

I-deals and Employee Creativity: The Mediating Role of Job Engagement and Moderating Role of Preference for Autonomy

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Abstract

Drawing on social exchange theory, this study examines the process linking I-deals and employee creativity via mediating role of job engagement and moderating role of preference for autonomy. Idiosyncratic deals (“i-deals”) are special work arrangements that individuals negotiate with their employers. Using survey data from professional employees and their supervisors in a chain firm in China, we found that, as anticipated, job engagement mediated the relationship between I-deals and employee creativity, and preference for autonomy moderated the link between I-deals and job engagement. Further, preference for autonomy moderated the indirect effect of I-deals on creativity via job engagement.

Keywords

I-deals, employee creativity, preference for autonomy, job engagement.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With rapid change of market demand, global business environment has become increasingly complex and diversified, so organizations need to adapt to the rapidly changing social environment, including knowledge, technology and management through creativity. Managers are coming to realize that they should encourage their employees to be creative (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Considerable evidence indicates that employee creativity can fundamentally contribute to organizational innovation, effectiveness, and survival (Amabile, 1996; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Creativity refers to the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or by a group of individuals working together (Amabile, 1988; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000; Zhou & Shalley, 2003). There is evidence that the organizations need employee creativity to improve the core competitiveness of the organization. Employee creativity is the most important cornerstone, and the beginning of organizational innovation (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Zhou, 1998). Given that creativity is the indispensable condition of organizational success, organizations need to take measures to motivate employees to be more creative. In the practice of management, how to arrange the employee's working hours cannot be ignored. If the enterprise can make appropriate adjustments to the working arrangement system, the impact is not only limited in the improvement of management efficiency, but may also be of great advantage to the creativity of employees. Enhancing employee creativity can eventually help organizations to respond quickly to the change in the market, to continuously improve the competitiveness.

1.2. Research Problems

Though researchers have investigated factors that could affect employee creativity (see review by Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004; Zhou & Hoever, 2013). Paucity has investigated how organizational practices may motivate employee creativity. Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) have

been such practices that ----voluntary, personalized, nonstandard employment arrangements negotiated between a worker and an employer (Rousseau, 2005). Prior research finds support the positive influence of i-deals on employment relationship (Rousseau, Ho, and Greenberg, 2006), organizational citizenship behavior, and voice. However, few studies report significant results that relate i-deals with creativity. To address this research gap, this research examined why and how i-deals could enhance creativity. This research problem is of significance. For one thing, if we can convince the relationship between i-deals and creativity, the value of i-deals will draw more attention among researchers. For another, managers can take advantage of i-deals to motivate the creativity of employees. I argue that ideals influence job management that further leads to creativity. Job engagement has been examined as mediators which mediate the relation between psychological empowerment and employee creativity and the relation of creativity and charisma (Zhang & Bartol, 2010, Arnold B. Bakker & Despoina Xanthopoulou, 2013). For though who has preference for autonomy at work, the i-deals practices may be more effective. I will look into the potential moderating role of such preference. Earlier study has examined preference for autonomy as moderators in the relationship between distributive justice and work attitudes the relationship between work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors (Cai, Song & Zhao, 2013, Runhaar, Piety, Konermann, Judith, Sanders & Karin, 2013).

The effects of i-deals can be best understood from the perspective of social exchange theory. Social exchange theory delineates the dynamics underlying the exchange of resources between two or more parties (Blau, 1964). The theory is the paradigm underlying numerous approaches to studying relationships in organizations, from individual psychological contracts (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007), employee-employer relationships (Shore et al., 2004), and leader-member exchange (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Reflecting the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), i-deals recipients may reciprocate their favorable treatment by contributing in ways that benefit the employer who granted the deal, as well as the coworkers whose sense of fairness may be affected by it. Indeed, reciprocity on the part of i-deal recipients is postulated in i-deals theory (Greenberg et al., 2004), taking the form of discretionary contributions beneficial to the employer, such as engaging more time and energy in work and organizational citizenship behavior. The present study is among the first empirical studies to examine the mechanism through which i-deals affect employee creativity.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study include four parts: (1) the main relationship between i-deals and creativity, (2) the mediating role of job engagement in the relationship between i-deals and creativity, (3) the moderation effect of preference for autonomy on the relationships between i-deals and job engagement, and (4) the moderating indirect effect of preference for autonomy in the indirect effect of i-deals on creativity via job engagement. These relationships are schematically represented in Figure 1.

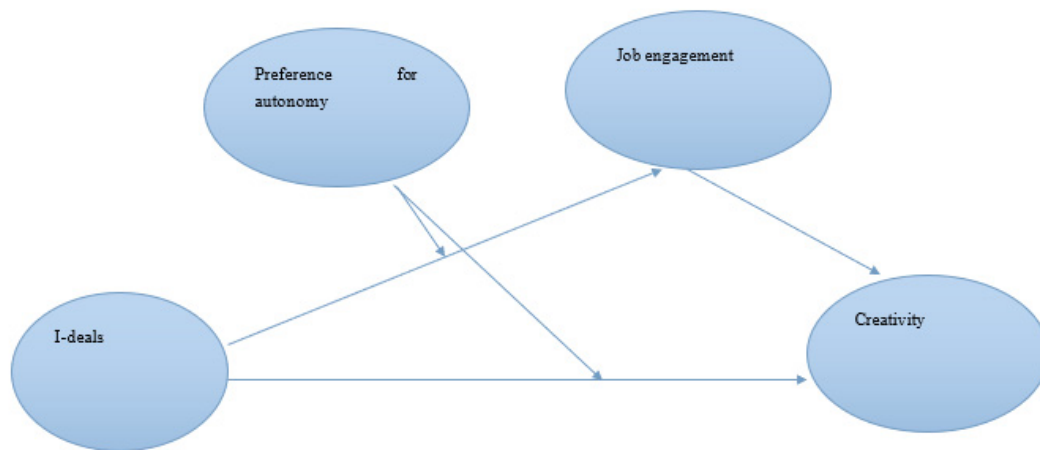


Figure 1. Research Model

1.4. Research Significance

To begin with, this study takes i-deals as the antecedent variables, and the job engagement of employees as a mediator, to explore the effect on employee creativity.

