

Transformational leadership, idiosyncratic deals and employee outcomes

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Abstract

Purpose – Transformational leadership (TFL) has been suggested to create positive changes in employees with the goal of developing them into leaders. The authors integrate this well-established leadership style with recent research on idiosyncratic deals (i-deals). The authors suggest TFL as a predictor of task and development-based i-deals, and propose i-deals as a mediating mechanism linking TFL to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, job stress and manager-rated performance).

Design/methodology/approach – The authors used a time-lagged research design, and collected four waves of data from 140 employees and 78 leaders.

Findings – TFL was found to be an important predictor of i-deals. I-deals predicted job satisfaction and job stress; and it mediated the relationship between TFL and these two employee outcomes. Yet, i-deals were not associated with employee performance and did not mediate the relationship.

Originality/value – First, it shows that transformational leaders who consider employees' unique skills and support their professional growth are more likely to grant personalized arrangements. Second, drawing from social exchange theory, it illustrates that i-deals may act as a linkage between TFL and employee outcomes. The paper bridges leadership and i-deals literature to identify key leverage points through which leaders can enhance employee satisfaction, well-being and performance.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Idiosyncratic deals, Job satisfaction, Job stress, Performance

Paper type Research paper

Contemporary HRM approaches emphasize active employee participation and involvement in redefining roles, tasks and boundaries in the workplace. HR practices are moving toward a state where employees are allowed to negotiate various aspects of their work and tailor the job to fit their needs and preferences. Thus, how to effectively lead employees while taking into consideration personalized work arrangements is a challenge for today's HR professionals. Such individualized work arrangements are called *idiosyncratic deals (i-deals)* which refer to “voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employers and their employees regarding terms that benefit each party” (Rousseau *et al.*, 2006, p. 978). I-deals have been suggested to be beneficial for employees by building up special skills, and increasing the fit between person and the job, which consequently reduce their feelings of



stress, and enhance their positive attitudes and performance in the workplace (e.g. [Ererdi et al., 2022](#)). Indeed, from an HR perspective this ability to create a satisfied, healthy and high-performing workforce is a powerful tool in improving effectiveness in today's uncertain and dynamic world. To this end, the present study investigates the extent to which leaders can enhance their followers' job satisfaction and performance, and reduce their level of job stress through the use of personalized work arrangements.

Leaders are important negotiation partners as i-deal granters on behalf of the employer. Hence, it is essential for leadership scholars to investigate which type of leader behaviors is conducive to dealing with the unique needs and expectations of followers. To this end, the i-deals literature recently called for research examining the role of immediate leaders in addressing their employees' requests for idiosyncratic work arrangements ([Anand et al., 2010, 2018](#)). Responding to these calls, most of the i-deals research has focused on LMX and has shown that high-quality exchanges enhance the chances for employees to negotiate more favorable tasks (e.g. [Hornung et al., 2010, 2014; Liao et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2022](#)). Despite these studies, no systematic research exists on the relationship between other relevant leadership styles and i-deals. Indeed, in their recent meta-analytical review of i-deals, [Liao et al. \(2016\)](#) suggested transformational leadership (TFL) as one possible important leadership style. They claimed that transformational leaders may grant i-deals to employees because of their emphasis on meeting personal needs and professional development of employees. Transformational leaders maintain high-quality relationships by inspiring and intellectually stimulating their followers, and building respect and individualized relationships with them ([Wang et al., 2005](#)). The relationship between transformational leaders and their followers is characterized by trust, support and development which can be highly influential in driving i-deals. To this end, the present study integrates *transformational leadership (TFL)* and *i-deals* literatures, and proposes TFL as a critical antecedent of i-deals, which in turn, influence followers' outcomes, namely *job satisfaction*, *stress* and *performance*.

I-deals, especially task-and development-oriented ones, produce meaning for employees in daily activities ([Hackman and Oldham, 1980](#)) and enhance the experience of positive work-related states ([Hornung et al., 2011](#)), because they include the negotiation of job content to better develop one's skills and abilities. Indeed, [Rosen et al. \(2013\)](#) combined "career development" and "task" i-deals dimensions ([Hornung et al., 2010](#)) into a single dimension and referred to it as "task and work responsibilities i-deals" as both pertain to the negotiation of what an employee does on the job such as negotiating challenging work tasks, special responsibilities outside of formal requirements, and activities suited to their personalities, skills and preferences. Hence, task and developmental i-deals contribute to the achievement of one's personal work goals and career growth ([Hornung et al., 2010, 2014; Rofcanin et al., 2016](#)).

We specifically focus on task and development ideals for two reasons. First, studying the task and development i-deals is meaningful because they are related to the socio-emotional aspects of work, and have been shown to be more significantly associated with a variety of positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes as opposed to other categories such as flexibility i-deals which predict a narrow range of outcomes (e.g. work-life balance; [Hornung et al., 2008, 2011, 2014; Rofcanin et al., 2016](#)). As these i-deals particularly stimulate growth and development, they were found to positively influence a variety of work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, job involvement and performance ([Anand et al., 2010, 2018; Hornung et al., 2009; Liao et al., 2017; Ng and Feldman, 2015](#)). Therefore, for employee outcomes included in the study – namely, job satisfaction, performance and job-induced stress – studying these task and developmental i-deals is more imperative.

