

# The International Journal of Human Resource Management

ISSN: 0958-5192 (Print) 1466-4399 (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/rijh20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rijh20)

## The implications of (dys)functional and (un)fair line manager flexibility i-deals for subordinates: balancing flexibility with perceived support and fairness

Catherine O. Mackintosh, Aoife M. McDermott, Helen M. Williams & Deborah J. Hann

**To cite this article:** Catherine O. Mackintosh, Aoife M. McDermott, Helen M. Williams & Deborah J. Hann (2025) The implications of (dys)functional and (un)fair line manager flexibility i-deals for subordinates: balancing flexibility with perceived support and fairness, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 36:11, 1834-1868, DOI: [10.1080/09585192.2025.2536053](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2025.2536053)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2025.2536053>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 25 Jul 2025.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 624



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

# The implications of (dys)functional and (un)fair line manager flexibility i-deals for subordinates: balancing flexibility with perceived support and fairness

Catherine O. Mackintosh<sup>a</sup>, Aoife M. McDermott<sup>b</sup>, Helen M. Williams<sup>a</sup>  
and Deborah J. Hann<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; <sup>b</sup>Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

## ABSTRACT

Line managers influence subordinates' experiences through their supervisory and supporting capacities. Line managers have been examined as implementors of HRM, but the implications of them concurrently being recipients of HR practices remain overlooked. This paper examines the distinct consequences of flexibility i-deals held by line managers, given their role in supporting subordinates and as gatekeepers of flexibility. Findings are based on 40 interviews - with line managers and subordinates as key stakeholders, and HR practitioners who provided policy context for their organisations - in the construction and finance industries. Line manager flexibility i-deals are considered functional when subordinates feel sufficiently supported to execute their role. Factors influencing perceptions of support are identified. Line manager flexibility i-deals are considered fair when subordinates also have access to flexibility, versus unfair when line managers respond to their i-deal in ways that restrict subordinate flexibility. Based on third-party perceptions, a theoretical model of the functionality and fairness of line managers' flexibility i-deals is proposed, drawing on distributive justice and perceived organisational support. These factors are of theoretical and pragmatic relevance in a context of rising worker flexibility and illuminate the importance of differentiating between i-deals held by those with and without line management responsibilities.

## KEYWORDS

Line managers; flexibility; idiosyncratic deals; subordinates; perceived organisational support; distributive justice

**CONTACT** Catherine O. Mackintosh  [mackintoshc@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:mackintoshc@cardiff.ac.uk)  Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

## Introduction

Flexible working practices ‘offer employees some degree of choice over where and when they do their work’ (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008, p.420). The prevalence and importance of flexible working has accelerated within organisations (CIPD, 2023). However, employee requirements and preferences for flexible working need balancing against others’ needs for support as well as on-the-job learning and knowledge transfer that may benefit from face-to-face interaction (Alfes et al., 2022). We examine this tension in the context of flexibility idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) held by line managers, exploring the perceptions and implications of these arrangements for their subordinates.

I-deals are personalised employment arrangements agreed between employee and employer (Rousseau et al., 2006). By virtue of their individualised nature, i-deals provide employees the opportunity to customise their employment terms to satisfy their specific needs or preferences (Liao et al., 2016). For employers, i-deals aim to support the attraction and retention of employees and can provide a basis for policy innovations that later become part of standard employment relationships (Rousseau et al., 2006). I-deals also have implications for co-workers, with their perceived fairness by third parties presented as key to their success (Rousseau et al., 2006). Yet, the existing conceptualisation of the relevant parties to i-deals is limited, most often presuming: a line manager who grants i-deals; a subordinate<sup>1</sup> who (requests and) receives an i-deal; and co-workers who work at the same level, and for the same line manager, as that subordinate. A small body of evidence indicates i-deals may have unique consequences for third parties at different levels to those in receipt of i-deals (cf. Rofcanin et al., 2018) and our research takes a new perspective on the parties relevant to these arrangements by considering subordinate experiences and perceptions of line managers as recipients of i-deals. Examining perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals supports our understanding of the pressures facing organisations to accommodate individualised forms of flexibility for those with line management responsibilities while also needing to ensure sufficient support for subordinates (cf. Alfes et al., 2022) and maintain perceptions of fairness (cf. Lee et al., 2023). Guiding this investigation, our research question asks ‘how does the existence and enactment of line managers’ flexibility i-deals shape subordinate experiences and perceptions of support and fairness?’

To date, attention has been afforded to line managers as key stakeholders determining access to flexibility i-deals for subordinates (Hornung et al., 2009; Liao et al., 2017). However, little is known about the consequences of line managers’ own flexibility i-deals - both for them and those they manage. This gap in understanding is despite line managers’

unique and influential role in shaping subordinates' experiences and expectations of work (McDermott et al., 2013). Given the increasing normalcy of flexible working, line managers' critical role, and in response to calls to look at the implications of arrangements such as flexibility i-deals (cf. Rofcanin et al., 2018), we take a multi-stakeholder approach to examining line managers' flexibility i-deals: considering the perspectives of both line managers with flexibility i-deals and their subordinates. Despite widespread acknowledgement of the multi-party nature of i-deals, there is a deficit in research considering them from multiple perspectives (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2016; Liao et al., 2016). Our multistakeholder approach supports a more holistic understanding of the tension faced within organisations between balancing line manager preferences for flexible working, the support (cf. Alfes et al., 2022) requirements of their subordinates, and maintaining fairness perceptions for relevant stakeholders (cf. Lee et al., 2023).

Our findings draw on 40 interviews with line managers and subordinates as key stakeholders, as well as a small number of HR practitioners who provided background information and policy context for the two case organisations. These operate in the construction and finance industries. We highlight the importance of subordinates' access to the support they need to carry out their work in shaping perceptions of whether line manager flexibility i-deals are functional or dysfunctional, and identify key factors that influence subordinate perceptions of support when their line manager has a flexibility i-deal. Furthermore, we explicate how line managers' behaviours in response to their own flexibility i-deals can either enhance or constrain their subordinates' access to flexible working, which in turn influences the perceived distributive (un)fairness of line manager flexibility i-deals.

Our work contributes to the i-deals literature by further developing (distributive) justice as an inherently relevant theoretical lens (Lee et al., 2023) while also integrating perceived organisational support (POS) to complement and enhance the robust theoretical foundation in the i-deals literature. Our findings draw attention to the status of line managers as recipients as well as implementers of HR practices. Previous research has not differentiated between i-deals held by individuals with and without line management responsibilities. This is despite recognition of interdependencies between stakeholders and the inherent power dynamics of management roles (Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, 2023), which we identify as contributing to unique justice and POS considerations and implications of line manager flexibility i-deals. Building upon this we respond to the call from within this journal for 'more sophisticated solutions [...] to be developed by HR professionals' (p.4736) to address the twin challenges of flexibility and support (Alfes et al., 2022), and further

develop our understanding of the importance of adopting a fairness lens when considering solutions that involve HR differentiation, such as i-deals (cf. Lee et al., 2023). Specifically, we develop a theoretical framework of the perceived functionality and distributive fairness of line manager flexibility i-deals. Practical recommendations emanating from this research aim to support organisations, line managers and subordinates in creating and maintaining fair and functional flexibility arrangements that work for all.

## Literature review

Here we introduce organisational justice and POS as the broad theoretical context for our consideration of line managers' i-deals. We then review existing i-deals literature, focusing predominantly on flexibility arrangements and consider each relevant stakeholder in turn.

### *Distributive justice and perceived organisational support*

Within organisations, questions of justice are focused on why and how people decide what is fair, and the consequences that follow these judgments (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Multiple dimensions of organisational justice have been identified, with perceptions of the fairness of outcomes within organisations termed distributive justice (Adams, 1965). Distributive justice perceptions have been linked to numerous employee attitudes, including job satisfaction, turnover intentions (Haar & Spell, 2009), and affective commitment (Murphy et al., 2006), as well as organisational outcomes such as actual turnover (Jones & Skarlicki, 2003). Finding the balance between offering personalisation and flexibility to individual employees versus maintaining fairness for third parties has been a significant theme within the i-deals literature since they were first conceptualised by Rousseau (see Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2006, 2016). However, empirical work examining the relationship between i-deals and justice perceptions has produced mixed findings (Lee et al., 2023), and the justice dynamics of i-deals held by those in management roles has been overlooked by research to date.

POS refers to employees' 'beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being' (Eisenberger et al., 2002 p.565). High POS is believed to lead to positive outcomes for individuals and organisations, with POS having been associated with outcomes such as job retention (Eisenberger et al., 2002), in-role performance and turnover (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Although previous research has examined the relationship between i-deals and POS, it has not received the same theoretical attention as concepts of

organisational justice, and where it has been considered, studies have tended to focus only on the POS of employees with i-deals. The impact of i-deals on third-party POS has received little to no attention to date. Next, we review this extant i-deals literature, and draw attention to how issues of distributive justice and POS have been theorised or empirically examined across the relevant stakeholders to i-deals.

### ***Flexibility i-deals for employees***

Interest in i-deals has grown steadily over recent years with their defining features being that they are: bargained for individually; heterogeneous, leading to within-group differences in conditions of employment; variable in scope; and intended to benefit both employer and employee (Liao et al., 2016). Predominantly, research to date has focused on the benefits of i-deals although there is increasing examination of their potential unintended consequences (Simosi et al., 2023). I-deals vary in content (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2016) but have been broadly categorised as developmental, task, workload, flexibility (around working hours, schedule, or location) and financial. Following previous work which has tended to explore the nature and/or outcomes of specific i-deal types (e.g. Erden Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019; Taser et al., 2022), we focus on flexibility i-deals.