In addition, there is still lack of empirical research on the relationship of i-deals and employee creativity both in domestic and foreign research field, the paper enriches the research content of the field of the previous research. It can be considered a complement to the blank authored.

Moreover, the research on management of Chinese enterprises is still in the shortage of guidance. For example, the importance of i-deals in western culture in the organizational management has been widespread recognized and accepted, but the empirical research in the Chinese cultural background is limited. This cross-culture test in Chinese domestic business environment needs to be broadened. Based on the specific background and research motivation, the significance of this paper is as follows: First, to explore the relationship between i-deals and job engagement; Second, to explore the relationship between job engagement and creativity; Third, job engagement mediates the relationship between i-deals and Creativity; Fourth, the preference for autonomy at work moderates the relationship between i-deals and job engagement. Fifth, the preference for autonomy at work indirect affects the relationship between i-deals and creativity.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. I-deals and Job Engagement

Idiosyncratic deals are voluntary, personalized, nonstandard employment arrangements negotiated between a worker and an employer (Rousseau, 2005). The process of negotiating an i-deal can take the form of a proactive behavior, as employees are generally responsible for negotiating. The i-deals individual workers enjoy may vary in scope from a single idiosyncratic element in a larger standardized employment package to a complete, entirely idiosyncratic employment arrangement. For example, one worker with i-deals with his or her supervisors and organizations might have distinctly more flexible hours than peers but otherwise share with them the same pay, job duties, and other conditions of employment. In contrast, another worker might have a more novel, customized arrangement in which almost all employment terms are specially negotiated, from pay and hours, to duties and title. A central feature of i-deals is that the employee has had a hand in creating or negotiating some aspect of his or her employment.

Idiosyncratic arrangements can make jobs more valuable to workers, especially when they involve features not easily obtained from other employers. Special opportunities for training and development in particular lead employees to believe their psychological contract with the employer as drawing on the concept of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals). I-deals are intended to serve both worker needs and employer interests (Rousseau et al., 2006). Task i-deals hold the promise of creating individually optimal conditions for sustainable work motivation, performance, and well-being.

Drawing on the concept of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), Supervisors differentiated among i-deals regarding development, flexibility, and workload reduction. Their authorization of developmental i-deals was influenced by employee initiative. Supervisors viewed these i-deals to have positive implications for employee motivation and performance. Flexibility i-deals were influenced by structural conditions such as the type of work the employee performed. Supervisors viewed these i-deals to enhance work-life benefits. Supervisors tended to grant workload reduction i-deals in the context of unfulfilled organizational obligations towards employees.

It can be observed in brief literature review related to I-deals that I-deals are taken as independent variable which is proved to be related to Job dissatisfaction, OCB, Employee outcomes etc. This study take i-deals are as independent variable, and I suggest they have a positive relation to job engagement. The study advances theory on employment relationships as well, employees expect their employment arrangements to suit their individual needs. I-deals serve the interests of both employers and employees and benefiting both parties. An organization attracts, motivates, and retains the services of a valued contributor at the same time he or she receives desired resources from that organization. The emerging role of these deals suggests the need to modify theory on employment relationships. By developing and testing theory on the relationship between i-deals and job engagement, this study contributes an important new perspective to the literature on employment relationships (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004; Shore et al., 2004).

Job engagement is a work-related state of subjective well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, 2004). It is effectively the opposite of burnout, characterized by vigor, dedication, absorption - ---antipodes to burnout-symptoms of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Engaged workers display high energy, identify strongly with their jobs, and experience flow-like states at work. Whether workers develop symptoms of burnout or engagement is at least partly a function of job design. Both direct and interacting influences on job engagement exist across a broad range of job characteristics (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Job engagement is an active state of work-related subjective well-being, and positively related to performance (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005).

In the academic literature, a number of definitions have been provided. Kahn (1990) defines personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” Personal disengagement refers to “the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Thus, according to Kahn (1990, 1992), engagement means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role. Rothbard (2001, p. 656) also defines engagement as psychological presence but goes further to state that it involves two critical components: attention and absorption. Attention refers to “cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role” while absorption “means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one’s focus on a role.” Burnout researchers define engagement as the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Maslach et al. (2001), engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposite of the three burnout

dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Research on burnout and engagement has found that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (vigor and dedication) are opposites of each other (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) define engagement “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.” They further state that engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but rather, it is “a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior”.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) imply that individuals who successfully negotiate i-deals are likely to feel obligated to those who granted or enabled their deals. Obligations can be reciprocated through job engagement because it is discretionary, meaning that individuals contribute their good behavior under conditions of their own choosing.

I suggest that employees who have i-deals with their supervisors and organizations can make their jobs more intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. These negotiations are assumed to have positive effects on job engagement, which should mediate a positive relationship between i-deals and creativity.

I-deals providing flexibility in work schedules can be used to allow employees to balance their work and family roles, thereby improving retention as well as performance (e.g., Baltes, Briggs, Huff, & Wright, 1999; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). If task i-deals are used to increase fit between personal needs or goals and their fulfillment during work activities (e.g., self-efficacy, positive self-image), they are likely to enhance job engagement. By making tasks more intrinsically motivating and less stressful, task i-deals are expected to enhance engagement through positive effects on work characteristics. Following from the preceding discussion, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: I- deals will be positively related to job engagement.

2.2. The Mediating Role of Job Engagement

According to Amabile’s (1983) componential conceptualization of creativity, intrinsic motivation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creative outcomes. Engaging in creative activities has an equal, if not more important, role in promoting employee creativity (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Amabile et al., 1996). There are many research taking job engagements as mediator or moderator in the recent years (brief literature review related to Job engagement is showed in Table 2). And several scholars (e.g., Mainemelis, 2001; Mumford, 2000; Shalley et al., 2004) have suggested that a promising direction for creativity research would be to focus on achieving a better understanding of the process that eventually leads to creative outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, we define job engagement as employee involvement or a relevant cognitive process, when an individual spends effort to more fully identify a problem, obtain as much information as possible, and generates numerous ideas and alternatives, solutions that are both novel and useful are more likely to be produced. This line of reasoning is congruent with research findings that engage in ideas identified later in a process of idea generation tend to be more creative (Runco, 1986).