Second, in the current study, we examine TFL as a predictor of i-deals. It is a relevant and important leadership style given its focus on the professional development of employees. Transformational leaders know followers' unique competencies, consider them as individuals having different needs and abilities from others, and inspire them to achieve goals. This leadership style is considered to be an autonomy-supportive leadership type because of its focus on provision

of support and encouragement (Byron *et al.*, 2023). We contend that these leaders will grant i-deals to their employees in order to give them a choice and control over their work, and special opportunities and assignments to further develop them. Therefore, it is critical to understand if transformational leaders offer employees the opportunities to take on desired responsibilities beyond formal job requirements and provide them with choices for skill development.

By integrating the fragmented i-deals and leadership literatures, the present study makes two main contributions. First, extending previous research which argues that day-to-day negotiation of i-deals is eventually contingent on the leaders' willingness and cooperative behaviors (Anand *et al.*, 2018), it suggests that TFL is a significant antecedent of i-deals. By responding to recent calls to examine the effects of specific leadership styles on i-deals (Liao *et al.*, 2016), it posits that transformational leaders consider employees' unique skills and support their professional growth, therefore are more likely to grant personalized arrangements upon employees' requests. Transformational leaders are expected to expand their employees' responsibilities and offer them opportunities to create or alter their work and daily tasks for the purpose of honing their skills. Second, drawing from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), we propose that i-deals may act as a linkage between TFL and attitudinal, emotional or behavioral employee outcomes. We contend that customized arrangements are evidence of leader's appreciation for employee skills and interests, which in turn result in more positive outcomes by the recipients of these terms. Thus, the ultimate contribution of this paper is to bridge leadership and i-deals literatures, and to identify key leverage points through which leaders can enhance employee satisfaction, well-being and performance. Our proposed theoretical framework is presented in Figure 1.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Task and developmental i-deals allow employees to accumulate special skills, improve the alignment between their tasks and professional interests, and pursue career goals (Rosen *et al.*, 2013; Rousseau *et al.*, 2006). Leaders are the representatives of their organizations and have a wide variety of resources to be accorded to employees on behalf of the employers. As i-deal grantors, leaders have an important influence on the extent to which individual arrangements are permitted (Hornung *et al.*, 2008). Because they are negotiated based on a relational bond between leaders and followers, employees interpret these i-deals in terms of a social rather than an economic exchange (Hornung *et al.*, 2010; Rosen *et al.*, 2013; Rousseau *et al.*, 2009). Although there are studies pointing to the importance of leadership behaviors on granting i-deals, little is known about relevant leadership styles and specific behaviors

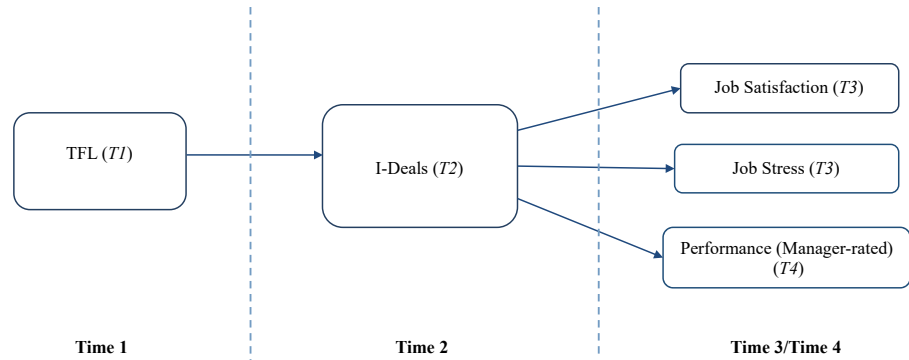


Figure 1.
Proposed
research model

Source(s): Authors' own creation

through which leaders support development of their followers. Indeed, in their recent meta-analytical review of i-deals literature, [Liao et al. \(2016\)](#) stated that “concerning leader influence, more research is needed to scrutinize how leader behaviors or leadership styles shape the i-deal negotiation process, beyond leader personality and leader– member relationships. For instance, it is reasonable to assume that transformational leaders tend to grant i-deals to employees because of their high levels of individualized consideration and attentiveness to employees’ needs” (p. 16). Despite these calls and the alignment between TFL and i-deals theories in the idea of fostering employee development and welfare, to our knowledge, there are no studies examining TFL as a relevant leadership style in granting i-deals. The relationship between transformational leaders and followers is based on exchanges of benefits such as esteem, support and consideration ([Bass and Avolio, 1995](#)), which is inherently germane to developmental i-deals. To address this gap, we examine the role of TFL in authorizing individualized arrangements to employees and the resulting employee attitudes, feelings and behaviors in the present study.

While we contend that TFL is highly relevant to the study of i-deals ([Liao et al., 2016](#)), other leadership styles such as ethical, authentic or servant leadership are also plausible candidates as leader behaviors with potential implications for i-deals. We focused on TFL for three reasons. First, theoretically TFL is the most relevant leadership style given its focus on follower inspiration, intellectual development and giving individuals personalized consideration, as discussed earlier. Second, past meta-analytic evidence has shown that authentic and ethical leadership styles, while among the most commonly studied leader behaviors, have a large degree of overlap with TFL, suggesting that the utility of including them would likely be low given their marginal predictive utility above and beyond TFL ([Hoch et al., 2018](#)). Finally, servant leadership, while emerging as a leadership style that is valuable in studies of job-related attitudes and behaviors, is less relevant to our model. Servant leadership places great emphasis on leaders’ humility and self-sacrificial behaviors, as well as a strong focus on the wellbeing of the wider organizational stakeholders and the larger community ([Eva et al., 2019](#)). As such, theoretically, it is less salient to our investigation of leaders’ granting of negotiated individualized deals to employees as a way to challenge and motivate them. Therefore, we focused on TFL as a key leadership style with implications for granting of i-deals.

