because they help employees develop new skills, adjust to their work tasks to achieve fit with their work needs and benefit from growth-related opportunities at work (Bal et al., 2012). Informed by this argument and adopting a weekly diary design, our findings demonstrate that in weeks when employees reported having more task i-deals, they accumulated more structural job resources, which in turn contributed positively to their work performance (H2).

In relation to this, a central contribution of our research is to conceptualise obtained i-deals as a resource which helps to explain how and why task i-deals lead to enhanced work performance at the weekly level. Our results show that obtained task i-deals build structural job resources, which are ingredients for functioning well at work. This finding expands prior between-person research on i-deals which have revealed inconsistent and at best weak effect sizes on the associations between task i-deals and work performance (Bal et al., 2012; see Liao et al., 2016 for an overview of research on i-deals published until then). We conducted post-hoc analyses to explore an alternative model of associations among obtained task i-deals, structural job resources and work performance at the week level. Our findings revealed that during weeks in which employees have access to structural job resources, they improve their performance because they can negotiate on task-relate terms (95% CI Low = 0.04; CI High = 0.15). This finding further supports the notion that week level structural job resources are likely to explain how and why obtained task i-deals contribute to enhanced work performance.

Previous research, at the between-person level, has mainly built on the reciprocity argument of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to argue that recipients of such i-deals show better work performance out of a feeling of being indebted to their employers for their i-deals. Our within-person findings may explain why previous research has not yielded consistent associations between task i-deals and work performance. The reason may be that

obtainment of task i-deals varies over weeks which influences and shapes structural job resources during these same weeks. As a result of accumulating and benefiting from accumulated resources, employees excel at their jobs in the same week. Addressing this gap and understanding what contributes to better work performance through weekly task i-deals is important because i-deals are costly and risky for employers (Marescaux, De Winne & Rofcanin 2019).

Considering our overall model, we conducted additional analyses to explore whether co-worker support, obtained task i-deals and structural job resources serially mediated a positive relationship between socially-connecting behaviors with co-workers and work performance. MSEM results including 95% Monte Carlo CIs supported this multilevel serial mediation (Indirect effect = 0.02, 95% CI Low = 0.007; CI High = 0.04). This finding underscores that at the weekly level, supportive relationships with co-workers help employees obtain task i-deals. These task i-deals enable employees access to structural job resources, which help drive work performance at week level.

From the perspective of the COR theory, our findings support the notion of "resource caravans" (Hobfoll, 2018): The combination of resources and supportive work environment at work enables employees to build more resources, protect them from losing their resources and helps them to develop themselves better by accessing more job-related resources. Thus, our findings reflect the gain-cycle or enrichment principle of COR theory. We show that working in a supportive and resourceful work environment characterized by socially connecting behaviors and co-worker support generates resources in the form of obtained task i-deals. Obtained task i-deals, in turn, generate further resources in the form of job resources to help employees excel at their jobs.

Practical implications

Our findings offer important practical implications for managers and HR units trying

to understand and encourage the obtainment of task i-deals and seeking to ensure that these deals are beneficial for the work performance of employees. The fact that co-worker support relates positively to the obtainment of task i-deals of employees suggests that supporting behaviors should be (formally and informally) encouraged and acknowledged. Given the positive consequences of task i-deals for work performance, line managers may utilize these deals to motivate and drive their performance at the weekly level (e.g., Guerrero et al., 2014). Moreover, as task i-deals help employees to develop new skills and build capabilities, managers can draw on this 'objective' argument to justify why organizations may invest in these i-deals as a dynamic HR intervention tool that may translate into better work performance in short term intervals (e.g. weekly task i-deals).

In addition, weekly variance in task i-deals underlines the crucial role of these agreements in helping employees show better work performance, thus contributing to their career trajectories in a dynamic fashion. The changes in obtained task i-deals can be highly dynamic. For example, with the consent of their managers, employees may work on different projects over one week. During the following week these same employees may take a training course to develop their skills (e.g. code development or specific software use). Based on these findings we suggest that managers, in collaboration with HR departments, develop and implement weekly workplace task i-deal interventions as a response to the dynamic nature of the work contexts (e.g., Petrou et al., 2017).

Limitations and future research suggestions

Despite the strengths of this study, such as the use of a multi-source, weekly diary design, we acknowledge several limitations. Because our study was cross-sectional, we are unable to ascertain causality. We ran plausible models to explore whether other explanations were possible. Nevertheless, we suggest that future research should take a longitudinal approach with pre-determined time lags to explore how task and work responsibility i-deals

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(as well as other types of i-deals) unfold. A laboratory experiment, which is a method rarely

used in broader job design research, might help to explore causality claims in i-deals studies.

In such a design, researchers might integrate other types of i-deal (e.g. location, schedule,

financial i-deals) and run simulations of negotiations between dyads, assuming subordinate

and supervisor roles.

In our study, we collected LMXSC perceptions data once before the weekly data

collection began. In line with recent research (e.g., Anand et al., 2018), it is plausible to

expect LMX to fluctuate depending on the task and work responsibility i-deals obtained by

employees over weeks. Our decision to measure LMXSC only once is guided by two reasons.

The first relates to the practicalities of our study[2]. The second reason relates to the cross-

cultural implications of the study context[3]. However, considering recent studies on i-deals

(e.g., Anand et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2017), we suggest future research to deconstruct

LMXSC perceptions and collect within-person data on this construct to explore how i-deals

will show fluctuations depending on the changes in employee's perceptions of LMXSC. It

may be possible that in weeks when co-workers feel that they are part of the "in-group" they

may be more willing to support the task i-deals of an employee by offering work support. In

contrast, in weeks when co-workers feel "out-group", they may be less likely to support the

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[2] As the participants were employed in their clients' sites over the weeks, working in the same project and with same clients, their interactions with their managers were limited to e-mails and to few face-to-face meetings they had once in one week. This has limited us in forming our research question around understanding and exploring whether employees' relationships with their managers fluctuated over the weeks and if so, whether this fluctuation was due to the perceptions of employees or some other intervening element. Since employees and their managers were separate from each other physically, we observed and decided that it would be difficult to observe and accurately report the fluctuations in LMX social comparison over weeks.

