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*Developmental Paper Submission*

**Understanding versus liking: Disability similarity as A predictor of idiosyncratic deals**

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** We aim to understand how supervisor-subordinate disability dissimilarity affects the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) and how this subsequently influences life and job satisfaction. **Design:** We conduct a survey of German employees from across different occupations (6’944 valid cases). We measure three types of i-deals: task, scheduling, and location i-deals. We employ a mediation analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses. **Findings:** We find that more i-deals are negotiated in dyads in which both supervisor and subordinate have a disability compared to dyads in which neither has one. When only the subordinate has a disability, less scheduling i-deals are granted by supervisors than in dyads in which neither has a disability. Supervisors with disabilities grant more task and location i-deals to employees without disabilities than supervisors without disabilities do. Task and scheduling i-deals are positively related to both life and job satisfaction. Location i-deals show no significant relationship with them. **Research implications:** Further research should identify moderators to counteract the negative consequences of the similarity-attraction paradigm. It should also aim for cross-cultural comparisons of supervisor-subordinate dissimilarity and i-deals negotiation. Additionally, they should also scrutinize the role of disability type. **Originality:** We shed more light on the antecedents of i-deals. We integrate the literature on i-deals with relational demography in general and with the similarity-attraction paradigm specifically. Furthermore, we investigate the role of the supervisor disability in both the similarity-attraction paradigm and the i-deals literature.

**Keywords:** disability, idiosyncratic deals, similarity-attraction paradigm, needs-supplies fit, flexibility, satisfaction

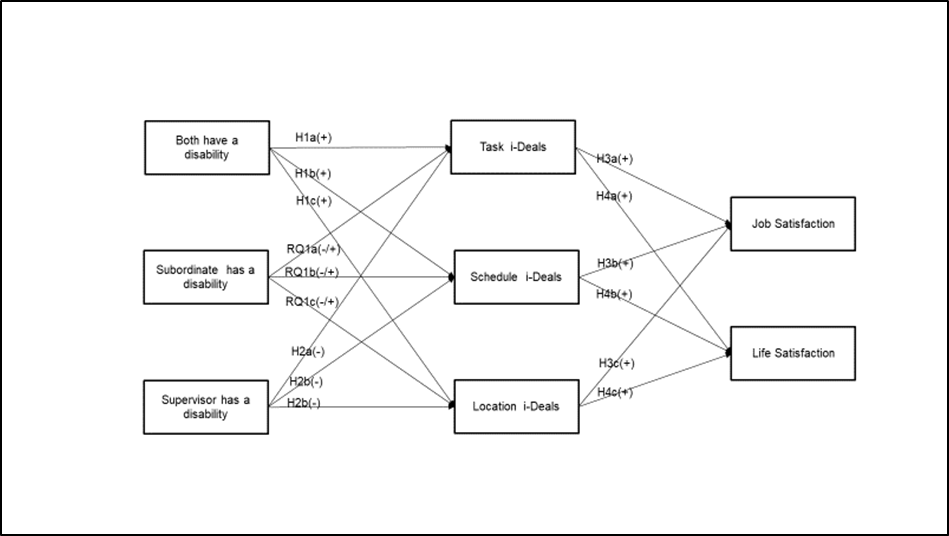
Since PWD tend to have health-related needs that diverge from those of employees without disabilities, organizations need to adjust workplaces to create a better person-job fit and to foster workability of PWD (Brzykcy et al., 2019). Such accommodations range from facilities reducing physical barriers, technical assistance (Colella and Bruyère, 2011), and task adaptions (Baldridge and Kulkarni, 2017) to flexibility in workplaces and work schedules (Nevala et al., 2015). PWD request accommodations two times more often than employees without disabilities (Schur et al., 2014). One central way to realize needed accommodations for PWD are idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), which are defined as negotiated work arrangements that differ from those of colleagues, such as flexible work schedules or opportunities for home office (Rosen et al., 2013; Rousseau, 2001). A central characteristic of i-deals is their reciprocity (Rousseau et al., 2006), enabling PWD to "work more effectively in a role, a work schedule, or a work location more appropriate for their physical or mental health condition" (Luu, 2018: 824).