TFL and i-deals

TFL behaviors include articulating a compelling vision, setting high performance expectations, showing individualized support and intellectual stimulation to employees ([Bass and Avolio, 1995](#)). These behaviors are highly relevant for encouraging followers to take initiative and ask for personalized tasks. First, transformational leaders build close and active relationships with their followers. They treat their subordinates as individuals and show sensitivity to their individual needs and expectations. They pay special attention to followers’ professional development and support them to reach their goals. Because they consider employees’ differing strengths, abilities and aspirations, they meet the emotional and professional needs of each employee. Therefore, employees working with such leaders are likely to be comfortable in asking for customized work arrangements and get what they want.

Second, transformational leaders challenge their followers about the ways they see their work and how they do it ([Wang et al., 2017](#)). These intellectually stimulating leaders encourage employees to seek novel approaches and explore new methods. Through stimulation, these leaders broaden employees’ problem-solving skills and pursue creative approaches. Numerous studies reported that transformational leaders help employees develop their intellectual capacities and encourage them to take initiative ([Avolio et al., 2004](#); [Dvir et al., 2002](#)). They lead employees to enrich their jobs by seeking resources and challenges ([Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006](#); [Schmitt et al., 2016](#); [Wang et al., 2017](#)). In such an

innovative environment created by transformational leaders, employees are eager to expand or initiate changes in their tasks and ask for developmental opportunities (Kark *et al.*, 2003; Shin and Zhou, 2003).

Third, through charismatic role modeling, transformational leaders suggest linkages between expected employee behaviors, long-term values and vision of the future. They show idealized influence by acting as positive role models for followers. They set high standards of performance and display confidence in followers' abilities. They go beyond exchanging contractual agreements for desired performance by actively engaging followers, building on their personal value systems, creating personal commitment and enhancing the meaningfulness of goals. In other words, they "strengthen followers' belief in the necessity and propriety of 'standing up' and 'being counted'" (Shamir *et al.*, 1994, p. 27).

Finally, transformational leaders inspire followers by providing meaning and challenge to their work. They talk energetically and optimistically about the future and what needs to be accomplished, and show the followers ways to achieve goals (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). They motivate employees through the use of inspirational talks, emotional appeals or metaphors. These inspiring behaviors create enthusiasm among followers especially toward difficult goals and mobilize them to achieve challenging tasks. Hence, employees working with these leaders will be energized to ask for, and get developmental responsibilities to perform beyond expectations. Based on these arguments, we propose that:

H1. TFL is positively related to task and developmental i-deals.

I-deals and employee outcomes

I-deals research asserts that task and developmental i-deals are associated with increased employee performance and commitment, more interesting work, better person–job fit and reduced stress (Rousseau *et al.*, 2016). We examine job satisfaction, performance and job-induced stress as employee outcomes in the present study. First, several studies pointed to the positive influence of i-deals, especially developmental ones, on employees' job satisfaction (Ho and Tekleab, 2016; Liao *et al.*, 2017; Rosen *et al.*, 2013; Singh and Vidyarthi, 2018), which is a positive emotional state resulting from appraisal of one's job. These studies argued that task i-deals include changes in the job content that results in more interesting, intrinsically motivating and meaningful work. Through these deals, employees negotiate for duties that match their personal interests, preferences or abilities. As they are able to change or expand the range of their responsibilities, employees perceive that they are engaged in more comprehensive and challenging tasks, and that their job has a higher impact on the work of others and the organization (Hackman and Oldham, 1980; Rosen *et al.*, 2013). In such cases, they perceive that their jobs include more complexity and they have higher control over their jobs, resulting in more positive evaluations toward their work (Hornung *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, when employees are granted tasks aligned with their abilities and are provided with opportunities to further develop their skills, they will feel more satisfied with their jobs.

From a job design perspective, task and developmental i-deals can also be argued to result in less stressful jobs. Job stress refers to adverse reactions (i.e. anxiety, tension and exhaustion) employees experience in response to stressors such as obstacles, barriers and hindrances to personal growth and accomplishment in the workplace (Büssing and Glaser, 2000; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, the i-deals literature mostly ignored the relationship between task/developmental i-deals and job stress (see Bal and Boehm, 2019; Hornung *et al.*, 2010; Kong *et al.*, 2020 for exceptions), largely focusing on the effects of flexibility i-deals on work–life balance. Indeed, as a proactive approach, negotiating task i-deals may help employees reduce aversive characteristics of their jobs, and actively cope with detrimental job features. First, work adjustment theory (Baltes *et al.*, 1999) provides an explanation for this negative relationship between i-deals and job stress: Through

customized opportunities and the chances to adjust their tasks in line with their unique abilities, employees are better able to align their jobs with their personal goals. These high levels of person–job fit and broader action repertoires that they negotiate (Liu *et al.*, 2013; Ng and Feldman, 2015) better satisfy their needs and reduce feelings of stress (Hornung *et al.*, 2010). Second, job demands-resources framework (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) elucidates how i-deals contribute to reduced stress. Accordingly, i-deals function as significant resources for employees by offering autonomy, development and clarity in their jobs (Rousseau, 2005). These resources help them achieve professional growth in their work, and reduce conflict and pressure in their work which consequently mitigate job-induced stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014; Kong *et al.*, 2020).