Most studies have hypothesised favourable outcomes for employees in receipt of flexibility i-deals, but these positive assumptions have not always been empirically supported (e.g. Pestotnik & Süß, 2023). While early research found a positive linear association between the level of flexibility accommodated by i-deals and outcomes (Hornung et al., 2009), later work suggested positive outcomes, including high POS, for i-deals accommodating low and high but not moderate levels of flexibility (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). The accommodations made through flexibility i-deals have been theorised to contribute to positive judgments of fairness by employees, but a positive relationship between flexibility i-deals and organisational justice has not been consistently supported (Lee et al., 2023). Furthermore, research into flexible working more generally indicates potential downsides from such arrangements. Employees working flexibly can experience work-family spillover (Perrigino et al., 2018) that can lead to feelings of guilt (Williams et al., 2013), reduced commitment, and ultimately increased turnover intentions (Ferguson et al., 2016).

### ***Co-workers and (flexibility) i-deals***

Empirical investigations of i-deals, including flexibility i-deals, have tended to prioritise employees in receipt of i-deals, with co-worker and line manager perspectives comparatively overlooked (Liao et al., 2016;

Taser et al., 2022). This relative neglect has occurred despite recognition that third-party acceptance of and responses to i-deals are key to their success (Lai et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006, 2016). The inherently unstandardised nature of i-deals increases potential for colleagues to perceive arrangements as distributively unjust, and for associated negative outcomes (e.g. reduced organisational citizenship behaviour cf. Van Waeyenberg et al., 2023).

Existing research suggests co-workers' assessments of the fairness of flexibility i-deals draw heavily on the requesting employee's perceived need for that arrangement (Marescaux & De Winne, 2016). Relationship quality, relative contribution and burden sharing between employees and their co-workers have also been proposed as key enablers of i-deal acceptance (Rousseau et al., 2016). Reflecting this, Rousseau et al. (2006, p.988) suggest that 'a person receiving an i-deal can engender a more positive response from colleagues by taking steps to minimize any adverse impact'. This arises as third parties' assessments of i-deals are affected by the extent they gain or lose because of the arrangement (Rousseau et al., 2006). For this reason, when functional dependence/task interdependence is high between colleagues, co-workers may view flexibility i-deals less favourably due to the detrimental impact on work planning and performance (Marescaux et al., 2019; Vidyarthi et al., 2016). These findings highlight the potential for i-deals to impact co-workers' contributions and well-being at work. Yet, as highlighted above, the impact of i-deals on co-workers' POS has been overlooked by research to date.

The i-deals literature also explicates co-workers as the potential recipients of i-deals (in the past, present or future), and considers how this shapes their perceptions of and responses to such arrangements. For example, flexibility i-deals can enhance coworkers' perceptions of their own likelihood of obtaining similar arrangements in the future, thereby increasing their acceptance of such practices (Zhang et al., 2020). However, co-workers are less likely to perceive peers' flexibility i-deals as fair if they are not achieving their own desired levels of temporal flexibility (Collins et al., 2013). This reflects more general findings that third parties are more likely to perceive i-deals positively if they believe they can access them too (Lai et al., 2009). This aspect of third-party responses to i-deals may be especially relevant to subordinate perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals, given line managers are the gatekeepers of flexible working opportunities for those subordinates.

### ***Line managers and i-deals***

The limited i-deal literature concerned with line managers has predominantly focused on them as granters of i-deals (e.g. Hornung et al., 2009;



Liao et al., 2017), with Kehoe and Han (2020, p.122) noting that i-deals research 'has focused on benefits of managers' customisation of practices to accommodate the needs of employees' rather than line managers' own needs. That is, research has considered line managers as *granters* rather than *recipients* of i-deals. Yet, the implications of line managers as recipients of flexibility i-deals should not be overlooked given previous findings that when more senior employees work from home, there is potential for a detrimental impact on the support received by more junior colleagues, particularly for their on-the-job learning and knowledge transfer (Alfes et al., 2022). Furthermore, the implications of line managers' flexibility i-deals may be of particular relevance to subordinate POS given line managers are considered agents of organisations and subordinate perceptions that their line manager values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived supervisor support, PSS) are key to overall beliefs of POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

A notable exception to the focus on line managers granting rather than receiving i-deals is Rofcanin et al. (2018), who found support for managers' task and developmental i-deals trickling down to subordinates. They suggest line manager i-deals signal to subordinates that negotiating for i-deals is appropriate, and that line managers in receipt of task and developmental i-deals are better positioned to appreciate their subordinates' needs for similar terms. While trickle-down effects may apply to other types of i-deal (e.g. flexibility as considered here), the varying nature and wide-ranging content of i-deals means this cannot be presumed and the authors suggest future research explore how trickle-down effects may unfold (Rofcanin et al., 2018). Previous research has found managers' caregiving responsibilities positively correlate with subordinates' schedule-flexibility i-deals (Las Heras et al., 2017), highlighting the potential for trickle-down effects stemming from the line manager flexibility i-deals that are the focus of our study. This existing work underscores how the presence (or absence) of such trickle-down effects may shape subordinates' distributive justice perceptions based on their own (relative) level of flexibility and access to i-deals.

We examine the implications of line manager flexibility i-deals for their subordinates and emphasise the potential for line manager i-deals to have effects both similar and distinct from arrangements held by other employees. The line manager-subordinate relationship makes their subordinates a specific form of third party/co-worker, in a context where co-worker experiences and acceptance of an i-deal are key to its successful functioning (Rousseau et al., 2006). The conceptualisation of co-workers by i-deals research to date assumes relevant third parties to i-deals work at the same level as the i-deal recipient. Yet,



given the potential for high functional dependence between line managers and their team members, the impact of line manager flexibility i-deals on their subordinates and the support they receive warrants examination.

Work focused on HRM differentiation has called for research to examine the influences over line managers' downward HRM involvement (cf., Kehoe & Han, 2020). Line managers' enactment of HR practices plays a significant role in the HRM-performance chain (Katou et al., 2021; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) as their formal and informal interactions with subordinates can support a range of beneficial subordinate attitudes and behaviours (Fu et al., 2020; Kehoe & Han, 2020; McDermott et al., 2013). However, potential barriers to effective line management should not be overlooked given line managers often have their own work responsibilities in addition to supervisory duties (McDermott et al., 2015) that can lead them to experience role overload (Evans, 2017). Furthermore, for optimum outcomes, line managers are required to identify ways their HRM enactment can balance the seemingly contradictory need for individual responsiveness and consistency within teams (Fu et al., 2020). As such, the implications of line managers' flexibility i-deals for their subordinates, including justice perceptions and potential tensions between flexibility for line managers and the provision of support for subordinates (cf. Alfes et al., 2022), have been neglected by work to date.

In summary, our paper examines flexibility i-deals held by line managers and the implications of these for their subordinates. Acknowledgement that the benefits of i-deals can be undermined if implications for third parties are not managed (cf. Rousseau et al., 2006) makes these arrangements a conceptually appropriate lens for examining how HRM can balance the tensions between providing flexibility versus ensuring sufficient levels of support (cf. Alfes et al., 2022) and maintaining perceptions of fairness (cf. Lee et al., 2023) within organisations. Line manager and third-party perspectives on i-deals remain empirically overlooked (Liao et al., 2016) and to date the literature has conceptualised the parties relevant to i-deals too narrowly. Except for Rofcanin et al. (2018), research has failed to differentiate between i-deals held by line managers and subordinates, or to fully consider the consequences of line managers' i-deals for others. As the gatekeepers of flexible working arrangements for subordinates (Hornung et al., 2009; Liao et al., 2017), line managers as the recipients of flexibility i-deals, and the potential third-party POS and distributive justice implications, warrant greater consideration. Doing so can enhance understanding of how line managers balance consistency and differentiation in their HRM delivery (cf. Fu et al., 2020; Kehoe & Han, 2020).

## Methods

Here we outline the methods adopted to answer our research question focused on understanding how the existence and enactment of line managers' flexibility i-deals shape subordinate experiences and perceptions of support and fairness.

### *Research design and conceptualisation of i-deals*

Critically for our research exploring different stakeholder perspectives of line manager i-deals, we adopted a qualitative approach to accommodate understanding of what individuals experience and how they interpret their experiences (Bluhm et al., 2011). Two UK organisations were theoretically sampled: InsuranceCo, and ConstructionCo (psuedonyms). Both promote flexibility in their management practices and conversations with HR representatives from these organisations confirmed a dedication to increase the use of individualised approaches to managing certain aspects of their employment relationships. Consequently, the cases were considered an environment where i-deals would be prominent enough for stakeholders' experiences of i-deals to be explored. The case organisations were also selected in conjunction due to their differences in size, industry, and degree of formalisation in their approach to flexible working. These distinctions supported parsimonious and robust theorising through the identification of relationships replicated across cases, as intended by our comparative case study design (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Relevant contextual information for the case sites is provided in Table 1.

The contextual understanding gained from the case study design allowed accurate identification of flexibility i-deals distinguishable from

**Table 1.** Organisational context details.

	InsuranceCo	ConstructionCo
Industry and offering	Finance (insurance)	Construction (commercial and house building)
Size	≈10,000 employees	≈200 employees
Locations	Head office in South-East UK, multiple regional offices	Head office in West UK, satellite office in South-West. Work on construction sites across UK as needed
Structure	Single corporation with several trading subsidiaries	ConstructionCo group with 3 trading subsidiaries
History	Several decades growth	Third-generation family-owned business. Recent growth (staff numbers more than doubled over 5 years)
Span of control	Variable between departments: from single reports up to teams of 20	Narrow: managers supervising from 1–5 direct reports
HR strategy and structure	Predominantly devolved HR. Teams divided by function, e.g., Reward, Recruitment, ER, L&D, Business Partnering	Predominantly centralised HR. Small team responsible for all HR operations

standardised (organisational or team) approaches. Careful attention was paid to ensuring arrangements discussed by participants met defining characteristics of i-deals as (i) individually bargained for, and (ii) heterogeneous, leading to different terms to those for other employees (Liao et al., 2016; Rousseau et al., 2006). At ConstructionCo, no formal guidance was in place regarding flexible working. Any flexibility in working hours and/or location was considered uncommon and needed to be explicitly negotiated. At InsuranceCo, despite a formal policy relating to flexible working, the levels of normalised flexibility differed between departments and teams. For some, working in the office 9am to 5pm daily was expected, while others suggested a degree of flexibility in working hours (e.g. small shifts to start/finish times) and/or location (e.g. working from home on Fridays). For all employees at InsuranceCo, any flexibility beyond the team 'norm' needed to be explicitly requested and negotiated with an individual's line manager. This was noted by all respondents and confirmed in interviews with HR representatives. For both sites, to be considered a flexibility i-deal, arrangements discussed by interviewees needed to have been explicitly agreed and not simply a consequence of normative flexible work arrangements available in an individual's organisation/team.