Scholars began serious study into the social psychology of creativity about 25 years after the field of creativity research had taken root. Over the past 35 years, examination of social and environmental influences on creativity has become increasingly vigorous, with broad implications for the psychology of human performance, and with applications to education, business, and beyond. (Amabile, Teresa M.; Pillemer, Julianna, 2012).

Creativity refers to the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or by a group of individuals working together (Amabile, 1988; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000; Zhou & Shalley, 2003). Considerable evidence indicates that employee creativity can fundamentally contribute to organizational innovation, effectiveness, and survival

(Amabile, 1996; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Brief literature review related to creativity shows in Table 3.

After reviewing the previous research on creativity, as a depend variable, employee creativity is affected by factors such as self-efficacy, Job dissatisfaction, Cognitive team diversity etc. In this study, I argue that job engagement may have important influences on an employee's willingness to engage in a creative process. Several studies have suggested that when individuals know the importance of creativity in their jobs, they are more likely to be creative (e.g., Carson & Carson, 1993; Speller & Schumacher, 1975). For example, Shalley (1991, 1995) found that assigned creativity goals effectively enhanced employee creative performance. Similarly, Pinto and Prescott (1988) concluded that a clearly stated mission by a leader enables a greater focus on new idea development and subsequent successful innovation.

Thus, we expect job engagement to influence employee tendencies to be creative. Specifically, when an employee perceives that his or her job requirements are meaningful and personally important, and they were given more flexible working time, the employee will spend more effort on understanding a problem from multiple perspectives, searching for a solution using a wide variety of information from multiple sources, and generating a significant number of alternatives by connecting diverse sources of information (Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Jabri, 1991). Such an employee is also more likely to take risks, explore new cognitive pathways, and be playful with ideas (Amabile et al., 1996). Amabile (1983) suggested that an individual's intrinsic task motivation plays an important role in determining behaviors that may result in creative outcomes. This is because intrinsic motivation "makes the difference between what an individual can do and what an individual will do" (Amabile, 1988). As we indicated earlier, the degree of engagement in the creative process varies. If an individual pays little attention to a problem and chooses to minimally engage in its resolution, solutions may not be creative and useful. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Job engagement will mediate the relationship between I-deals and creativity.

2.3. The Moderating Role of Preference for Autonomy at Work

According to Black and Deci (2000), behaviors that are autonomous have an internal perceived locus of causality, are experienced as volitional, and are performed out of interest or personal importance. Similarly, Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasized that autonomy concerns the experience of integration and freedom. Following these conceptualizations, autonomy may concern the freedom for employees to choose goals, working methods and strategies.

People who preferred autonomy in their work did tend to help each other less and to learn less from their fellow group members, their work performance depended almost entirely on the design of the work they did and the kinds of rewards they received. A sense of autonomy and ability to use discretion over how someone does their job should convey a feeling of control over work. This should also enhance an employee's belief that he can affect the negative outcomes (Greenberg, 2006). For example, a common rationale for self-managed teams is through giving employees more control of the operational and other aspects of their job, employees will feel the company treats them more fairly with respect to the rewards from the job and how they are determined.

In accordance with these theoretical reflections, empirical research shows that autonomy is positively associated with job satisfaction. In a factor analysis, Avanzi, Miglioretti, Velasco, Balducci, Vecchio, Fraccaroli, et al. (2013) found a correlation of $r = .36$ between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction, Koustelios, Karabatzaki, and Kousteliou (2004) reported a correlation of $r = .21$, whereas Skaalvik and Skaalvik in two different studies (2009, 2010) reported correlations of $r = .37$ and $.24$, respectively. Research evidence also shows that perceived autonomy is negatively related to burnout and emotional exhaustion. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) found that perceived teacher autonomy was negatively correlated with all the

traditional dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion ($r = -.27$), depersonalization ($r = -.26$), and feeling of reduced accomplishment ($r = -.31$). In recent years, a brief literature review related to Preference for autonomy at work can be seen in appendix.

To respond to the previous research mentioned above, we explored employee autonomy as a potential moderator. As is put in the research by Ruth (1995), high outcome interdependence makes high member effort more important because all members' efforts contribute to an individual member's chances to receive valued rewards (Deutsch, 1949). Group-based outcomes, then, may enhance group norms that regulate members' efforts, Berkowitz's (1957) study of the effects of different levels of outcome interdependence on group member effort levels on an interdependent task suggest this may be true. He found that high outcome interdependence promoted the best performance and concluded that group rewards enhanced collective expectations (norms) about member effort and heightened individual motivation, but his conclusions about group effort norms and motivation were inferred from performance scores, rather than being drawn from direct measures of group norms.

There is additional support for autonomy being a link between attitudes relating to rewards and pay and other job-related attitudes. In addition, it follows that the treatment that employees perceive they get with respect to rewards will either inherently reinforce or detract from the reality of management giving them autonomy. Lawler (1971) asserted that job autonomy can be considered as a non-monetary outcome (reward), and hence be positively related to job engagement.

If the employees' preference at work is high, they will feel a strong sense of control toward their work and believe that he or she has the ability to perform a task successfully, has a certain degree of self-determination over job execution, and can shape desired outcomes through his or her behaviors, the employee is likely to focus on an idea or a problem longer and more persistently (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Spreitzer, 1995). Then they will have more working enthusiasm and be willing to engage themselves into work in order to achieve more sense of control at work. In the context of low autonomy, since employees feel they have less control over how they do their job, there would be greater tendency to focus on completing their duty work by rote. Thus, I hypothesize that the perceived level of autonomy will be associated with i-deals and job engagement. Thus, our associated hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 3: Preference for autonomy will moderate the relationship between I-deals and job engagement such that their relationship is stronger for employees with high preference for autonomy than for those with low preference for autonomy.