Research also indicates that task and developmental i-deals encourage employees to take greater initiative on the job, become more engaged in their work and thus enhance their in-role performance (Hornung *et al.*, 2014; Ng and Lucianetti, 2016; Rofcanin *et al.*, 2021). In-role job performance is the expected quality, quantity and accuracy of work done by an employee to accomplish goals (Welbourne *et al.*, 1998). While explaining the linkage between i-deals and performance, extant research (Anand *et al.*, 2010; Hornung *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2013; Singh and Vidyarthi, 2018) used social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as an explanation: Task and development i-deals between the grantor and the recipient involve social exchange as these i-deals are associated with fulfilling socio-emotional needs of employees for personal growth and recognition (Liao *et al.*, 2016; Ng and Feldman, 2015; Rosen *et al.*, 2013). When leaders provide employees with i-deals, employees, in return, work harder and increase individual productivity. That is, employees feel obliged to enhance their in-role performance to respond to the exchange process started by the leader (Ng and Lucianetti, 2016). As a result of negotiations with the managers, employees are also likely to be provided with individually challenging assignments that better fit their abilities, and opportunities to reach their development goals, all of which enhance their in-role performance (Hornung *et al.*, 2009).

H2. Task and developmental i-deals are positively related to a) job satisfaction and b) performance and negatively associated with c) job stress.

The mediating role of i-deals between TFL and employee outcomes

Successful negotiation depends on leaders' willingness to support and develop followers to their fullest potential. Transformational leaders pay special attention to subordinates' unique needs and encourage them to ask for what they need for professional development. Thus, we argue that transformational leaders will be more likely to grant i-deals to satisfy their followers' differing needs and expectations for growth. These arrangements verify the leader's acknowledgement of employees' interests and skills. Based on social exchange theory, the recipients of such i-deals who actively receive new assignments/opportunities, in return will show more positive assessments and behaviors. Specifically, we predict that employees who take on challenging work assignments, duties better aligned with professional interests, and special career opportunities are likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, perform better and feel lower levels of stress. Hence:

H3. Task and developmental i-deals mediate the relationship between TFL and a) job satisfaction, b) performance and c) job stress.

Method

Data were collected as part of a larger study from employees working for a conglomerate established to support a private university in Turkey, as well as from the administrative personnel of the university. The conglomerate operates in a diverse set of industries including

construction, defense, printing, real estate and tourism. We contacted the HR departments of the university and the conglomerate to obtain the names of employees and their e-mail addresses. Participation in the study was voluntary, and we raffled gift cards as incentives to motivate participation. The five winners of the raffle were eligible for \$80 gift certificates from retail stores in Turkey.

Data were collected via web-based surveys in 2018. We conducted the study in four waves by collecting data from employees at T1, T2 and T3 and from managers at T4. Waves were separated by three weeks each. TFL was measured at T1 and i-deals at T2. At Time 3, employees reported the level of satisfaction with their jobs and job stress. At T4, managers evaluated the performance of their followers. We distributed the first survey to 594 employees and 130 managers. Employees completed 235 surveys at T1 (response rate = 40%), 185 at T2 (31%) and 175 at T3 (29%), and 80 managers rated the performance of 300 employees at T4 (62%). Due to missing responses, the final sample used to test our hypotheses included 96 employees and 46 managers. Forty-nine percent of employees were women, and average age was 36.7 (SD = 8.0). The average organizational tenure was 7.7 years (SD = 7.4), the average employee dyadic tenure with their manager was 3.6 years (SD = 3.2), 69% of employees were married and 66% had a university education, while 21% had a graduate degree. Hence, employees consisted of highly-educated white-collar professionals. Employees reporting to the same manager were physically located in the same unit, and interacted regularly to achieve shared goals through formal and informal interactions. Regarding managers, 47% were female, and average age was 44.3 years (SD = 6.5). The average manager tenure was 13.2 years (SD = 8.3), 86% of managers were married, 33% had a university education, while 88% had a graduate degree.

Transformational Leadership (T1). Participants rated how frequently managers engaged in transformational behaviors on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, and 5 = Frequently, if not always) using the 20 item Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass and Avolio, 1995). Sample items were “S/He considers me as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others” and “S/He suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments”. Although TFL is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct including different dimensions, the present study does not make a distinction among these components as previous research showed that these dimensions are highly correlated and fall under the higher-order construct of TFL, resulting in more parsimony (Avolio *et al.*, 1999).

I-deals (T2). Employees provided their ratings on i-deals using the six-item task and work responsibilities dimension of Rosen *et al.*'s (2013) scale. Sample items are “I have successfully asked for extra responsibilities that take advantage of the skills that I bring to the job” and “At my request, my manager has assigned me tasks that better develop my skills.”

Job satisfaction (T3). Respondents rated their job satisfaction by three items (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Sample items are “Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job” and “I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job.”

Stress (T3). Respondents rated their job stress using the seven-item scale of House and Rizzo (1972). Sample items are “My job tends to directly affect my health” and “I work under a great deal of tension.”

Performance (T4). Managers rated the performance of their employees in terms of quality, quantity and accuracy of work output, and the service provided to customers by using Welbourne *et al.*'s (1998) four-item scale.