### ***Data collection***

Qualitative interviews were adopted as our data collection method due to their suitability for accessing individuals' subjective experiences (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews enabled a balance between exploring our predefined focus and interviewees expressing their own interpretations and/or any unanticipated attitudes towards or experiences of line manager i-deals (cf. Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Our findings draw on 40 interviews with volunteers (28 from InsuranceCo; 12 from ConstructionCo) who responded to a research advert posted on each organisation's intranet. The smaller sample from ConstructionCo reflects the smaller size of the organisation (see Table 1) and the lower prevalence of flexibility i-deals at this site. Four interviews were conducted with HR practitioners who exclusively provided insight into the case organisations' policy contexts, supporting the identification of flexibility i-deals distinct from standardised approaches to flexible working (no specific line manager flexibility i-deals were reported in these interviews). The understanding gained from these interviews is included in the preceding section, including Table 1. 36 interviews were conducted with line managers and subordinates as key stakeholders of line manager flexibility i-deals: 18 interviewees were line managers, and 21 were subordinates (three individuals occupied both roles). Of these, five

interviewees (three line managers and two subordinates) also worked in HR, contributing to our contextual understanding while also participating as line managers or subordinates. 21 respondents identified as female, 19 as male, and organisational tenure ranged from 6 months to 17 years.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 100 min, 50 min on average. Questioning related to interviewees' biographies and work roles, and their attitudes towards and experiences of line manager flexibility i-deals. Subordinates were questioned on how their line manager's flexibility i-deal impacted them and their work, including their own access to flexible working. They were asked whether their line manager's arrangement was fair and what influenced perceptions of fairness. Line managers were questioned on ways they believed their i-deal impacted their subordinates, positively or negatively; and their responses to their flexibility i-deals, including any attempts to mitigate negative consequences for others. To ensure arrangements discussed met the defining features of an i-deal, questions were included which sought to determine the normative approaches to flexible working within each participant's organisation/team. Plus, line managers were questioned on how their arrangement had emerged and subordinates were asked how (they believed) their line manager's arrangement had arisen.

### ***Data analysis***

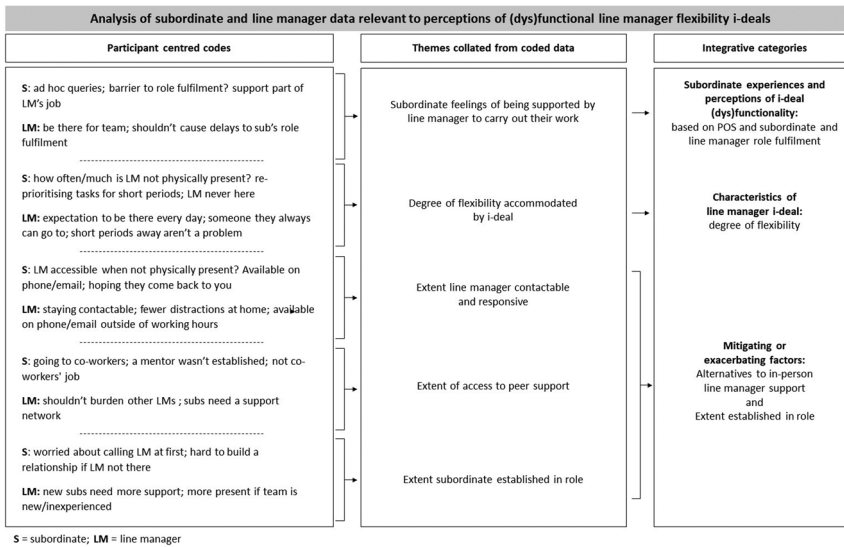
The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis, adopted as the study's analytical method, involved generation of initial codes based on participant language, that were categorised into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) reviewed against existing literature in line with the study's abductive approach to theory development, and then refined.

Abduction applies deductive and inductive reasoning in tandem, with data and theory supplementing each other to generate new explanations in response to an empirical puzzle that has been identified (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Here initial coding took place alongside data collection and after the first round of (seven) interviews conducted as part of a broader research study examining i-deals from multiple perspectives, line managers as recipients of flexibility i-deals was a strong emergent theme. The need to fulfil management responsibilities was raised by line managers with flexibility i-deals, as were subordinates' experiences of line manager flexibility i-deals. Based on existing themes within the literature, questions focused on the fairness of i-deals were already included in the interview schedules, but what was striking from the initial analysis was the strong emergence of data on employee support despite no specific prompting on this topic. Returning to the literature, it became apparent

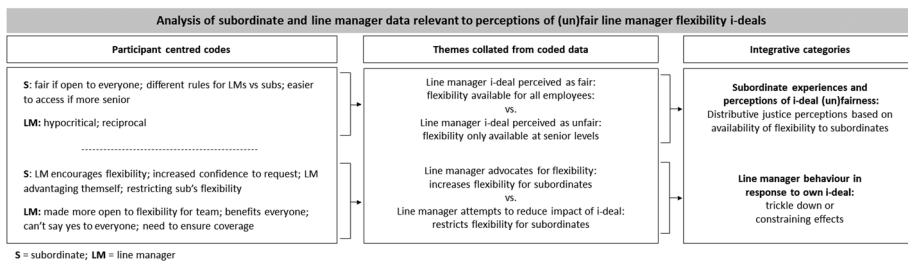
that flexibility i-deals held by line managers, and the impact of these arrangements on employees, particularly their experiences of support, had been largely overlooked. This empirical surprise (cf. Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) led to the refinement of our analytic focus and prompts were added to the interview schedules, in line with the questioning described above, to further interrogate these ideas with subsequent interviewees.

Across all the interviews conducted, 41 line manager flexibility i-deals were reported and analysed. Figures 1a and 1b provide transparency on the development of our final coding structure. Figure 1a presents the coding structure in relation to the perceived (dys)functionality of line manager flexibility i-deals, and 1b to the perceived (un)fairness of line manager flexibility i-deals. They present our initial participant-centred codes (columns 1), aligned to the subsequent collated themes (columns 2) and then refined integrative categories (columns 3). The

a. Coding structure for data analysis evidencing perceived line manager flexibility i-deal (dys)functionality



b. Coding structure for analysis evidencing perceived line manager flexibility i-deal (un)fairness



**Figure 1.** a. Coding structure for data analysis evidencing perceived line manager flexibility i-deal (dys)functionality. b. Coding structure for analysis evidencing perceived line manager flexibility i-deal (un)fairness.

participant-centred codes are differentiated by stakeholder (subordinate vs. line manager), with collated themes and integrative categories reflecting both perspectives. The coding structures do not differentiate by case site as the initial codes were strikingly consistent across the two organisations despite their differences in size, sector, and approach to flexible working, supporting the theoretical generalisability of our findings across contexts (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Our findings are presented thematically, with the perspectives of line managers and subordinates integrated throughout. Interview extracts are provided to evidence the findings, with a pseudonym and the stakeholder group (S or LM) for each interviewee indicated.

## Findings

This section details findings relating to the functionality and fairness of line managers' i-deals. First, functionality is framed by respondents in terms of subordinates' access to the functional support required to carry out their work, as well as key factors influencing subordinates' perceptions of this support. Next, line managers' flexibility i-deals are considered in terms of the perceived distributive justice of these arrangements, framed by respondents in terms of how line managers' behaviours serve to enhance or constrain subordinates' access to flexible working.

### *Perceptions of support and (dys)functional line manager flexibility i-deals*

*Degree of flexibility:* Participants discussed concern with whether line manager flexibility i-deals impacted subordinates accessing the functional support they needed to carry out their job tasks:

*I'm all for it, you've got to make work work for you. ...as long as I'm getting the information and the support I need to get my job done and meet my targets, because at the end of the day that's good for both of us.* (Erik: S, ConstructionCo)

30 of the 41 line manager flexibility i-deals reported were discussed in these terms, and in the case of 20 of these, subordinates were able to access the support they needed and the i-deals were considered functional. In contrast, 10 i-deals were described as barriers to subordinates accessing support and carrying out their role, and both subordinates and line managers' presented these arrangements as dysfunctional:

*...you can't just run over to them and say 'can you look at this?' ...It was hard getting stuff done. We were trying to fix things and she's not there to help, and everyone's like 'we'll have to do it on Monday, she's not here', and I'm like 'we can't do it on Monday, we have to do it today!'* (Daisy: S, InsuranceCo)

*...it's not that I can constantly be at the beck and call of my team ...but the flip side is you don't want people panicking and twiddling their thumbs because, say, it's a Thursday and I'm not in and they don't know how to move something forward ... that's the balance. (Graham: LM, ConstructionCo)*

29 of the line manager flexibility i-deals reported by participants were discussed in terms of the degree of flexibility afforded to a line manager *via* that i-deal, as this was reported to impact whether subordinates felt functionally supported to carry out their job tasks. In part this reflected a commonly reported belief that line managers are better able to support their teams when physically present. For example, Tamsyn (LM, InsuranceCo) explained '*I was very conscious of ... making sure I was around to support the people I manage*'. Emma (LM, InsuranceCo) also suggested this was a common view:

*[management] would expect you to be there for the majority of the day, every day. I've known people... who have then had to step down [from a manager role] because they haven't wanted to do that... they think that it's only fair on that team of people that they've got someone that they can always go to.*

Nevertheless, some degree of flexibility for line managers was commonly seen as acceptable. 12 of the i-deals discussed were described as accommodating low levels of flexibility (generally this was where line managers would still be based in the office and working standard hours most of the time) and were almost universally described positively or as having little/no impact on subordinates. For example, Helen (S, InsuranceCo) occasionally found herself in the office at times when her manager wasn't present but explained this '*hasn't caused any problems. If I need some support with one thing, I can do something else. I can prioritise*'.