In this paper, we address the question of the antecedents of i-deals. More specifically, we focus on the disability similarity in subordinate-supervisor dyads, which has been shown to play a decisive role in the subordinate-supervisor interaction (Dwertmann and Boehm, 2016). We draw on two main research streams to explain the relationship between disability similarity and i-deals, i.e., (1) the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), and (2) the person-environment (P-E) fit paradigm (Edwards et al., 1998; Endler and Magnusson, 1976), more specifically needs–supplies (N-S) fit, stating that complementary P-E fit is achieved when the job environment satisfies personal needs (Cable and Edwards, 2004). For persons with disabilities, N-S fit is often related to the need for accommodation (Cleveland et al., 1997; Gates, 2000).

Our contribution is three-fold. First, we investigate the antecedents of i-deals. Second, we integrate the literature stream of i-deals with relational demography (Tsui and O’Reilly, 1989) and P-E fit (Cable and Edwards, 2004). Third, we scrutinize the hitherto understudied phenomenon of supervisor disability and its effect on employee outcomes (Emira et al., 2018).

**Theoretical overview and hypotheses / research questions**

According to the similarity-attraction paradigm, similarity increases liking and empathy towards each other and leads to more interactions (Byrne, 1971). Relational demography refers to the similarity in terms of demographic attributes (Tsui and O’Reilly, 1989), such as disability. Following this line of reasoning, we assume that the subordinate will ask for and the supervisor will tend to grant more i-deals in scenarios, in which he or she is similar in disability status, i.e., no one in the dyad has a disability or both have a disability compared to the incongruent scenarios. Also, in scenarios, where the subordinate is a PWD, his/her need for and possible benefit from the respective accommodation (Cleveland et al., 1997) calls for N-S fit, creating understanding and a sense of urgency on the part of the supervisor irrespective of disability similarity and thus, may also lead to more i-deals.



**Figure 1:** Research model

In the scenario where both supervisor and subordinate are PWDs, due to congruency the i-deals will be same as dyads where none are PWD but due to the call for N-S fit, the number of i-deals will be higher

***Hypotheses 1a/b/c:*** *In dyads in which both the subordinate and the supervisor have a disability, the subordinate will be granted more (a)task / (b)schedule / (c)location i-deals compared to dyads in which neither of the members has a disability.*

In the incongruent scenario where only, the subordinate is a PWD, the number of i-deals will be lower compared to the dyad where none are PWD due to similarity-attraction but the need-supplies fit could lead to higher i-deals. Thus, in this scenario we formulate research questions rather than hypotheses

***Research Question 1a/b/c:*** *In dyads in which the subordinate, but not the supervisor, has a disability, will the subordinate be granted more or less (a)task / (b)schedule / (c)location i-deals compared to dyads in which neither of the members has a disability?*

In the incongruent scenario where only, the supervisor is a PWD, the number of i-deals will be lower compared to the dyad where none are PWD due to similarity-attraction. Also, there will be no call for need-supplies fit due to disability. Thus

***Hypotheses 2a/b/c:*** *In dyads in which the supervisor, but not the subordinate, has a disability, the subordinate will be granted less (a)task / (b)schedule / (c)location i-deals compared to dyads in which neither of the members has a disability.*

**The Relationship between I-Deals and Satisfaction**

Studies on the relationship of i-deals and job satisfaction use the social exchange as well as self-enhancement theory (Liu et al., 2013). There is no study relating i-deals to life satisfaction yet, but there is evidence that i-deals increase the quality of life ( e.g., Hornung et al., 2009). Thus

***Hypotheses 3a/b/c:*** *(a)Task / (b)schedule / (c)location i-deals will be positively related to job satisfaction.*

***Hypotheses 4a/b/c:*** *(a)Task / (b)schedule / (c)location i-deals will be positively related to life satisfaction.*

Figure 1 provides the research model with the proposed hypotheses/research questions

**Methods**

**Sample, data collection, and measures**

We conducted a two-wave survey of 8,004 employees in Germany. Participants were recruited by a market research institute based in Germany. In our analysis, we only included those 6,944 participants that have a supervisor. 53% of our sample are male. The average age is 43 years, with a standard deviation of 11.43 years.