It has been proved that there is a significant difference found between job commitments of employees with high and low job autonomy (1996) and in situations of high autonomy, transformational leadership relates positively to proactive behavior for individuals high (but not low) on self-efficacy (2012). I suggest that hybrid forms may capture the best of independent designs, creating positive synergy. Hybrid tasks may afford the benefits of high interdependence (Maier, 1983). At the same time, hybrid tasks may afford the benefits of independent designs, such as giving each performer who get i-deals from their organization high personal control over some portion of the work, they may be productive and satisfying both for people with strong preferences to work autonomously.

With an individual work design, employees work alone and principally responsible for machines in their own territories. Because no one to share the responsibility, these employees develop a strong sense of personal responsibility for how well their work run. They know their machines and customers extremely well, and when they arrive at customer sites, they often know from memory what preventive maintenance practices are due on each machine. This reinforces the cues they get from their tasks and increases their work motivation and efforts to improve their own performance and creativity. Employees operating individually also reported

a stronger perceived link between i-deals and creativity than did those working in groups. Individual designs enhance norms that support high levels of independent, rather than coordinated effort, as shown in this exchange among members of a group, who will try to work out some creative work strategies.

Following from the preceding discussion, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: Preference for autonomy will moderate the indirect effect of i-deals on creativity via job engagement such that the indirect effect is stronger for employees with high preference for autonomy than for those with low preference for autonomy.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Procedures

I collected survey data from employees and their supervisors of a large chain firm in Jiangsu province, China. Participants are professional level employees, such as software engineers and new product developers and their respective supervisors, whose work required substantial creativity in order to be effective.

With the permission of the general manager for data collection in his company, I and other team members explained the objective of the survey and the process of data collection to the personnel director. Then a team with the assistance of HR department was appointed to take charge of distribution of questionnaires to employees. During the first period, 300 (50 groups with 6 subordinates in each group questionnaires) in total were distributed to formal employees among departments of the company. Each questionnaire was enclosed in an envelope, on which a job code of each employee was written. Attached to the questionnaire was a letter that explained the objective of the survey, gave assurances of confidentiality, and informed respondents of the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Respondents were requested to provide data on their job engagement, i-deals in their work and their preference for autonomy at work. One week later, the team in charge of data collection got the questionnaires back from a box in the personnel office through which employees delivered their questionnaires.

One month later, we start the second period of data collection. The team offered the name list of each group to the 50 supervisors, who provided the evaluation of these respondents' creative performance. Each questionnaire was enclosed in an envelope, on which a job code of each employee was written. Attached to the questionnaire was a letter that explained the objective of the survey, gave assurances of confidentiality, and informed supervisors of the voluntary nature of participation in the study.

Two hundred and ten complete and usable questionnaires were returned, representing 70% response rate.

Of the 210 respondents, 62.2 percent were male. Subordinates were predominantly married (86.2 percent), with an average age of thirty-four ($SD = 7.14$). The maximum age was 49 with an average reported organizational tenure of 11 years ($SD = 8.06$); the workers obtained an average of 15 ($SD = 1.91$) years of education.

3.2. Measures

The survey instrument will be administered in Chinese but originally constructed in English. Following research practices adopted in the Chinese context (for example, Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007), I will use a standard translation and back-translation procedure to ensure equivalence of the measures in the English and Chinese versions (Brislin, 1980). Response options of all the measures in the survey ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Unless otherwise indicated, all the variables were measured by participant responses to questions on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The specific

measures are described below, along with the results of calculation of Cronbach alpha coefficients for the various measures. When a measure is described as having dimensions, the dimensions (items averaged) were used as indicators for their construct in structural equation modeling (described under "Analysis"). Otherwise, items were averaged into an overall scale score. Measures were completed by employees, except for the creativity measure, which was completed by supervisors. The Appendix gives the texts of the items for our primary measures. Subordinates responded to the idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), Job engagement and Preference for autonomy at work measures.

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) (time 1)

I used a six-item scale developed by Rousseau and Kim (2006) to assess the extent to which employees had negotiated work arrangements different from their colleagues' via i-deals. Employees were asked if they had "training opportunities," "skill development opportunities," "on-the-job activities," and "career development opportunities" that were "different from his/her coworkers" Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability of the scale is ($\alpha = .791$). Other studies of i-deals have used these items (e.g., Hornung et al., 2008). The six questions measured i-deals ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." in the questionnaire are as follows: I can obtain special convenience or work arrangement different from colleagues if I require. These special convenience includes (1) the flexible arrangements of daily commute time, (2) separate work schedule which is specially established for me, (3) take part in activities, (4) training opportunities, (5) participate special opportunities on skills training, and (6) occupation development and promotion opportunities

Job engagement (time 1)

An 18-item scale was developed for this study on the basis of the conceptual work of Amabile (1983) and Reiter Palmon and Illies (2004). Prior to using the measure, we had several experts (doctoral students and doctorate holders) independently review the intended dimensions and judged them to be reasonable indicators. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability of the scale is .771. Respondents answered on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These 18 questions about employee engagement in the questionnaire are as follows: 1). I work intensity. 2). I tried my best to work. 3). I give a lot of effort to work. 4). I manage to give the best performance in the work. 5). I try my best to finish the work. 6). I spend a lot of time and energy in the work. 7). I am full of enthusiasm at work. 8). I have the energy to work. 9). I'm interested in the job. 10). I feel proud of the work. 11). I feel good about the work. 12). I feel happy about my work. 13). I focus on my work. 14). I am very concerned about my work. 15). I pay a lot of attention to the work. 16). I am absorbed in my work. 17). I can concentrate on the work in my spirit. 18). I pay a lot of concern on my work.

Preference for autonomy at work (time 1)

The preference for autonomy at work was measured with a six-item scale ($\alpha = .911$) developed by Ruth Wageman (1995) and was completed by employees. Respondents are given on a 5-point scale with response options anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These six questions measured the preference for autonomy at work in the questionnaire are as follows: 1). I like my work best when I do it all myself, 2). I prefer tasks that allow me to work with others, 3). I would rather work alone than with other people. 4). the less I must rely on others at work, the happier I am, 5). I would rather work through a work problem myself than ask for advice. 6). Working in small groups is better than working alone. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability of the scale was .911 and the scale's external validity was supported.