Line managers agreed that arrangements accommodating small amounts of flexibility didn't prevent the provision of support to subordinates:

*...[one team leader] wanted to finish at 12 o' clock one of the days... None of the other team leaders do anything like that ...but I didn't really think that half a day was that much of a big deal to be honest with you. She was going to be in every day. She was going to see her team every day. I didn't think just going home at lunch time once a week was going to be that much of a problem. (Emma: LM, InsuranceCo)*

This was echoed by interviewees describing the 10line manager i-deals that were perceived to accommodate slightly higher/moderate levels of flexibility (generally described as working from home or time off one day a week) but who were able to minimise the functional impact on subordinates by remaining contactable and responsive (discussed further below). Laurie (S, ConstructionCo) was very positive about the support she



received from her line manager, explaining ‘*she always works from home one day a week and she’s great as a boss... she’s great on her email and great on her phone, so it’s not that she’s [missing in action] for a Friday*’.

In contrast, 7 line manager i-deals discussed by interviewees were presented as accommodating high levels of flexibility (typically allowing a line manager to frequently work outside of or not work during contractual hours, or frequently work away from the office) and these were more often discussed negatively:

*My line manager works from home every Friday and every other week: all week, every other week. .... it’s strange because it’s so frequent. And if he goes on training courses those will be in his week in the office so I won’t see him for maybe three weeks because then he’ll go back home.* (Elizabeth: S, InsuranceCo)

These high-level line manager flexibility i-deals were described as impeding provision of support to subordinates: a responsibility considered core to the line manager role.

*...how can you be a manager if you’re never here to manage? ... people who go without seeing their manager all week because their manager has some kind of deal... it’s clearly a bad thing when that happens, right? ...there needs to be some appreciation that part of what you do is being there for your team.* (Seb: S, InsuranceCo)

Furthermore, these higher-level flexibility i-deals were reported as putting increased pressures on a line managers’ time when they are working in the office, further limiting their availability to support their subordinates:

*...it’s not just a day at home and a day off. I think that would be manageable... but it means all their meetings get crammed into those three days so you can’t really catch them then either. Say, on a Tuesday, I’m like ‘[Managers’ name], can I chat to you?’ and he’s like ‘Of course, I’m just dashing to a meeting, I’ll pop by your desk later’ and then you don’t see them until gone 5 when they’re packing up to go home.* (Will: S, InsuranceCo)

However, higher-level line manager flexibility i-deals were not always perceived as dysfunctional, as subordinates can still feel functionally supported to carry out their role if line managers can compensate for their absence through alternative support methods. These are elaborated next.

*Alternatives to in-person line manager support (remote contact and peer support):* Subordinates described line manager flexibility i-deals having less impact on the functional support they received when their line manager remained easily contactable:

*Even if he’s not here, he’s always been available when I need him.* (Cassie: S, InsuranceCo)

Line managers with flexibility i-deals also noted the importance of being contactable so as to provide support when not physically present, and explained that communication technology made this possible:

*Modern technology allows people to be contactable, so I don't allow it to be a barrier to conversations and questions. ...I always make sure I'm online and send a message just to say 'Look guys, just to remind you that I'm here'. (Phillip: LM, InsuranceCo)*

Further, some line managers described being contactable outside of their working days/hours, not just when working away from the office. Tim (LM, InsuranceCo), a line manager whose i-deal allows him to work condensed hours Monday—Thursday, noted that *'even on a Friday if [my team] need to speak to me, I'm always available because I'm just a phone call away and, sometimes, I'm logged on so I can catch up with them'*. However, this was not always possible or desirable for line managers. Lynne (LM, InsuranceCo), whose i-deal helped balance her work-family life, described supporting a team member outside her agreed working hours:

*...I'd finished for the day, and he was on the phone to me ... saying he needed this and that off me. I said 'That's fine, ...as soon as [my son's] in bed I will get onto it for you. It's fine' ...and then [my boss] rang me saying 'I've just had Adam on the phone, he says you can't do [this work] because you're doing some sort of family stuff'.*

Lynne's experience highlights that while being constantly contactable and responsive may benefit subordinates, this may not be appropriate for line managers who have requested to amend their working hours for specific reasons. Further, there is scope for line managers' work to spill-over into non-working time for them to successfully balance their flexibility i-deal and the demands of their work, including providing support to their teams.

Subordinates who didn't have ease of contact with their line manager had different experiences of line manager flexibility i-deals. Many described challenges in accessing support with detrimental impact on their role execution. Elizabeth (S, InsuranceCo) found getting support from her line manager *'really hard'* because *'he's not very responsive when he is working from home'*. Specific examples illustrated how being unable to contact their line manager made it difficult to progress tasks or meet deadlines:

*[the team] always had our big launches on a Friday... and she's not there to help... if she's working at home, you just have to send an email and hope that they read it on time, and if they don't, you can't move stuff forward. (Daisy: S, InsuranceCo)*

The combined influences on subordinates feeling supported of 1) the degree of flexibility accommodated by line manager flexibility i-deals and

2) those line managers being contactable and responsive, indicate the relevance of the visibility and performance of work across superiors and subordinates. Being seen to be engaged and/or visible is highlighted as influencing whether line managers are considered supportive and their (perceived) performance.

Notably, some line managers used the flexibility offered by their i-deal to help progress their non-people tasks, using the opportunity to *'catch up with everything that I need to do and all the actions from the week'* (Emma: LM, InsuranceCo). For example, Paul (LM, ConstructionCo) had a flexibility i-deal allowing him to work from home once a week, and this provided the opportunity to work on tasks he found difficult to complete in the office:

*When you're in the office, you get people pop their head round the door 'can you look at this for me?' whereas if they had to send an email they might [think] 'ah, I'll ask someone else'.*

These responses highlight the multifaceted nature of line manager roles, with management and support of subordinates' part of a broader portfolio of responsibilities. While some line managers described making efforts to be contactable and responsive when working from home to provide support to their teams, others were purposefully using this time to focus on other aspects of their work.

In scenarios where line managers were not accessible, some subordinates were turning to peers for functional support. Cassie (S, InsuranceCo) explained that when she needs help but her line manager isn't available, she'll *'ask people around me... I've not really had any issues where only my manager could step in and help'*. Despite the positive impact of peer support, no interviewees gave examples of formalised options/guidance for subordinates to seek support from others.

*It would be nice if I had someone to go to...because that was never really established.* (Elizabeth: S, InsuranceCo)

Indeed, examples were provided of peers being reluctant to step in or getting frustrated with having to do so, perceiving it outside the remit of their role to provide compensatory support when their line manager can regularly be away from the office.

*I did notice that [my colleagues] seemed to get more annoyed that I was going over to them, over time anyway. I did feel guilty, I know it's not really their job, but I didn't know what else to do. ...I suppose I don't know if they were so much annoyed at me or annoyed at [our manager].* (Will: S, InsuranceCo)

This concern was also raised with reference to support from other line managers.

*...they think that it's not fair because they're leading a team of people.... You could say 'well there's other team leaders, they can go to them [when their line manager isn't present]', but then I think the argument is it's not really fair on those other team leaders because they're sort of picking up the slack from the person that's off... (Emma: LM, InsuranceCo)*

These findings have identified the negative effect of inadequate support from line managers with flexibility i-deals on subordinates' ability to fulfil their role responsibilities. This can become more of a risk when subordinates are less established in their role, as discussed next.

*Extent subordinate is established in role:* Subordinates who were less established in role were reported as more greatly impacted by line manager flexibility i-deals because of their need for increased and more regular support in order to carry out their work. Consequently, when line managers with flexibility i-deals had less established subordinates reporting into them, the arrangements were potentially perceived as more dysfunctional:

*...don't take the piss, actually be there for your teams. Where are they going to get guidance? A couple of grad[uate]s in the years below me are in these teams where the managers are hardly ever there and you think 'How can you ever learn? How can you ever improve?' ...I was always very lucky that my managers were regularly there, so I always had somebody to lean on, whereas I think it's a bit sh\*t if they're not having that, especially for those in their first roles. (Seb: S, InsuranceCo)*

Furthermore, those who were new or less established in role were more reluctant to contact their line manager for support when that manager was not in the office. Often these individuals had not yet established strong relationships with their line managers and reported concern about how their reasons for, and/or the frequency of, making contact would be perceived. Rob (S, InsuranceCo) explained that when he first started his role he found *'being able to pick up the phone and contact [my line manager] quite difficult.'* He had questioned *'am I worth their time right now?'* and *'is it really worth [contacting them]?'* Cassie (S, InsuranceCo) shared similar concerns despite reassurance from her line manager:

*He was like 'yeah, no problem, pick up the phone if you need me...' ...but it's okay someone saying that, you've got to get to that point yourself where you're comfortable doing that, before you're able to say 'okay, I've got an issue that warrants a phone call'.*

Unfortunately, this problem was exacerbated by the impact of line manager flexibility i-deals on the development of the subordinate-line manager relationship itself. As Cassie noted, *'at the beginning, [the arrangement] made it hard for me to build quite a close relationship with him.'*

This reluctance to contact a line manager who is away from the office could lead to delays to subordinates' receipt of support and on-the-job learning, impeding role execution:

*At first it was really hard because I didn't know what my job was, I didn't know what my tasks were and I had no one to really walk me through stuff so I had to kind of figure it out myself, got it a bit wrong and he'd come back in the next week, and I'd be like 'please help me!' (Elizabeth: S, InsuranceCo)*

Furthermore, less-established subordinates may not have built up the peer support systems that, as established above, can assist them executing their roles. Daisy (S, InsuranceCo) noted it was 'tricky in...the first 6 months, but past that I'd gotten to know enough people that it was fixable without her being physically there...'