Results

We tested our hypotheses using Mplus version 8.3 and full information maximum likelihood. Because employees were clustered within groups (i.e. managers), we estimated null models to

evaluate whether there was sufficiently high proportion of between-group variability to warrant two-level analyses. Intraclass correlations (i.e. ICC1) indicated the following: For the TFL and i-deals variables, 17 and 2% of the total variance, respectively, was at the between-group level (i.e. Level 2), and for the job satisfaction, stress and performance variables, 39%, 12% and 54% of the total variance, respectively, was at the between-group level. Given the relatively large ICCs for some outcome variables, we tested Hypotheses 1–3 using two-level path analysis. We estimated a two-level, just-identified path model (Model 1) with observed composite variables used for each variable. Two-level path analysis results in model-based group-mean centering for all within-level variables (Preacher *et al.*, 2010). We adapted R code (R Core Team, 2021) from Selig and Preacher (2008) to estimate 95% CIs for indirect effects based on a Monte Carlo method with 200,000 repetitions. Table 1 displays all descriptive statistics.

To test our hypotheses, we specified a two-level Model 1 (employee = Level 1, manager = Level 2) wherein i-deals regressed on TFL; job satisfaction, stress and performance regressed on TFL and i-deals. The mean of TFL and the intercepts of i-deals, job satisfaction, stress and performance were estimated at Level 2. We report only the within-group findings since our hypotheses focus on employee level.

Hypothesis 1 received full support, as TFL was positively associated with i-deals ($b = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 predicted that i-deals would be positively associated with a) job satisfaction and b) performance, and negatively associated with c) stress. Consistent with our predictions, i-deals was positively associated with job satisfaction ($b = 0.32$, $p = 0.026$), providing support for Hypothesis 2a. Yet, i-deals was not associated with performance ($b = 0.15$, $p = 0.253$) or stress ($b = -0.25$, $p = 0.073$), not supporting Hypotheses 2b and 2c (Table 2).

For Hypothesis 3, we predicted that i-deals would mediate the associations between TFL and a) job satisfaction, b) performance and c) stress. The indirect effect from TFL to job satisfaction via i-deals was positive and the confidence interval did not include zero (IE = 0.18, 95% CI[0.020, 0.365]), supporting Hypothesis 3a. Neither Hypothesis 3b nor

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ICC	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Original model 1</i>								
$N_{\text{employees}} = 96, N_{\text{managers}} = 46$								
1. Transformational Leadership (TFL) (T1)	3.76	0.81	0.17	(0.92)	0.66**	0.52**	-0.33*	0.11
2. I-deals (T2)	3.54	0.74	0.02	0.52**	(0.80)	0.51**	-0.38*	-0.12
3. Job Satisfaction (T3)	4.00	0.83	0.39	0.38**	0.48**	(0.90)	-0.66**	-0.23
4. Stress (T3)	2.58	0.81	0.12	-0.24*	-0.27*	-0.40*	(0.88)	0.07
5. Performance (Manager-Rated) (T4)	3.91	0.77	0.54	0.19	0.08	0.22*	-0.04	(0.93)
<i>Re-specified model 1</i>								
$N_{\text{employees}} = 140, N_{\text{managers}} = 78$								
1. Transformational Leadership (TFL) (T1)	3.66	0.89	0.28	(0.92)	0.65**	0.32**	-0.24*	
2. I-deals (T2)	3.55	0.73	0.03	0.48**	(0.80)	0.39**	-0.28*	
3. Job Satisfaction (T3)	4.05	0.79	0.32	0.40**	0.51**	(0.90)	-0.60**	
4. Stress (T3)	2.50	0.77	0.09	-0.18*	-0.29**	-0.40**	(0.88)	

Note(s): Lower-diagonal values are employee-level correlations, upper-diagonal correlations are weighted between-group correlations. Off-diagonal parenthetical values refer to Cronbach's alphas

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 1.
Descriptives

Table 2.
Unstandardized
parameter estimates

Parameter	Original model 1		Re-specified model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Est	SE	Est	SE	Est	SE	Est	SE	Est	SE
Path <i>a</i>										
TFL → I-deals	0.57**	0.08	0.46**	0.07	0.46**	0.07	0.46**	0.07	0.54**	0.07
Path <i>b</i>										
I-deals → Job Satisfaction	0.32*	0.14	0.38**	0.13	0.38**	0.13				
I-deals → Stress	−0.25	0.14	−0.25*	0.12			−0.24*	0.12		
I-deals → Performance	0.15	0.13							0.14	0.11
Path <i>c</i>										
TFL → Job Satisfaction	0.18	0.14	0.03	0.13	0.03	0.13				
TFL → Stress	−0.07	0.15	0.00	0.11			0.02	0.11		
TFL → Performance	−0.16*	0.08							−0.14	0.09
<i>R</i> ²										
I-deals	0.34		0.32		0.31		0.30		0.31	
Job Satisfaction	0.26		0.20		0.20					
Stress	0.08		0.06				0.05			
Performance	0.04								0.03	
<i>N</i> _{employees}	96		140		140		140		115	
<i>N</i> _{managers}	46		78		78		78		51	

Note(s): **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01
Source(s): Authors' own creation

[Hypothesis 3c](#) received support ([Table 3](#)), as the indirect effects from TFL to performance and from TFL to stress were nonsignificant (IE = 0.082, 95% CI[−0.056, 0.243] and IE = −0.140, 95% CI[−0.309, 0.014], respectively). As follow-up analyses, when relaxed to 90%, the confidence intervals associated with the indirect effect from TFL to stress approached significance (−0.28, −0.01), while the indirect effect from TFL to performance included zero (−0.03, 0.21).