Creativity (time 2)

Supervisors provided creativity measures for each employee.

Employee creativity was measured with a 13-item creativity scale ($\alpha = .950$) developed by Zhou and George (2001) and was completed by supervisors. Respondents answered on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These 13 questions measured creativity in the questionnaire are as follows: 1). He or she can find a new way to perform the job. 2). He or she can put forward new and feasible ideas to improve performance. 3). He or she can find new methods of work, customer service, technology and or products. 4). He or she can propose new methods to improve the quality of the products and services. 5). He or she has creative ideas. 6). Not afraid to take risks. 7). He or she often promote and defend his or her own ideas. 8). If given the opportunity, he or she will show their creativity in the work. 9). He or she has plenty of plans and schedules to bring new ideas into practice 10). He or she often puts forward new and creative ideas. 11). He or she can find solutions of the problem with creative thinking. 12). He or she often has new ideas to solve the problems. 13). He or she often recommends new working methods to complete the tasks.

Control variables.

The control variables, in order to control the employee and supervisor in the demographic and personal potential impact on employees, include the age, sex and dyad tenure, academic staff, in charge of education, supervisor subordinate staff, competent in the job and so on. Among them, the employee and supervisor subordinate employees age in accordance with the actual number, the rest of the virtual digital instead. For example: in charge of education and academic staff (College =15, University =16, graduate student =18); supervisor position in the company (director =0, middle managers=1, senior manager=2, the company level manager =3). In view of the impact of i-deals on job engagement, and consistent with creativity research in the Chinese context, we controlled for several demographics in the moderation and mediation regression that examined the job engagement and preference for autonomy at work. A single item was used to measure the demographic characteristics of gender (Male = 0, Female = 1), marital status (Single = 0, Married = 1), age at last birthday, years of formal education, and number of years worked with the organization.

Missing data corrections

For the variables of i-deals, job engagement and preference for autonomy at work, six respondents left one to two items missing. In these few cases, we substituted the mean of the remaining items.

Analysis Techniques

According to Bagozzi & heatherton (1994), I used AMOS to do CFA and SPSS 21.0 to conduct regression analyses. Predictors were centered on their respective means, and interaction terms were based on the mean-centered scores (Aiken & West, 1991). The results of the analysis may confirm the mediating effects of job engagement and moderation of preference for autonomy at work.

4. Results

4.1. Factor Analysis

According to Bagozzi & heatherton (1994), I used AMOS to do CFA and. I combined the i-deals and job engagement as three-factor model, two-factor model and one-factor model. Results of the mediated regression analysis are presented in Table 1. By comparing the measured model, I found the value of RMSEA of four-factor model is 0.05, ($0.05 < RMSEA < 0.10$), which indicates that four-factor model has good fitting degree. The value of TLI, CFI of four-factor model are 0.96 and 0.97 respectively, which exceed 0.9 and mean that the four-factor model fits best.

Table 1. Measured Model

Model	Factors	X ²	df	ΔX ²	RMSEA	TLI	CFI
Four-factor model		79.12	48		0.05	0.96	0.97
Three-factor model	Combine i-deals and job engagement	124.88	52	45.76***	0.08	0.65	0.51
Two-factor model	Combine i-deals, job engagement and work autonomy	153.01	54	73.89***	0.09	0.62	0.42
one-factor model	Combine i-deals, job engagement, work autonomy and creativity	183.32	69	92.67***	0.09	0.57	0.41

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the study variables are shown in Table 3, which presents the means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations of all the studied variables. Perceptions of i-deals are positively related to job engagement ($r = 0.11, p < 0.01$). Job engagement is positively related to creativity ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$) and i-deals are positively related to creativity ($r = 0.46, p < 0.01$).

4.3. Mediated Effect

To examine the main and mediated effects of i-deals and job engagement on creativity, Results of the mediated regression analysis are presented in Table 3. To demonstrate mediation, Baron and Kenny (1986) recommended that (1) the independent variable must be related to the mediator, (2) the independent variable must be related to the dependent variable, (3) the mediator must be related to the dependent variable after controlling for the independent variable, and (4) the previously significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable must cease to be significant in the presence of the mediator. Following these recommendations, we first regressed the mediator (job engagement) on the controls and the independent variable (i-deals). Second, the outcome (creativity) was regressed on the controls and i-deals. Last, the outcome was regressed on the controls, i-deals and job engagement. As shown in the table, i-deals was positively related to job engagement ($\beta = 0.07, p < .01$; model 3) and positively related to creativity ($\beta = 0.28, p < .05$; model 1), providing support for Hypothesis 1. As evident from model 5, both job engagement and i-deals were both positively related to creativity ($\beta = 0.56, p < .05$; $\beta = 0.28, p < .05$). Thus, job engagement partly mediated the i-deals-creativity relationship supporting Hypothesis 2.

4.4. Moderated Effect

To examine the main and interactive effects of i-deals and the preference for autonomy at work on job engagement and creativity, we conducted a moderated regression. Following Aiken and West (1991), we centered the two antecedents used in the interaction term. We firstly entered the control variables of age, marital status, and organizational tenure with their supervisors into the regression equation predicting job engagement. These variables have a significant effect on the fit of the regression ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.001$). Then we entered the main effects of i-deals and the preference for autonomy at work. Entry of these variables made a significant contribution to the explained variance in job engagement ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.001$), with i-deals ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$) and the preference for autonomy at work positively ($\beta = -0.26, p < 0.01$) related to job engagement (Hypothesis 3). In the final step, we entered the interaction term. As

shown in Table 4, the interaction term significantly predicted job engagement ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.05$) and made a significant contribution to its explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.07, p < 0.05$).