Less-established subordinates' enhanced need for functional support to carry out their work, and the potential for line manager flexibility i-deals to act as a barrier to this, was also recognised by line managers. Tim (LM, InsuranceCo) commented that for this reason, he'd recently been utilising the flexibility granted by his i-deal less frequently:

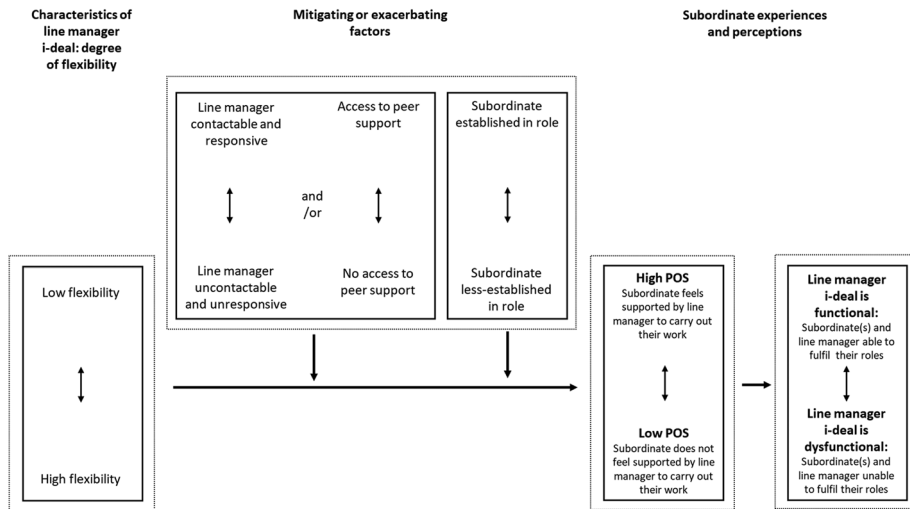
*I work from home less than I ever have done over the last year and a half because the team is quite new... I tend to be in more at the moment than not.*

Similarly, Tamsyn (LM, InsuranceCo), who currently had some less established subordinates in her team, ensured her working hours spread across the full working week so she could be available for them every day:

*I need to be around for the people who depend on me and that can change from time to time. I'm looking after some grad[uate]s right now and they need more handholding and instruction. That's why my hours spread across Monday to Friday.*

These findings emphasise the tension between flexibility and provision of support, specifically for on-the-job learning and knowledge-exchange. They also highlight that subordinates who are less established in their current role can be particularly affected by this tension due to their nascent relationships with their line manager or peers.

The empirical findings thus far are illustrated in [Figure 2](#). Subordinates considered the provision of functional support to them and their colleagues a key line manager responsibility, and whether their perceptions of support were high or low when their line manager had a flexibility i-deal was key to their view of the arrangement as (dys)functional. The degree of flexibility accommodated by a line manager flexibility i-deal influenced subordinates' perceptions of support, with high-level line manager flexibility i-deals having a more detrimental effect than low-level line manager flexibility i-deals. However, there were two mitigating/exacerbating factors on this relationship: whether employees could access



**Figure 2.** Empirically reported influences on subordinate experiences and perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals as (dys)functional.

support when their line manager wasn't physically present (e.g. through their line manager remaining contactable and responsive, and/or through support from peers or other line managers), and the extent to which the subordinate was established in their role.

Next, we consider how line managers' behaviour in response to their flexibility i-deals influences subordinates' assessments of the arrangements as (un)fair.

### **Perceived availability of flexibility to subordinates and (un)fair line manager flexibility i-deals**

*Trickle-down versus constraining effects:* Line manager flexibility i-deals can impact subordinates' access to flexibility because those line managers also gatekeep flexible working opportunities for others. Of the 41 line manager flexibility i-deals reported, 24 were discussed in terms of whether that line manager's subordinates also have opportunities to work flexibility. On one hand, line manager flexibility i-deals can have trickle-down effects where, because line managers see value in flexible working practices, they enable and support their subordinates to work flexibly. For example, Liv and Phillip both have their own flexibility i-deals, and explained their openness to their subordinates working flexibly, either through their own i-deals or increased autonomy over their working arrangements:

*When [team member name] came to me and wanted to figure something out to help juggle things, I was always going to find a way to make it work. I have my own arrangement, I expected them to accommodate that, and they did, so I'd be a hypocrite if I didn't for her. (Liv: LM, ConstructionCo)*

*It's reciprocal, I work flexibly and my message to my team is that... 'you own your time. I don't mind when you work, it's your call... whether you need to work from a different office or work from home, that's absolutely fine'. (Phillip: LM, InsuranceCo)*

Reflecting the above, some subordinates of line managers with flexibility i-deals described feeling more confident asking for their own arrangement. For example, when Helen realised her line manager had an i-deal she felt able to ask for a similar arrangement.

*[My manager and I] sort of had a chat... and when I described where I was from, he was like 'oh, I have a bit of a commute in as well. I drive, I know how the parking situation works, I'm normally in at 7'. So, when he said he was in at 7, I thought, okay, green light, I can ask to come in really early as well. (Helen: S, InsuranceCo)*

Similarly, Laurie (S, ConstructionCo) had requested to work from home once a week, explaining 'I did think it would be okay [for the arrangement to go ahead] because [my manager] always works from home one day a week herself'.

In other scenarios, subordinates of line managers with a flexibility i-deal did not have their own i-deal but still experienced increased flexibility through autonomy over their work schedule or location. Rob (S, InsuranceCo) described his line manager with a flexibility i-deal as 'very keen on [me working flexibly]. It's extremely flexible to the point that it's almost up to me how much I want to travel and where I want to work.' A similar experience was shared by Cerys (S, InsuranceCo) whose line manager has a flexibility i-deal and often encourages her to work from home:

*There are times where I've got a text, literally on Thursday morning [saying] 'so, by the way you're the only one who's down to be in the office so feel free to work from home' and this is from my own manager.*

Where line managers with flexibility i-deals enable flexibility in either form, our findings suggest subordinates are more likely to view flexibility as widely available in their organisations and describe line manager flexibility i-deals as fair, drawing on principles of distributive justice:

*It's fair if everyone can do it... [My line manager] sat me down and said 'these are my flexible working arrangements. What are yours? What would you like them to be?' It was never a presumption that she could do it but I couldn't just because she's a manager or a higher pay grade. (Amelia: S, InsuranceCo).*

*What makes it fair is if everyone has some opportunity if they want it. Everyone has their own individual preferences... So, my manager has her deal, and I have mine, and the person who sits next to me has hers and it all works pretty well, I think. ...We all support each other because it advantages all of us. (Christian: S, InsuranceCo)*



16line manager flexibility i-deals were described as fair by the participants because the line manager's subordinates also had opportunities to work flexibly.

However, in contrast, some interviewees described restrictions on working flexibly due to their line manager's flexibility i-deal. For example, Daisy's (S, InsuranceCo) line manager worked at home on Fridays and constrained flexible working options for others:

*She always preferred me to be there because she worked from home on the Friday, so she wanted me to be in that day so that I could see people in the office if she needed something from them, to make it easier for her.*

Elizabeth's (S, InsuranceCo) ability to work flexibly was also constrained, but at times when her manager was in the office, as he worked from home the majority of the time (6 days out of 10):

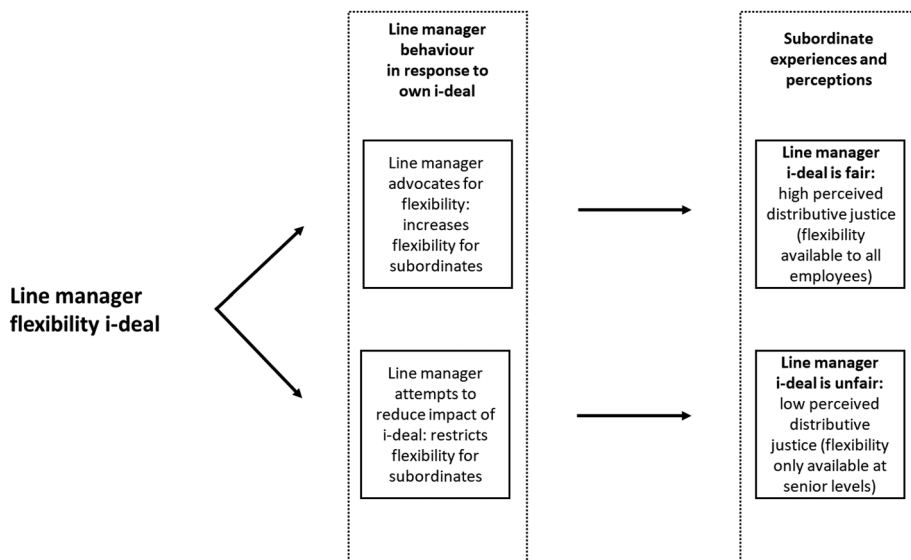
*I can't work from home on the weeks he's in because we all have to communicate at some point. I do get it but it seems unfair.*

In the case of 8line manager flexibility i-deals discussed, subordinates were described as not benefiting from the same flexibility as their line manager, and the respondents perceived flexible working as more accessible by those in senior positions. In line with distributive justice principles, these line manager flexibility i-deals were considered unfair:

*Our head of department has said he doesn't want us working from home on a Friday anymore ...the boss who implemented the rule works from home twice a week. ...It's very unfair... there's this kind of one rule for one person, one rule for another. (Elizabeth: S, InsuranceCo)*

*...whenever I hear from people that they have these arrangements to work from home, I do look at them, sort of think it's one of those things that seems easier to get as you get higher. ...I don't think that's right, if they are going to let people do that, it should be available to everyone. (Seb: S, InsuranceCo)*

As summarised in [Figure 3](#), line managers' behaviour in response to their own flexibility i-deals may either increase or restrict subordinate opportunities to work flexibly. These experiences impact upon subordinate beliefs regarding the availability of flexibility and the distributive justice of their line manager's flexibility ideal. Line manager flexibility i-deals are more likely to be assessed as fair by subordinates when flexibility is viewed as distributively just by being widely accessible and experienced by subordinates themselves. In contrast, they are more likely to be perceived as unfair by subordinates when their opportunities to work flexibly are constrained and flexibility is viewed as more accessible by those in more senior roles, thus making line manager flexibility i-deals distributively unjust.