As a supplementary analysis, we re-specified Model 1 by dropping performance from the model due to the amount of unmatched missing data at T4 for manager-rated performance. After excluding performance from the model, the employee sample size increased from 96 to 140, and the manager sample size increased from 46 to 78. Like the original model, the path from TFL to i-deals (*b* = 0.46, *p* < 0.01), the path from i-deals to job satisfaction (*b* = 0.38, *p* < 0.01), and the indirect effect from TFL to job satisfaction via i-deals (IE = 0.18,

Table 3.
Indirect effects and
confidence intervals

Indirect effects	Original model 1		Re-specified model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	LL	UL	LL	UL	LL	UL	LL	UL	LL	UL
TFL → iDeals → Job Satisfaction	0.02	0.37	0.04	0.33	0.06	0.31				
TFL → iDeals → Stress	−0.31	0.01	−0.29	−0.01			−0.23	−0.00		
TFL → iDeals → Performance	−0.06	0.24							−0.04	0.20
<i>N</i> _{employees}	96		140		140		140		115	
<i>N</i> _{managers}	46		78		78		78		51	

Note(s): 95% confidence intervals estimated using Monte Carlo method with 200,000 repetitions ([MacKinnon et al., 2004](#))

Source(s): Authors' own creation

95% CI[0.04, 0.33]) remained statistically significant. Unlike the original model, the path from i-deals to stress became statistically significant ($b = -0.25, p = 0.04$) when performance was excluded, and the indirect effect from TFL to stress via i-deals also became statistically significant (IE = -0.14 , 95% CI [$-0.29, -0.01$]).

We also conducted additional supplementary analyses wherein we specified each outcome – job satisfaction, stress and performance – in its own model, which we refer to as Models 2, 3 and 4, respectively. The effective sample sizes for these Models differed from Model 1 due to differences in how many and which specific employees reported their job satisfaction and stress at T3 vs how many and which specific managers rated the performance of employees at T4. The sample sizes were 140 employees and 78 managers for Model 2; 140 employees and 78 managers for Model 3; 115 employees and 51 managers for Model 4.

In Models 2, 3 and 4, TFL was positively associated with i-deals ($b = 0.46, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.46, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.54, p < 0.001$, respectively). This finding was consistent with the initial test of [Hypothesis 1](#). In Model 2, i-deals was positively associated with job satisfaction ($b = 0.38, p = 0.002$). Further, the indirect effect from TFL to job satisfaction via i-deals was positive and the confidence interval did not include zero (IE = 0.18 , 95% CI[$0.06, 0.31$]). These findings were consistent with initial support for Hypotheses 2a and 3a. In Model 3, i-deals was negatively associated with stress ($b = -0.24, p = 0.047$). Further, the indirect effect from TFL to stress via i-deals was positive and the confidence interval did not include zero (IE = -0.11 , 95% CI[$-0.236, -0.001$]). In contrast to previous analyses, both Hypotheses 2c and 3c were supported when stress was the sole outcome in the model. In Model 4, i-deals was not associated with performance ($b = 0.14, p = 0.216$) and the confidence interval included zero (IE = 0.07 , 95% CI[$-0.04, 0.20$]). Therefore, Hypotheses 2b and 3b did not receive support in either analysis.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

Our study extends previous research on i-deals by investigating its mediating role in the relationship between TFL and employee outcomes in the Turkish context. Our contributions are twofold: First, by integrating leadership and i-deals literatures, we found that TFL serves as an important predictor of i-deals. This is an important contribution to HRM and i-deals literature which primarily has focused on the consequences of i-deals or has not examined which specific leadership styles or behaviors cultivate i-deals. We showed that transformational leaders are likely to allow employees to hone their personal skills, and better align work with their interests. Second, drawing from social exchange theory ([Blau, 1964](#)), we argued that customized arrangements can be considered as an indication of transformational leaders' sensitivity to employees' needs, and their desire to professionally develop followers, which in turn result in more positive outcomes by the recipients of these terms. Our results suggested that these expectations were supported for job satisfaction, and job stress, but not for in-role performance.

First and foremost, by focusing on and signifying the role of leadership style (i.e. TFL) in granting i-deals, we extend previous research which has demonstrated that managers play an important role in changing existing HR practices ([McDermott et al., 2013](#)). The individualized or differentiated HRM literatures argue that formal HR policies and practices may change across organizations, yet managers frequently shape existing policies by re-defining these practices through i-deals ([Alfes et al., 2013](#); [Rofcanin et al., 2017, 2019](#)). In other words, as the most important negotiation partners on behalf of their organizations, leaders play a critical role in materializing i-deals ([Rofcanin et al., 2017](#)). Extending these previous research, we found that transformational leaders facilitate obtainment of task and developmental i-deals.

Our finding referring to the significance of TFL in predicting i-deals implies that transformational leaders who care for their employees' needs and skill development are likely to authorize individually customized jobs and development opportunities to their followers, at least in the Turkish context. This finding supports [Hornung et al.'s \(2010\)](#) claim that employees who are valued and trusted by their leaders tend to have greater zones of acceptance. Transformational leaders, who aim to change and transform their employees, are more likely to expand their responsibilities, and offer them opportunities for skill development. Because these leaders act as coaches or mentors who enhance followers' unique competencies, employees then negotiate to make their jobs more challenging and request assignments that better suit their individual needs. Thus, they are likely to receive tasks that satisfy their career goals, and benefit from varied opportunities for learning and growth ([Guerrero et al., 2016](#)).