According to the same procedure, in order to examine the main and interactive effects of i-deals and the preference for autonomy at work on creativity, we conducted a moderated regression. Following Aiken and West (1991), we centered the two antecedents used in the interaction term. We firstly entered the control variables of age, marital status, and organizational tenure with their supervisors into the regression equation predicting creativity. These variables have a significant effect on the fit of the regression ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.001$). Then we entered the main effects of i-deals and the preference for autonomy at work. Entry of these variables made a significant contribution to the explained variance in creativity ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.001$), with i-deals ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$) and the preference for autonomy at work positively ($\beta = -0.20, p < 0.01$) related to creativity. In the final step, we entered the interaction term. As shown in Table 5, the interaction term significantly predicted creativity ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.05$) and made a significant contribution to its explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.05$).

According to Muller, Judd, Yzerbyt (2005). When Moderation Is Mediated and Mediation Is Moderated. It happens if the mediating process that is responsible for producing the effect on outcome depends on the value of a moderator variable.

There are conditions for moderated mediation. First, overall treatment effect on Y at the average effect of Mo should be significantly different from zero. Second, Either (or both) of two patterns should exist: both change in treatment on Me as Mo increase and Mediator effect on Y on average in two treatment levels and at the average level of Mo are significant or both treatment effect on Me at the average level of Mo and change in Mediator effect on Y as Mo increase are significant. Third, Change in residual direct treatment effect on Y at the average level of Mo may be significant.

Following Muller (2005), in my study, I found: Preference for autonomy moderate the relationship between I-deals and job engagement ($\beta = 0.44, \Delta R^2 = 0.07, p < 0.05$). Preference for autonomy moderate the relationship between I-deals and creativity ($\beta = 0.44, \Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.05$). Job engagement and creativity have a positive relationship ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$). So, preference for autonomy moderated the indirect effect of I-deals on creativity via job engagement. (supporting Hypothesis 4).

To interpret the demonstrated moderating effect, we solved for regression equations at higher and lower preference for autonomy at work of employees. From Cohen and Cohen (1983), we defined high and low levels of the moderators by plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean; the results are graphically presented in Figure 3 and 4. As shown, the positive effects of perceptions of higher preference for autonomy at work of employees were more pronounced than that of lower ones.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1.60	0.49	1											
2. Age	34.21	7.14	0.17*	1										
3. Education	14.92	1.91	0.06	0.57**	1									
4. Marital status	1.16	.365	-0.16*	-0.4**	0.23**	1								
5. Tenure	11.44	8.06	-0.08	0.97**	-0.62**	0.46**	1							
6. Stenu	5.19	3.55	0.32**	0.49**	-0.2*	-0.37**	.5**	1						
7. Hour	41.40	3.02	-0.10	0.01	-0.35**	-0.16*	0.07	-0.03	1					
8. Position	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00				
9. I-deals	3.38	0.67	0.09	0.15*	0.26**	0.07	0.02	0.39*	-0.02	0.00	1			
10. Engage	3.68	0.66	0.35**	0.04	0.03	0.2**	-0.04	0.22**	-0.09	0.00	0.11**	1		
11. Autonomy	3.56	8.83	0.16*	-0.16*	0.18*	-0.2**	-0.11	0.19**	0.21**	0.00	0.52**	-0.09	1	
12. Creativity	2.80	0.77	0.27**	-0.12	0.26**	-0.20**	0.13	0.31**	-0.03	0.00	0.46**	0.62*	0.14	1

N=210, * p < .05 , **p < .01

Table 3. Regression Results for Mediated Analysis and Moderated Mediation

Independent Variables	Model 1 Creativity		Model 2 Creativity		Model 3 Engagement		Model 4 Engagement		Model 5 Creativity		Model 6 Creativity	
	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²
Controls												
Marital status	-0.50***		-0.55***		-0.29*		-0.30**		-0.24*		-0.42**	
Age	0.05*		0.05*		0.75		0.02		0.04		0.05*	
STenure	0.08***		0.08***		0.07*		0.12		0.04*		0.05*	
ΔR ²		0.02**		0.02**		0.05***		0.03**		0.05***		0.02*
I-deals												
ΔR ²	0.28**		0.28**		0.07**		0.23**		0.34***		0.24*	
ΔR ²		0.04**		0.04**		0.03*		0.04**		0.02*		0.04**
Autonomy												
ΔR ²			-0.20**				-0.26***				0.12*	
ΔR ²				0.03**				0.04**				0.03**
I-deal*Auto												
ΔR ²			0.44***				0.44***				0.14	
ΔR ²				0.04***				0.07**				0.04***
Engagement												
ΔR ²									0.56***		0.44***	
ΔR ²										0.06***		0.13***
Engage * Auto												
ΔR ²											0.44**	
ΔR ²												0.02**

Note: CI = 95% confidence interval for beta; n = 210; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 4. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis

Model	Variables	b	F	ΔR^2	Lower bound	Higher bound
1	Controls			0.03**		
	Marital status	-0.30**			0.8	1.52
	Age	0.02			27.07	41.35
	Tenure with supervisor	0.08***			-0.036	0.060
2	Main effects			0.04**		
	I-deals	0.23**	9.90***		-0.67	0.67
	Autonomy	-0.26***			-8.83	8.83
3	Interactive effect					
	I-deals* Auto	0.44***	22.4***	0.07**	-0.24	0.82