**Figure 3.** Empirically reported influences on subordinate perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals as (un)fair.

## Discussion

Drawing on the theoretical lenses of POS and distributive justice, our work enhances understanding of the characteristics and implications of line manager flexibility i-deals that are perceived as (dys)functional and (un)fair by subordinates. Our findings generate key insights to inform organisational responses to the twin challenges of providing both flexibility as well as support and learning opportunities to their workforce, while also maintaining perceptions of fairness. With the exception of Rofcanin et al. (2018), research to date has not differentiated between i-deals held by those with and without line management responsibilities. This work highlights specificities in the outcomes of line manager flexibility i-deals and how they are perceived by third parties, as well as similarities compared to i-deals previously examined within the literature. By doing so, we contribute to theorising on i-deals and HRM differentiation, emphasising the importance of considering line managers as recipients of HR practices and highlighting how this may influence their concurrent implementation of HRM.

### *Line manager flexibility i-deals: balancing flexibility with subordinate POS*

While previous research has examined the relationship between i-deals and POS, those studies have tended to focus on the POS of employees with i-deals with little attention paid to the impact of i-deals on third-party POS (or PSS). While flexibility i-deals may boost POS for

recipients (e.g. Vidyarthi et al., 2014), our work indicates the overall outcomes of line manager flexibility i-deals may be less positive for organisations where there is negative impact on POS for subordinates. This is especially relevant as our findings identify line managers as key agents in the provision of support to their subordinates, reinforcing previous work that has found POS and PSS to be associated (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Even if others could step in during a line manager's absence, functional support is ultimately viewed as the line manager's responsibility and when subordinates feel unsupported to perform, they perceive it as the manager failing in their role. Furthermore, while our findings emphasise the degree of flexibility accommodated by a line manager's i-deal corresponds to how supported subordinates feel to perform their roles, distinctions emerge compared to existing studies on flexibility i-deals held by non-managers or research that doesn't distinguish between managerial and non-managerial roles (e.g. Hornung et al., 2008, 2009; Vidyarthi et al., 2014). The unique nature of the line manager-subordinate relationship appears to shape what level of flexibility granted by an i-deal yields positive outcomes.

The focus by third parties on whether line manager flexibility i-deals impact the support received by subordinates, as well as the consequences for line manager and subordinate role fulfilment, highlights that subordinates' functional dependence - or task interdependence - on their line manager is key to the perceived functionality of these arrangements. These findings align to existing i-deals research that recognises how such interdependence influences stakeholder attitudes (Marescaux et al., 2019; Vidyarthi et al., 2016). However, while prior research has emphasised burden sharing among co-workers (cf. Rousseau et al., 2016), our study underscores that support provision is an intrinsic part of the line manager role, making subordinate experiences qualitatively different. This distinction reveals that subordinates are a unique category of co-worker, defined by their structural and functional relationship to the i-deal holder. While co-workers more broadly have received limited empirical attention in i-deals research, the perspectives of subordinates, who often depend directly on line managers for support, have been almost entirely overlooked. Our work therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of third-party perceptions and responses by identifying both parallels and key differences in how subordinates experience and respond to line manager flexibility i-deals.

### ***Line manager flexibility i-deals: implications for fairness***

The trickle-down effects found by Rofcanin et al. (2018) for line managers' work-task and developmental i-deals were also identified in our

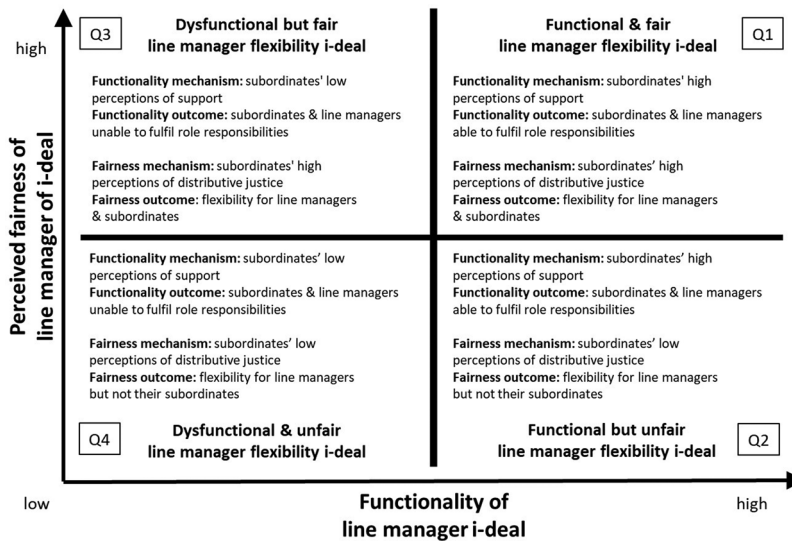
findings, with (some) line manager flexibility i-deals enhancing subordinate opportunities to work flexibly. In such cases, line manager flexibility i-deals were more likely to be perceived as distributively just. When line manager flexibility i-deals trickle down to subordinates and flexibility is widely available, there is the potential to create HR practices that are both individually responsive and also consistently implemented: a combination that has positive implications for job performance (Fu et al., 2020). However, this trickle-down effect from line manager flexibility i-deals did not always occur, leading to perceptions of unfairness based on principles of distributive justice. The power held by line managers can be disinhibiting, leading them to prioritise acts that satisfy their own desires for flexibility over those of their subordinates (cf. Keltner et al., 2003). Future research should explore whether this differential trickle-down is applicable to other types of line manager i-deal but has to date only been partially identified.

In line with existing work, we confirm the importance of perceived fairness for i-deals held by line managers but also highlight nuances to managing this perceived fairness given line managers' role as the gatekeepers of flexibility for others. Our findings align to previous work that determined co-workers are more likely to perceive i-deals positively if they themselves experience flexibility (Collins et al., 2013) or believe they can access i-deals too (Rousseau et al., 2006). However, unlike co-worker assessments of employee flexibility i-deals (Marescaux & De Winne, 2016), here considerations of the i-deal recipient's *need* did not emerge as relevant to subordinates' fairness assessments of line manager flexibility i-deals. Future research should seek to understand how hierarchical differences between parties affect how and why they assess the distribution of i-deals (and other organisational resources) as fair or unfair.

Overall, our work demonstrates the need for future research to differentiate between line manager and subordinate i-deals, as these can differ in their outcomes. More broadly, we highlight the need for future research to consider the potentially unique implications of HRM differentiation for those across different job roles and levels of seniority. Typically, position-based HRM differentiation has had a narrow focus on, for example, employee pay and benefits (Rousseau, 2005), but our work highlights the potential relevance for broader aspects of managing the employment relationship.

### **Typology of line manager flexibility i-deals**

Figure 4 presents a typology of the functionality and fairness of line manager i-deals premised on theoretical abstraction of our empirical findings regarding third-party perceptions of these arrangements



**Figure 4.** The line manager i-deal architecture.

(illustrated in Figures 2 and 3). Based on our findings, Figure 4 presents two axes and, in each quadrant, details the relevant mechanisms and outcomes. The horizontal axis considers the functionality of line manager flexibility i-deals. Functionality is determined by perceptions of support afforded to subordinates by line managers or alternative sources such as peers. As line managers are key agents of POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002), when subordinates feel unsupported to carry out their role, dysfunction arises from two sources: line managers being seen as failing to fulfil their people management responsibilities, and subordinates facing barriers to their own role fulfilment. The vertical axis considers the perceived fairness of line manager flexibility i-deals, determined by third-party concerns with distributive justice. Whereas fair line manager flexibility i-deals lead to flexibility for line managers and their subordinates, line manager flexibility i-deals that are considered unfair offer flexibility to line managers but not their subordinates.

Drawing upon the findings of existing research, we present research propositions related to the implications of our proposed typology of line manager flexibility i-deals. 'Functional and fair' line manager flexibility i-deals (quadrant 1) may have positive impacts on subordinates' attitudes and behaviours given the previously determined associations between outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment with distributive justice perceptions (Haar & Spell, 2009; Murphy et al., 2006) and POS (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). Positive HRM outcomes such as increased retention are also theorised, as these have been linked to perceptions of distributive justice (cf. Jones & Skarlicki, 2003) and POS (cf. Eisenberger

et al., 2002). They are also likely to arise given that the arrangements fulfil line manager and subordinate (*via* trickle down effects) needs for flexibility (cf. Mackintosh & McDermott, 2023). Plus, as support for role fulfilment is sufficient, productivity is likely unaffected by fair and functional line manager flexibility i-deals and there may be indirect increases to in-role performance due to POS (cf. Kurtessis et al., 2017).