Why are transformational leaders more likely to grant such personalized arrangements regarding employee's work responsibilities and professional development? First, through personalized interaction and support, these considerate leaders may enhance the willingness of the employees to seek customized tasks that better match their interests and abilities. As mentioned by [Avolio and Bass \(1995\)](#), "a large portion of individualized consideration is developmental, involving the diagnosing of followers' needs for growth and providing the mentoring or coaching required to both meet those needs for growth and expand them to higher levels of potential" (p. 202). Therefore, these leaders are willing to delegate assignments as opportunities for growth, and employees are willing to ask for them. Furthermore, intellectual stimulation provided by these leaders may also drive imagination, intellectual curiosity and novel approaches to explore different dimensions of tasks ([Shin and Zhou, 2003](#)). Transformational leaders facilitate search behaviors for work-related information, knowledge, challenges and resources for development ([Wang et al., 2017](#)). Followers try to achieve the standard that they are capable of, and the leader's role is to consider their new ideas and help them realize their full potential ([Dvir et al., 2002](#)). The compelling vision of the future articulated by these leaders also enhances excitement and intrinsic motivation among followers ([Lowe et al., 1996](#)). By acting as positive role models, they show confidence in followers' abilities and inspire them to achieve challenging goals. This enthusiasm of the leader provides challenge to the work at hand and energizes followers to ask for differentiated tasks. As a result of all these leader behaviors, employees may feel more comfortable in asking for customized jobs around their aspirations, requesting personalized prospects for their professional development and being more proactive in managing their responsibilities.

The second contribution of our study is that it shows task and developmental i-deals act as a bridge between TFL, and attitudinal and emotional employee outcomes, supporting the tenets of social exchange theory ([Blau, 1964](#)). Indeed, previous research has well-established the positive effects of such i-deals on numerous follower outcomes ([Anand et al., 2010, 2018](#); [Hornung et al., 2008, 2009, 2011, 2014](#); [Liao et al., 2017](#); [Ng and Feldman, 2015](#); [Rofcanin et al., 2016, 2018](#)). Based on data collected across three waves within one organization in Turkey, we confirmed previous research and found that task and development i-deals promote higher levels of job satisfaction among followers. When employees are granted personalized arrangements based on their individual needs, they have a higher control over their jobs, feel more satisfied and get more engaged with their jobs ([Hornung et al., 2010, 2011](#)). As a result of chances to craft their tasks provided by transformational leaders, employees can choose developmental activities that better fit their needs which increase feelings of job satisfaction. Employees under such development-oriented leaders may feel free and safe to take initiatives about their jobs, and ask their leaders for extra responsibilities which go beyond their formal job requirements. Because they are provided enough leeway to take advantage of their

unique strengths, employees can hone their skills and build personal career paths which contribute to their feelings of satisfaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that customized arrangements are evidence of leader's appreciation for employee skills and interests, which in turn result in more positive outcomes by the recipients of these terms.

In line with job design perspective, we also argued and found that granting task and developmental i-deals reduce stressors and hindrances to personal development in the workplace (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). Previous research illustrated that negotiation over responsibilities and tasks help employees reduce negative job characteristics, job demands and the related psychological costs (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). Feelings of autonomy, clarity and control over work aid employees successfully cope with the demands of the job, better accomplish job requirements and experience positive emotions, which buffer them against negative experiences (Bal and Boehm, 2019; Hornung *et al.*, 2010). Work stressors, in a way, indicate person–environment mismatches which eventually create psychological strain and reduced mental health (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). Our results highlight that i-deals is a form of active coping with detrimental job features. I-deals can increase person–job fit by reducing the discrepancy between environmental conditions and personal needs and preferences. Therefore, our findings imply that negotiating task and developmental i-deals tend to reduce the stressors in the job resulting in better personal health and well-being.

It should be noted that our stress-related expectations (Hypotheses 2c and 3c) were fully supported in analyses where performance was excluded from the model (Re-specified Model 1) and when stress was the sole outcome variable in the model (Model 3). In both models, the sample size was higher (140 employees and 78 managers) as compared to modest sample size in the full analytical model (96 employees and 46 managers when all outcomes were considered simultaneously in the model) due to the amount of unmatched missing data at T4 manager-rated performance. Hence, the small sample size in the full-analytical model may have limited our statistical power to detect significant relationships between i-deals and job-induced stress in the study. Future research would benefit from testing our hypotheses with a larger sample size.

Interestingly, we found that TFL influences job satisfaction and job stress only via task and development i-deals (Re-specified Model 1), but not directly in our study. This finding implies that providing i-deals is a key mechanism that explains why TFL has positive implications on employee outcomes. It can be said that employees feel valued through i-deals which produce meanings for their jobs (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). In other words, transformational behaviors may affect employee attitudes and behaviors through personalized work arrangements whereby leaders signal that they care to develop and invest in the employees' professional growth. Individualized attention and skill development prospects provided by such leaders may create an environment where employees feel as valuable partners which enhance their positive feelings.

Finally, task and developmental i-deals provided by transformational leaders did not drive employee performance in our sample, which is contradictory to our expectations (Hypotheses 2b and 3b). Even the less conservative follow-up analyses indicated that i-deals do not relate to employee performance. One tentative explanation for this finding may be that i-deals have stronger effects on job attitudes as opposed to behavioral outcomes. I-deals are a social exchange theory-based mechanism (e.g. Gajendran *et al.*, 2015), whereas job performance may be more a function of individual capabilities. Thus, studying citizenship behaviors or other discretionary behaviors could have yielded stronger results. Another explanation could be that there may be some missing mediating variables in this i-deals–job performance relationship. Indeed, some studies referred to job autonomy (Hornung *et al.*, 2014), structural job resources (Rofcanin *et al.*, 2021) or perceived organizational support (Singh and Vidyarthi, 2018) as potential mediating mechanisms linking i-deals to job

performance. Future studies should test for these explanations in different organizations with other affective and behavioral outcomes.