Note: CI = 95% confidence interval for beta; n = 210; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Dependent Variables: Job Engagement

auto =Preference for autonomy at work

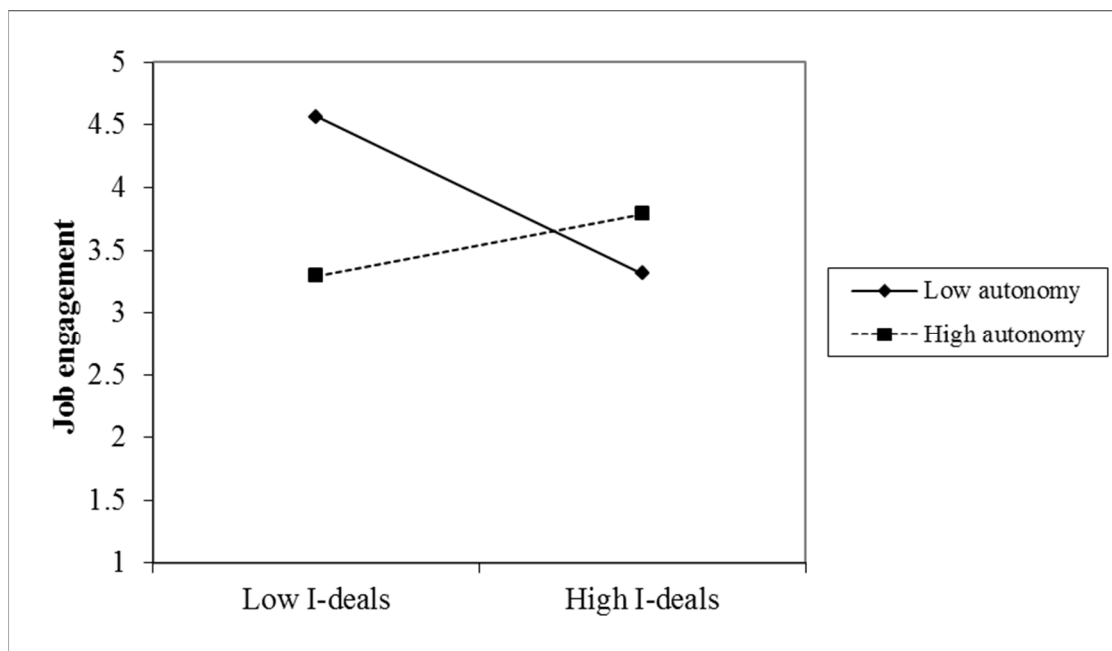


Figure. 1 Job engagement

Table 5. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis

Model	Variables	b	F	ΔR^2	Lower bound	Higher bound
1	Controls			0.02**		
	Marital status	-0.55***			-0.876	-0.327
	Age	0.05*			-0.002	0.111
	Tenure with supervisor	0.08***			-0.036	0.060
	STenure	0.08***			-0.036	0.060
2	Main effects			0.04**		
	I-deals	0.28**	9.90***		0.336	0.709
	Autonomy	-0.20**			-0.266	-0.001
3	Interactive effect					
	I-deals* Auto	0.44***	22.4***	0.04***	0.206	0.672

Note: CI = 95% confidence interval for beta; n = 210; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Dependent Variables: Creativity

auto =Preference for autonomy at work

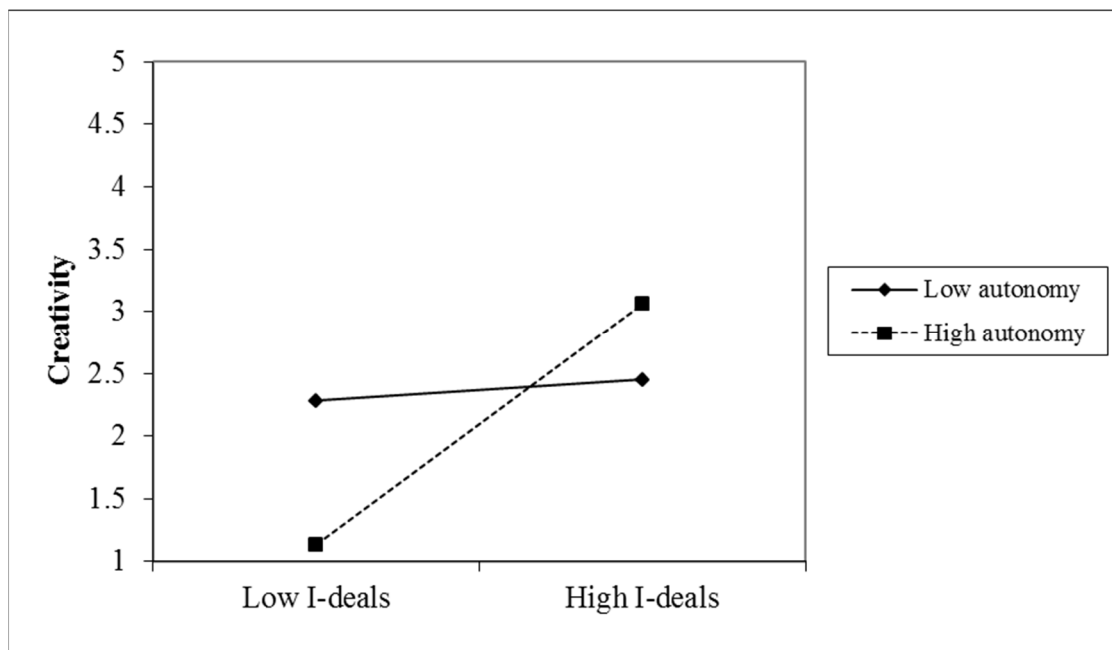


Figure.2 Creativity

From the correlation between i-deals and job engagement and creativity, i-deals and job engagement had a positive effect on creativity; the job engagement as a mediator is partly mediates I-deals and creativity, which shows that i-deals facilitates the generation of employees' creativity. When employees get i-deals from their supervisors and organizations, such as flexible working time arrangements, they will also made corresponding more outstanding performance and improve their creativity. In other word, it also shows that i-deals can promote the staff's creativity. This is consistent with the literature review and research hypothesis. Therefore, the hypothesis1 is confirmed.

According to the test result of the correlation between i-deals and job engagement and creativity, hypothesis1 and hypothesis2 were supported. It indicated that the social exchange that the supervisors and organizations showed including flexible working hours and the emotional caring, would help to enhance their subordinates' stronger commitment to work, and would finish their work better and more efficiently. What's more, they would obtain stronger motivation to complete their tasks with updated and better methods, which would evolve into more intense creativity.

As shown in the result of hypothesis test about the relationship between preference for autonomy at work and i-deals and job engagement, hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 were supported. It indicated that preference for autonomy at work as a moderator, has a significantly effect on the relationship between i-deals and job engagement and the relationship between i-deals employee creativity. The higher preference for autonomy at work can improve the job engagement and efficiency of the staff, besides, it can improve the creativity of the employees eventually.