**Research propositions:** Functional and fair line manager flexibility i-deals will be associated with: (1a) increased job satisfaction and affective commitment in subordinates; (1b) decreased turnover of line managers with flexibility i-deals and their subordinates; and (1c) increased role performance of subordinates.

*'Functional but unfair'* line manager flexibility i-deals (quadrant 2) risk negative impacts on subordinate attitudes and behaviours due to distributive justice concerns regarding access to flexibility across organisational levels (cf. Haar & Spell, 2009; Murphy et al., 2006). While these arrangements provide sufficient support for role fulfilment and existing evidence does not suggest an impact on performance due to distributive justice concerns (cf. Williams, 1999), such arrangements may impede retention efforts within the organisation (Jones & Skarlicki, 2003).

**Research propositions:** Functional but unfair line manager flexibility i-deals will be associated with: (2a) decreased job satisfaction and affective commitment of subordinates; (2b) decreased turnover of line managers with flexibility i-deals but increased turnover of their subordinates; and (2c) have no significant association with role performance of subordinates.

*'Dysfunctional but fair'* line manager flexibility i-deals (quadrant 3) enhance access to flexible working but any associated benefits to subordinate attitudes may be undermined by concurrent negative impacts from reduced POS (cf. Ng & Sorensen, 2008). The HRM outcomes of these arrangements may also be mixed: fulfilling line manager needs for flexibility may support their retention (cf. Mackintosh & McDermott, 2023), but any benefits for subordinate retention *via* flexibility may be negated or even outweighed due to reduced POS (cf. Eisenberger et al., 2002). Furthermore, a lack of support for role fulfilment and the previously established association with POS (cf. Kurtessis et al., 2017) both point towards a negative impact on in-role performance.

**Research propositions:** Dysfunctional but fair line manager flexibility i-deals will be associated with: (3a) decreased job satisfaction and affective commitment of subordinates; (3b) decreased turnover of line managers with flexibility i-deals but increased turnover of their subordinates; and (3c) decreased role performance of subordinates.

Lastly, *'dysfunctional and unfair'* line manager flexibility i-deals (quadrant 4) are likely to have detrimental effects on subordinate attitudes and

behaviours, as well as impede organisational efforts to retain them. Plus, these effects may be stronger than those presented for quadrants 2 and 3 due to the dual effects of distributive justice concerns (Haar & Spell, 2009; Jones & Skarlicki, 2003; Murphy et al., 2006) and reduced POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Ng & Sorensen, 2008). While line manager retention may be supported through their access to flexibility, this is leading to inadequate support for subordinate role fulfilment.

**Research propositions:** Dysfunctional and unfair line manager flexibility i-deals will be associated with: (4a) decreased job satisfaction and affective commitment of subordinates; (4b) decreased turnover of line managers with flexibility i-deals but increased turnover of their subordinates; and (4c) decreased role performance of subordinates.

In summary, given existing knowledge of outcomes associated with POS and distributive justice, we propose that neither the perceived fairness nor functionality of line manager flexibility i-deals alone is sufficient to produce wholly positive or even neutral outcomes for organisations.

### ***Line managers as recipients (and granters) of HRM***

In addition to theorising related to i-deals, our work contributes to the body of work considering line managers and their enactment of devolved HRM and HRM differentiation. Existing work on this topic has tended to concentrate on their capacity and capabilities, and their status as individuals in the middle of subordinates and management (e.g. McDermott et al., 2015; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Here we move debates forward by highlighting the importance of considering how line managers are managed, how they shape their own terms and conditions (potentially through i-deals), and the consequential implications for their relationships with others. Of particular significance is that we demonstrate how line managers' management of others is influenced by their flexibility i-deals, with implications for subordinates' POS and subsequent role performance, as well as assessments of fairness. Line managers' informal responses (e.g. whether they are contactable and responsive) to their i-deals also have implications for assessments of functionality. Our study therefore supports the existing body of work that demonstrates the role of line manager behaviour in the link between HRM and subordinate attitudes and performance (e.g. Katou et al., 2021; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Plus, we contribute to existing literature on HRM differentiation by identifying line managers' own receipt of HR practices as an overlooked influence on their downward HRM involvement (cf. Kehoe & Han, 2020).



### ***Future research and limitations***

Our typology proposed above offers opportunities for future research to validate, apply and extend theorisation of third-party perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals, and test our propositions regarding their implications. Future research might also consider whether the conditions for (dys)functional and (un)fair line manager flexibility i-deals are associated (cf. Marescaux et al., 2019). Such studies may benefit from utilising established survey measures for distributive justice and POS/PSS to determine whether the principles of functionality established here impact upon perceptions of line managers i-deals as fair, or vice versa. Other variables not examined by our research but potentially impacting perceived functionality and fairness of line manager i-deals should also be considered by future work, e.g. the extent to which flexibility is balanced between subordinates (within teams) and the impacts of varying job designs (the nature of scheduling or front-line work). Additionally, our findings draw on perceptions of line manager i-deals accommodating low versus high levels of flexibility. As a qualitative study, the definitions of flexibility levels were not based on rigid or pre-specified thresholds but emerged from general patterns in participant narratives. As such, individual interpretations of 'high' or 'low' levels of flexibility may have varied to some degree. Future research could seek to identify more precise or universally applicable tipping points in degrees of flexibility to understand which i-deals are more or less likely to be (dys)functional and the factors shaping these outcomes.

While we focus specifically on idiosyncratic forms of flexibility, our findings may support understanding of the implications of line managers engaged in standardised approaches to flexible working. This potential generalisability is an important avenue for further examination given the increasing prevalence of different forms of flexible working and that i-deals can act as early HRM innovations that subsequently become standard practice within organisations (Rousseau et al., 2006). Furthermore, although we did not sample on the basis of i-deals, future research might consider a range of forms of individualised arrangements and begin from that premise when considering how to balance flexibility with fairness and support across hierarchical levels within organisations.

As detailed in our methods, our case organisations were selected as environments where i-deals would be sufficiently prominent to allow exploration of stakeholders' experiences of these arrangements. A potential limitation of this sampling approach is that within organisations where i-deals are less prominent, attitudes may differ, and i-deals may generally be considered more contentious. Finally, although we had

initially intended to interview line managers with flexibility i-deals and their specific subordinates as part of our sampling approach, ethical approval raised concerns regarding participant anonymity and power dynamics. As a result, a more general approach to sampling and data collection was required, where (as described above) volunteers from either stakeholder group responded to a research advert. The change in sampling method altered the research's data collection approach but still allowed for the examination of the key stakeholder groups' attitudes and experiences of line manager flexibility i-deals in a manner that addressed the research question and captured both differences and shared themes across both groups. Nevertheless, our originally intended dyadic approach could extend understanding of line manager flexibility i-deals further by supporting investigation of how and why different stakeholder perceptions of the same arrangement may differ. Future research may benefit from adopting a vignette study design to pursue this while minimising potential ethical concerns.

### ***Practical implications***

Line managers should proactively plan for how subordinates will access support when they are not physically present because of their i-deal. This is particularly important if the line manager desires a high-level flexibility i-deal, has less-established subordinates, or if they manage specialists who may not be able to access the support needed from peers or other line managers. When working away from the office, line managers should remain contactable and responsive to their subordinates and proactively check in with less-established team members who may not instigate contact when they require support. While line managers with flexibility i-deals may feel pressured to remain available outside their agreed working hours, prioritising subordinate perceptions of support at the complete expense of their own work-life balance and wellbeing may negate the intended benefits of the arrangement for themselves and the organisation. As an alternative, line managers are encouraged to identify and agree substitute sources of support (subordinate co-workers or other line managers) for subordinates in their absence. Line manager strategies for managing the impacts of their i-deal that involve constraining flexibility for their subordinates are flagged as particularly detrimental to subordinate attitudes and experiences and should be avoided. Instead, trialling i-deals including reviewing concomitant support arrangements with all relevant stakeholders is encouraged.

Subordinates are encouraged to consider and communicate ways they could more easily access support when their line manager is not

physically present (e.g., regularly scheduled catch ups, assignment of a mentor). This solution-oriented approach to difficulties subordinates may experience due to line manager flexibility i-deals is encouraged as, when appropriately managed, these arrangements can have beneficial trickle-down effects leading subordinates to experience enhanced flexibility themselves.

Despite falling outside the scope of standardised organisational policy, guidance on the management of flexibility i-deals from HR practitioners and senior managers is to be welcomed. This is particularly important for line managers with i-deals themselves, as their arrangements can highlight perceived distributive injustices to subordinates unable to work flexibly. HR and senior managers should also work with line managers who work flexibly to find solutions to role overload and the competing priorities inherent to their multi-faceted role, and working towards normalising reciprocal support between line managers may be beneficial. Otherwise, line managers with flexibility i-deals may struggle to balance competing demands on their time, with detrimental outcomes for themselves and their subordinates.

## Conclusion

Empirically, our research identifies influences on subordinate perceptions of whether they are being sufficiently supported to fulfil their role responsibilities when their line manager has a flexibility i-deal. Our findings also reveal how line managers' enactment of their flexibility i-deals can enhance or constrain subordinates' access to flexible working options which, in turn, influence perceptions of line manager flexibility i-deals as fair or unfair. A theoretical typology of line manager flexibility i-deals' (dys)functionality and (un)fairness is presented, based on POS and perceptions of distributive justice. This understanding supports organisations under accelerated pressures to balance the tension between providing both flexibility and support to various organisational actors (cf. Alfes et al., 2022), while also maintaining perceptions of fairness (cf. Lee et al., 2023).

## Note

1. While subordinate is not our preferred term due to the connotations of inferiority, we adopt this terminology to clearly differentiate between i-deal stakeholders.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number: ES/P00069X/1].