Following Dwertmann and Boehm (2016), the present study differentiates four different scenarios of *supervisor-subordinate disability similarity*: (1) nobody in the dyad has a disability, (2) both subordinate and supervisor have a disability, (3) only the subordinate has a disability, and (4) only the supervisor has a disability. In line with Dwertmann and Boehm (2016), the constellation where neither of the two dyad members has a disability is used as a baseline scenario because it is the case that occurs most frequently in our study sample (60%).

Regarding i-deals, *task i-deals* was measured using two items from the Ex Post I-Deals Scale (Rosen et al., 2013). The 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 supervisor has assigned me tasks that better develop my skills". Cronbach's α is .82. *Scheduling i-deals* was also measured using two items from the Ex Post I-Deals Scale (Rosen et al., 2013). The items are "My supervisor considers my personal needs when making my work schedule" and "Outside of formal leave and sick time, my supervisor has allowed me to take time off to attend to non-work-related issues". Cronbach's α is .79. *Location i-deals* was also measured using two items from the Ex Post I-Deals Scale (Rosen et al., 2013). The items are "Because of my individual needs, I have negotiated a unique arrangement with my supervisor that allows me to complete a portion of my work outside of the office" and "Because of my particular circumstances, my supervisor allows me to do work from somewhere other than the main office". Cronbach's α is .86.

*Job satisfaction* was measured with a single item taken from Scarpello and Campbell (1983). It was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "very unsatisfied" to 5 "very satisfied". *Life satisfaction* was measured with three items taken from Diener et al. (1985). All three items were measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Completely disagree" to 5 "Completely agree". Furthermore, we controlled for the educational level of participants, their migrant status, their tenure with their employer, their actual weekly working hours, the size of the organization where they are working, age and gender dissimilarity with their supervisor, and the amount of average weekly remote work their supervisor does. We employed a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach using *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) in R (R Core Team, 2020).

**Results**

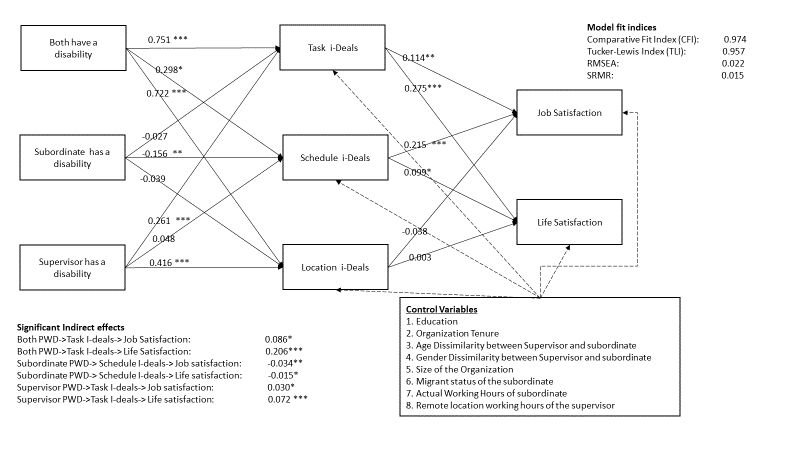
We compared the proposed model with two competing models A1) All the six i-deal items load on to a single variable representing ideals, and A2) items relating to schedule and location i-deals as they reflect on flexibility. The fit indices of the three models are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Model Comparison**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Proposed** | **A1** | **A2** |
| **Comparative Fit Index (CFI)** | 0.974 | 0.788 | 0.832 |
| **Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)** | 0.957 | 0.719 | 0.757 |
| **RMSEA** | 0.022 | 0.056 | 0.052 |
| **SRMR** | 0.015 | 0.028 | 0.027 |

As can be seen from the Table, the fit indices of the proposed model are better compared to the alternate model and are also within the acceptance criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler's (1998). The results are provided in Figure 2