The results indicate that if managers of enterprises look forward to stimulate employees' creativity, there is a great need to give the employees more i-deals, and also pay particular attention to enhance the employees' preference for autonomy at work. Working and training autonomously can cultivate and stimulate job engagement of employees, which will eventually contribute to employees' creativity. Creative work always tend to be more challenging, so strong inside power will promote the staff in dealing with a challenge work with adherence and creativity.

5. Discussion

This discussion involves findings and contributions of the study, implications for human resource management, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

5.1. Findings

The study examines a moderated mediation process linking I-deals and creativity via several intervening variables. The study is expected to yield several empirical findings. First, i-deals are positively related to job engagement, and the preference for autonomy at work moderates this relationship in such a way that the relationship is stronger under high preference autonomy at work than under low preference for autonomy. Second, job engagement mediates the relationship between i-deals and creativity of employees. These former two variables then had a positive influence on creativity. Third, the role of autonomy at work identity moderated the link between I-deals and job engagement such that their relationship is stronger for employees with high preference for autonomy than for those with low preference for autonomy. Whereas the autonomy at work has an indirect effect on the relation between the I-deals and creativity such that the indirect effect is stronger for employees with high preference for autonomy than for those with low preference for autonomy. The results reveals that i-deals and employees' preference for autonomy at work play active role in employee' creativity during the process they complete their work and tasks. This finding is also in agreement with Pathak and Das

(2003) who have indicated that the managers and the supervisors with high need autonomy are less absent (have higher presence percentage) from their job in comparison to the managers with low need autonomy. In reality, the results have significant guiding and enlightenment in management as well.

5.2. Research Contributions

The findings extend previous research in several ways. First, the study contributes to the scant research on the relationship between i-deals and creativity. It brings empirical support both to the research on i-deals and the impact factors on creativity, and developing the research scale on i-deals. Second, this study shows that the preference for autonomy at work has a moderating effect on the relationship between i-deals and creativity. Third, there are numerous findings in the relationships among OCB, job satisfaction, job performance and creativity. However, this study seems to be the first one to identify the mediating role of job engagement in the relationship between i-deals and creativity. Lastly, the study particularly responds to Denise M. Rousseau, Violet T. Ho, Jerald Greenberg, (2006) for inclusion of more studies in i-deals research. The positive interaction between i-deals and creativity may enrich the research on creativity in the Chinese context.

In addition, in the aspect of organizational management, leaders can actively encourage engagement by articulating the need for creative job outcomes, spelling out what the organization values, and calling attention to the effectiveness of engaging in processes likely to lead to creative outcomes. Such emphasis is likely to prime employee attention and facilitate effort toward trying to be creative (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Wyer & Srull, 1980). Managers may treat i-deals as an opportunity for encouraging the generation of new and useful ideas. By doing so, managers may not only improve the well-being of the employees but also benefit the organization by promoting meaningful and necessary change.

5.3. Implications for Human Resource Management

Arranging the working time is not just a simple attendance problem. If the enterprise can arrange to make appropriate adjustment system of working hours, the results will not be confined to improve management efficiency, and also be of great advantage to employees and the organization. For example, flexible working hours, job sharing, can help the staff balance their work and family better, so that employees will be able to have more time to engage in work. So i-deals can motive the enthusiasm of the staff and improve their work efficiency. Meanwhile the loyalty for the business will be strengthened. The new working hour arrangement system will not only meet the individual needs and personal dignity, but also maintain the vitality of innovation. To further improve the staff's work enthusiasm and let the staff have more free time to arrange their own affairs, the amount of hours (e.g. flexible working hour system and compression working hour system) or place of work (remote work or home system) need to make adjustments. If the enterprises tend to ensure the security of staff occupation the implementation of post, they can make some adjustments such as work sharing, time purchase plan, part-time system and on call system. For example, an engineer to study abroad, his employer will give him a year off instead of fire him because he wants to leave and. Likewise, the companies need to offer flexible work arrangements for staff so as to maintain long-term employment relationship between employers and employees, for the company to attract, motivate, retain valuable employees.

For employees with high preference at work and strong mastery expectations may perceive autonomy as an opportunity to complete tasks according to their own values, to use their resources, to experiment with new practices, and to change practices according to the situation and to the practical needs. Through these processes, high autonomy may lead to greater engagement. It is also likely that experimenting with new working methods and changing practices to accomplish their work as a learning process and that it will lead to personal

development and creativity. These findings support expectations that can be derived from Self Determination Theory, which conceptualizes autonomy as a universal psychological need. Based on this theory, satisfaction of the need for autonomy may be expected to be equally important for all employees. The author emphasizes that this interpretation is merely a speculation that needs to be addressed in future research.

5.4. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Estimation of clustered data might potentially lead to biased estimates of standard errors. Besides, with the exception of creativity based on ratings by the HR department, data on the other variables will be based on self-reports, suggesting the possibility of method variance. However, common method variance has been considered to be less of an issue in moderated regression (Pierce, Gardner, Dunham, & Cummings, 1993). For these reasons, the results may be substantive and not attributable to common method variance. In addition, the effective data is difficult to collect and the sample size may be relatively small. Future research should ascertain the external validity of the findings reported here in multiple organizations or in other parts of China.

5.5. Conclusion

The study is to examine both moderated and mediated processes linking i-deals, job engagement, work autonomy and creativity. Grounded in social exchange theory and using a multisource sample including employees and their supervisors from Chinese companies, the author examines the mediating roles of job engagement and the moderating role of preference for autonomy at work in the relationships between i-deals and creativity. I expect to find that the results of bootstrapping analyses confirm the mediating effects of job engagement. In addition, employees with high levels of preference for autonomy at work are more receptive to show more job engagement; in contrast, while employees with low levels of preference for autonomy at work are more receptive to have less job engagement. It seems to be of critical importance for HR practitioners to create and develop i-deals to ensure their employees' psychological well-being and enhance their job engagement and creativity.

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