## Data availability statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research, supporting data is not available.

## References

- Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267–299). Academic Press.
- Alfes, K., Avgoustaki, A., Beauregard, T. A., Cañibano, A., & Muratbekova-Touron, M. (2022). New ways of working and the implications for employees: A systematic framework and suggestions for future research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(22), 4361–4385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2149151>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bluhm, D. J., Harman, W., Lee, T. W., & Mitchell, T. R. (2011). Qualitative research in management: A decade of progress. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(8), 1866–1891. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00972.x>
- Brinkman, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. (3rd ed.) Sage Publications.
- CIPD. (2023). Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023: Employer and employee perspectives. Available online at <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2023-pdfs/2023-flexible-hybrid-working-practices-report-8392.pdf>
- Collins, A. M., Cartwright, S., & Hislop, D. (2013). Homeworking: Negotiating the psychological contract. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 23(2), 211–225. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2012.00200.x>
- Conway, N., & Coyle-Shapiro, J. (2016). Not so i-deal: A critical review of idiosyncratic-deals theory and research. In: Bal, M., & Rousseau, D.M. (Eds.), *Current issues in work and organizational psychology. Idiosyncratic deals between employees and organizations: Conceptual issues, applications and the role of co-workers*. (pp.36–64). Routledge.
- Cropanzano, R., Bowen, D. E., & Gilliland, S. W. (2007). The management of organizational justice. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21(4), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2007.27895338>
- Eisenberger, R., Stinglhamber, F., Vandenberghe, C., Sucharski, I. L., & Rhoades, L. (2002). Perceived supervisor support: Contributions to perceived organizational support and employee retention. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(3), 565–573. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.3.565>
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Organizational Research Methods*, 50(1), 25–32.
- Erden Bayazit, Z., & Bayazit, M. (2019). How do flexible work arrangements alleviate work-family-conflict? The roles of flexibility i-deals and family-supportive cultures.

- The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(3), 405–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1278615>
- Evans, S. (2017). HRM and frontline managers: The influence of role stress. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(22), 3128–3148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1146786>
- Ferguson, M., Carlson, D., Boswell, W., Whitten, D., Butts, M. M., & Kacmar, K. M. M. (2016). Tethered to work: A family systems approach linking mobile device use to turnover intentions. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(4), 520–534. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000075>
- Fu, N., Flood, P. C., Rousseau, D. M., & Morris, T. (2020). Line managers as paradox navigators in HRM implementation: Balancing consistency and individual responsiveness. *Journal of Management*, 46(2), 203–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318785241>
- Haar, J. M., & Spell, C. S. (2009). How does distributive justice affect work attitudes? The moderating effects of autonomy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(8), 1827–1842. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190903087248>
- Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M., & Glaser, J. (2009). Why supervisors make idiosyncratic deals: Antecedents and outcomes of i-deals from a managerial perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 24(8), 738–764. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940910996770>
- Jones, D. A., & Skarlicki, D. P. (2003). The relationship between perceptions of fairness and voluntary turnover among retail employees. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 33(6), 1226–1243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2003.tb01947.x>
- Katou, A. A., Budhwar, P. S., & Patel, C. (2021). Line manager implementation and employee HR attributions mediating mechanisms in the HRM system-organizational performance relationship: A multilevel and multipath study. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 31(3), 775–795. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12327>
- Kehoe, R. R., & Han, J. H. (2020). An expanded conceptualization of line managers' involvement in human resource management. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 105(2), 111–129. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000426>
- Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2008). For better or for worse? An analysis of how flexible working practices influence employees' perceptions of job quality. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(3), 419–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190801895502>
- Keltner, D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Anderson, C. (2003). Power, approach, and inhibition. *Psychological Review*, 110(2), 265–284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.110.2.265>
- Kurdi-Nakra, H., & Pak, J. (2023). Exploring the socio-political dynamics of front-line managers' HR involvement: A qualitative approach. *Human Resource Management*, 62(4), 615–636. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22150>
- Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S. (2017). Perceived organizational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organizational support theory. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1854–1884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315575554>
- Lai, L., Rousseau, D. M., & Chang, K. T. T. (2009). Idiosyncratic deals: Coworkers as interested third parties. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(2), 547–556. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013506>
- Las Heras, M., Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., De Jong, J., & Rofcanin, Y. (2017). 'Handle with care': The mediating role of schedule i-deals in the relationship between supervisors' own caregiving responsibilities and employee outcomes. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(3), 335–349. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12160>
- Lee, E. K., Hong, W., & Rupp, D. E. (2023). Employee idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) and organizational justice: The role of individual job performance and coworkers' i-deals. *Personnel Review*, 52(9), 2322–2341. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2021-0335>

- Liao, C., Wayne, S. J., & Rousseau, D. M. (2016). Idiosyncratic deals in contemporary organizations: A qualitative and meta-analytical review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(S1), S9–S29. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1959>
- Liao, C., Wayne, S. J., Liden, R., & Meuser, J. (2017). Idiosyncratic deals and individual effectiveness: The moderating role of leader-member exchange differentiation. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(3), 438–450. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.014>
- Mackintosh, C., & McDermott, A. M. (2023). The implications of market-based versus supportive idiosyncratic deal pathways. *Group & Organization Management*, 48(1), 125–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221088435>
- Mantere, S., & Ketokivi, M. (2013). Reasoning in organization science. *Academy of Management Review*, 38(1), 70–89. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0188>
- Marescaux, E., & De Winne, S. (2016). Equity versus need: How do co-workers judge the distributive fairness of i-deals?. In: Bal, M. & Rousseau, D.M. (Eds.), *Current issues in work and organizational psychology. Idiosyncratic deals between employees and organizations: Conceptual issues, applications and the role of co-workers* (pp.107–121). Routledge.
- Marescaux, E., De Winne, S., & Sels, L. (2019). Idiosyncratic deals from a distributive justice perspective: Examining co-workers' voice behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 154(1), 263–281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3400-7>
- McDermott, A. M., Conway, E., Rousseau, D. M., & Flood, P. C. (2013). Promoting effective psychological contracts through leadership: The missing link between HR strategy and performance. *Human Resource Management*, 52(2), 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21529>
- McDermott, A., Fitzgerald, L., Van Gestel, N. M., & Keating, M. A. (2015). From Bipartite to tripartite devolved HRM in professional service contexts: Evidence from hospitals in three countries. *Human Resource Management*, 54(5), 813–831. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21728>
- Murphy, C., Ramamoorthy, N., Flood, P. C., & Maccurtain, S. (2006). Organizational justice perceptions and employee attitudes among Irish blue collar employees: An empirical test of the main and moderating roles of individualism/collectivism. *Management Revu*, 17(3), 328–343. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0935-9915-2006-3-328>
- Ng, T. W. H., & Sorensen, K. L. (2008). Toward a further understanding of the relationships between perceptions of support and work attitudes: A meta-analysis. *Group & Organization Management*, 33(3), 243–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601107313307>
- Perrigino, M. B., Dunford, B. B., & Wilson, K. S. (2018). Work–family backlash: The ‘dark side’ of work–life balance (WLB) policies. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(2), 600–630. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0077>
- Pestotnik, A., & Süß, S. (2023). How do idiosyncratic deals influence employees' effort-reward imbalance? An empirical investigation of the role of social comparisons and denied i-deals. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(5), 1015–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.2016889>
- Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: Theory, analysis and evidence. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2007.00022.x>
- Rofcanin, Y., Las Heras, M., Bal, M., Van Der Heijden, B., & Erdogan, D. T. (2018). A trickle-down model of task and developmental of i-deals. *Human Relations*, 71(11), 1508–1534. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717751613>
- Rousseau, D. M. (2005). *I-deals: Idiosyncratic deals employees bargain for themselves*. M.E. Sharpe.
- Rousseau, D. M., Ho, V. T., & Greenberg, J. (2006). I-deals: Idiosyncratic terms in employment relationships. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 31(4), 977–994.



- Rousseau, D. M., Tomprou, M., & Simosi, M. (2016). Negotiating flexible and fair idiosyncratic deals (i-deals). *Organizational Dynamics*, 45(3), 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2016.07.004>
- Simosi, M., Aldossari, M., Chaudhry, S., & Rousseau, D. M. (2023). Uncovering missing voices: Invisible aspects of idiosyncratic deals (I-deals). *Group & Organization Management*, 48(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221120377>
- Taser, D., Rofcanin, Y., Las Heras, M., & Bosch, M. J. (2022). Flexibility I-deals and pro-social motives: A trickle-down perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(21), 4334–4359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1953564>
- Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Van Waeyenberg, T., Brebels, L., De Winne, S., & Marescaux, E. (2023). What does your i-deal say about me? A social comparison examination of coworker reactions to flexibility i-deals. *Group & Organization Management*, 48(1), 192–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221076637>
- Vidyarthi, P. R., Chaudhry, A., Anand, S., & Liden, R. (2014). Flexibility i-deals: How much is i-deal? *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 29(3), 246–265. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-07-2012-0225>
- Vidyarthi, P. R., Berrin, E., Posthuma, R., Singh, S., Chaudhry, A., & Anand, S. (2016). Individual deals within teams: Investigating the role of relative i-deals for employee performance. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(11), 1536–1552. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000145>
- Williams, J. C., Blair-Loy, M., & Berdahl, J. L. (2013). Cultural schemas, social class, and the flexibility stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 209–234. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12012>
- Williams, S. (1999). The effects of distributive and procedural justice on performance. *The Journal of Psychology*, 133(2), 183–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223989909599732>
- Zhang, X., Wu, W., Wu, W., Zhang, Y., & Xia, Y. (2020). Are your gains threat or chance for me? A social comparison perspective on idiosyncratic deals and coworkers' acceptance. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 30(4), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2020.32>