For the relationship between the dyads and the i-deals, the results indicate that compared to dyads in which neither the subordinate nor the supervisor has a disability, task i-deals and location i-deals are significantly positive in dyads where either both the supervisor and the subordinate are PWDs or where only the supervisor is a PWD. We can thus accept H1a and H1c regarding task and location i-deals. The relationship as hypothesized in H2a and H2c are significant but in the opposite direction so we cannot accept them. Schedule i-deals are significantly positive in dyads in which both are PWD but are significantly negative when only the subordinate is a PWD. Thus, we can also accept H1b but not H2b. For the research questions relating to dyads where only subordinate has a disability, the results point out that RQ1a and RQ1c do not have any significant relationship but RQ1b reflect a negative relationship.



**Figure 2:** Research model with results

Regarding the effect of i-deals on job and life satisfaction, the results, as presented in Figure 2, indicate that only task i-deals and schedule i-deals significantly impact both outcomes positively. Thus, we can accept H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b but not H3c and H4c

Figure 2 also provides results regarding effect of the dyads on job and life satisfaction through various i=deals under study. In dyads where either both are PWDs or the supervisor is a PwD, task i-deals work as a mediator in the relationship with job satisfaction as well as life satisfaction. The relationship is positive both for job satisfaction and life satisfaction. In dyads in which only the subordinate is a PWD, schedule i-deals work as a mediator both for the relationship with job satisfaction and life satisfaction, but the relationship is in the negative direction.

The results indicate that (dis-)similarity in disability status is an important predictor for i-deals, with task i-deals playing the most significant role. In the scenario in which only the subordinate has a disability, the influence of i-deals becomes more complex. Regarding the (dis-)similarity effect on job and life satisfaction, the results point towards the role of task and schedule i-deals being most significant when both supervisor and subordinate have a disability.

**Discussion**

Our results offer support for both the similarity-attraction paradigm and the P-E fit paradigm (Edwards et al., 1998; Endler and Magnusson, 1976) /N-S fit (Cable and Edwards, 2004) and the associated perceived need for accommodation.

First, we show that in the similarity conditions where both are PWD, the P-E fit compliments the similarity paradigm and thus more i-deals are negotiated than in other dyads. In the condition in which only the subordinate has a disability, we find less scheduling i-deals. Here, the similarity-attraction paradigm seems to outweigh the N-S fit model. One of the plausible explanations for this could be the perceived Demands–Abilities Fit (Edwards et al., 2006) by the supervisor regarding abilities of the subordinate even after providing for flexibility through i-deals.

In the dyad where only, the supervisor is a PWD, supervisors grant more task and location i-deals to employees than supervisors without disabilities. This is in contrast to the similarity attraction paradigm. Here, we assume that the supervisors' own need for accommodation makes them more receptive to employee requests even when they come from non-PWD employees. PWD supervisors are thus valuable contributors to employee well-being due to their unique perspective. This finding is especially important since accommodations not only maximize the inclusion of PWD but are supposed to have positive spillover effects on other employees (Schur et al., 2014). Thus, supervisors with disabilities may function as multiplicators of inclusion and productivity.

**Limitations and suggestions for further research**

Despite its strength our study comes with some limitations. First, we cannot account for the type of disability. Further studies should therefore add disability type as a moderator for the relationship between supervisor-subordinate similarity and i-deals. Disability has shown to influence what accommodations are granted to employees (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018). Second, we only look at one cultural context: Germany. Additional studies should compare the relationship between disability similarity and i-deals in a cross-cultural context. Cross-cultural comparison among persons with disabilities are lacking (Beatty, et al., 2019). Third, we have not been able to address possible endogeneity issues (Antonakis, et al., 2017). Future research should therefore employ suitable instrumental variables for i-deals or use quasi-experimental methods such as propensity score matching. Unfortunately, our sample size of certain supervisor-subordinate dyads was not large enough for such an approach. Furthermore, future studies should employ a longitudinal design to explore the long-term effects of the relationship between disability similarity and i-deals. Additionally, moderators must be identified that can counteract the negative consequences of the similarity-attraction paradigm.

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