Limitations and directions for future research

Although we used a time-lagged design, and collected data from both employees and managers, there are some limitations to be noted. First, the multi-source and multi-wave nature of our study resulted in a relatively small sample size. Second, the study was conducted in a single organization in Turkey. These limitations prevent us from generalizing our results to other business settings and cultural contexts. Researchers contended that national context may shape the prevalence of i-deals, as well as how employees react to i-deals (Wasti *et al.*, 2022). Regarding the latter for example, in high power distance contexts, employees may interpret i-deals as high-quality relationships with their leaders (Anand *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, in collectivistic contexts, employees may believe that i-deals signify care about the needs of the employees which may cultivate social exchange processes and commitment to the organization (Wasti *et al.*, 2022). Our study was conducted in a Turkish business context which is mainly characterized by high power distance and collectivistic values, which may limit the generalizability of our findings to other cultural settings. Hence, future studies are needed to elaborate on the perceptions of i-deals, as well as its outcomes in different cultural contexts with different value systems. Third, the nature and outcomes of task and developmental i-deals examined in the current study may be different from other i-deal types such as flexibility i-deals (Rosen *et al.*, 2013). Thus, our findings may not be generalized to other types of i-deals; future studies are needed to test and explain the unique effects of different i-deal types.

We did not test for any moderators in our theoretical model. Future research would benefit from examining the effects of boundary conditions of the proposed relationships. For example, in organizations with weak HR practices, i-deals can be the main tool leaders use to reward or promote their employees (Anand *et al.*, 2010). In such contexts, subordinates may feel the need to bargain individually with their leaders more to obtain resources for development. Moreover, we only focused on TFL as a critical antecedent of i-deals in the current study, and only considered task and development i-deals. Future researchers can examine the effects of other leadership styles on different types of i-deals. For example, transactional leadership, which is based on an economic exchange with the followers (Bass and Avolio, 1995), can be specifically tested for its effects on flexibility or financial incentives i-deals. As another relevant leadership style, benevolent paternalism (Chan *et al.*, 2013) can be studied for its effects on negotiation of i-deals. These leaders may have positive influences on obtainment of i-deals given that they treat their followers like a parent does, and show support in their professional and private lives. Hence, they are likely to grant followers flexibility in their schedules or locations to improve their work–life balance or provide developmental opportunities.

Practical implications

The present study provides some practical implications for HR departments and managers. First, it implies that in today's world, there are advantages to moving away from “one-size-fits-all” HR systems toward employment conditions that permit employee participation. Task and development i-deals are significant intervention tools for HR departments to keep today's development- and career-focused generation of employees healthy and motivated at work. A supportive environment in the workplace which welcomes requests for personalized task arrangements may be beneficial. Yet, i-deals reveal more positive responses when they supplement standardized benefits and supports (Rousseau *et al.*, 2006). In organizations

where i-deals accompany standard HR practices, i-deals allow managers to give rewards and support functional individualized arrangements, as long as they do not violate interactional and procedural justice perceptions. If i-deals are not communicated openly, they may result in perceptions of injustice among coworkers (Marescaux *et al.*, 2021; Vidyarthi *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, managers should be very careful about the unintended consequences of i-deals and take actions to ensure fairness in their units while granting i-deals to team members.

Second, our study provides insights about which leadership styles utilize i-deals as effective intervention tools to enhance motivation and well-being in the workplace. Specifically, transformational behaviors might influence the nature of relationships between leaders and their employees so that employees feel supported and develop more confidence in using their skills and abilities. Accordingly, we suggest that leaders should consider the differing skills of employees, and encourage them to take initiatives in expanding their jobs. They should let employees to achieve person–job fit, take extra responsibilities to advance their knowledge. When leaders permit their subordinates to take on desired assignments, give them more discretion in how they perform their tasks, and grant personalized arrangements, employees not only feel satisfied with their jobs but also seem to feel less stress. Having such high levels of satisfaction and less negative feelings as a result of customized arrangements not only benefit the employees, but also the employers, creating a win-win situation. Hence, to make task and development i-deals effective for everyone in an organization, we recommend prioritizing recruitment and promotion of leaders showing TFL characteristics. TFL, which encourages initiative taking at the workplace and enrichment of jobs with respect to followers' unique skills and goals, should be the subject HRM programs as such leaders are more likely to make their subordinates more satisfied, motivated and healthy through customized arrangements. Given the confirmed positive effects of TFL training programs on follower development (Dvir *et al.*, 2002), organizations could integrate these training programs into their leadership development practices.

Conclusion

I-deals offer employees means to improve their employment conditions. They also provide leaders and HR departments with tools in designing a positive workplace. Our study extends previous research on i-deals by investigating its mediating role in the relationship between TFL and employee outcomes. In doing so, our contributions are twofold: First, by integrating two fragmented literatures, we show that transformational leaders are likely to consider their employees' unique skills, provide support for their professional development and grant personalized arrangements. Second, we illustrate that task and development i-deals can be considered as evidence of leader's appreciation of employees' capabilities/strengths, which in turn, tend to result in more positive states. Future studies would benefit from further investigations of the link between leadership styles and i-deals to enhance positive employee outcomes in the workplace and to create effective HR initiatives.

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