[3] Taking into account the cultural dynamics in Turkish business setting; the LMX dynamics between managers and their subordinates in our selected two consulting companies reflect stable patterns of relationships. For example, they have been working with each other, on average, for more than five years within the same company. This is likely to reflect a foundational basis on which leader – employee relations are built. From a cross-cultural perspective, LMX dynamics are likely to reflect paternalistic style of leadership in which manager – employee relations are built on trust, reciprocity and commitment to each other over long term, that preclude us from expecting cyclical patterns in these dyadic relationships (Aycan et al., 2013).

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task i-deals of others/other employees. Future research may adopt an experience sampling approach to explore the reasons why employees may feel part of the "in-group" and "out-group" in relation to their LMXSC perceptions and the implications for task i-deals.

In developing our arguments, we built on the assumption that employee notice and acknowledge the LMX relationship qualities of co-workers with the manager. Since the measurement of LMXSC comes from same employees, our findings pertaining to this hypothesis may be biased. Future research is suggested to validate and expand our findings by collecting LMXSC data from multiple source of parties, including but not limited to employees, their co-workers and the manager.

While our findings revealed that obtaining task i-deals led employees to feel more resourceful (i.e., structural job resources at work), future research would benefit from exploring the darker side of negotiating i-deals over weeks. It is possible that employees may feel depleted as a result of repeated bargaining. Such repeated negotiations may lead employees to feel exhausted while their relationships with their supervisors may also suffer. Exploring and integrating ego depletion, resource depletion and exhaustion therefore offers a promising line of research.

Future research is suggested to explore the underlying process of what happens to the terms and conditions of task i-deals negotiated and obtained over weeks. While the results of our weekly diary design revealed that they vary across weeks, the survey results did not depict the exact nature of how and why these task i-deals change across weeks. The accounts of participants from our interviews demonstrated that these employees re-bargained over similar types of work arrangements to achieve better and more stable conditions. However, we recommend future research to unearth the nuanced process of i-deal negotiation and obtainment over weeks to address the question whether these obtained i-deals represent re-negotiation, a new deal or steps of a long term i-deal negotiation process.

Conclusion

Our results revealed that at the weekly level perceived co-worker support is important in facilitating the obtainment of task i-deals. Furthermore, in weeks employees negotiate and obtain i-deals relating to their tasks, they have access to structural job resources which help them demonstrate better work performance during the same week.

Notes

[1] This method uses simulations with 20,000 iterations and relies on a product-of-coefficients (ab) approach, where ab is equal to the product of a (the regression path between expansion-oriented relational job crafting and work engagement) and b (the regression path between work engagement and employee outcomes; MacKinnon and Fairchild, 2007). The advantage of this method is that it draws randomly from the joint distributions of the parameter estimates, calculates the product value of the two parameter estimates and repeats this very many times. In the end, a confidence interval is estimated to test indirect effects (Bauer et al., 2006).

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Appendix

Content of Task I-Deals

1. Extra responsibility to manage the performance and work engagement profiles of the client company. Associate working for this client company asked to expand their responsibility to engage more actively with the client and hence the scope of work responsibility included work performance, engagement and client satisfaction with them.

2. Tasks that fit one's skills better. An associate working for the software company asked to take on a small task that enabled them to learn new coding and project skills. This type of i-deal enabled this employee to work on separate projects, which at the same time, fitted better with their desire to learn new ways of working (e.g., learning new codes) and implementing this to their idea of project enhancement for the clients.

3. Taking on extra responsibilities. Over weeks, some associates asked for a broadened line of responsibility to communicate with clients more on an ongoing basis and to ask for their feedback. This was reflected in slight re-shifting of work responsibilities of associates from being task oriented to being more relational oriented (e.g., talking more often with the clients, having more frequent meetings with them and seeing them more face-to-face rather than being merely task focused).

4. More flexibility in how one completes a task. Four associates mentioned that they had asked for more flexibility in how they completed and finished the reporting of their tasks. They asked for more discretion in the way they were reporting on the findings of the report (e.g., the structure and content of the executive summary, descriptions of the findings, flexibility in areas of the report to focus more (less) in the delivery of the report to the clients, flexibility in preparing the presentation for the clients).

FIGURE 1. *Conceptual Model*

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │                         │
                    │   LMXSC perceptions     │
                    │                         │
                    │ (Once, measured by      │
                    │  employees)             │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                       H3              H3
Person level
─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────
Week level

┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐
│ Socially │   │          │   │          │   │Structural│   │          │
│Connecting│   │Co-Worker │   │Task      │   │Job       │   │Work      │
│Behaviors │H1 │Support   │H1 │I-Deals   │H2 │Resources │H2 │Performance│
│with Co-  │   │          │   │          │   │          │   │          │
│Workers   │   │(Each     │   │(Each     │   │(Each     │   │(Each     │
│(Each     │   │Monday,   │   │Wednesday │   │Wednesday,│   │Friday,   │
│Monday;   │   │measured  │   │measured  │   │measured  │   │measured  │
│measured  │   │by co-    │   │by        │   │by        │   │by        │
│by        │   │workers)  │   │employees)│   │employees)│   │employee's│
│employees)│   │          │   │          │   │          │   │manager)  │
└──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘
```