

## A Phenomenographic Analysis of School Principals’ Understandings of Teachers’ Idiosyncratic Deals\*

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) is a concept that describes agreements between an employer or its representative and individual employees on personalized arrangements that benefit both the employee and the organization. The aim of this study is to determine how many different ways school principals understand the i-deals they make with teachers.

**Method:** Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with sixteen school principals who were diversified in terms of the sector (public/private), school level, and gender. This study was conceived in the tradition of phenomenography within the framework of qualitative methodology. Phenomenography is a research method that aims to reveal how many different ways a group of participants experience and understand a particular phenomenon.

**Findings:** Results indicate that participants understood these agreements in five different ways: (A1) An acceptable practice to motivate teachers if it does not lead to certain problems. (A2) A practice I would not prefer to the systems I use for problematic issues in my school. (A3) In some cases, it is a practice that teachers deserve. (A4) Although it carries some risks, it is still a necessary practice to increase motivation and remove obstacles to performance, and (A5) A necessary practice to benefit from teachers with key skills. Consistent with the logic of phenomenographic design, these understandings were ordered hierarchically based on the extent to which one understanding encompasses the other.

### Keywords

idiosyncratic deals, i-deals, teachers, school principals, phenomenography

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## Introduction

Teachers sometimes ask their principals for personalized arrangements, such as taking on tasks where they can use their skills or being able to work with a program where they can more comfortably perform their other responsibilities outside of work. Just like employees in other sectors, teachers need these personalized arrangements that are not recognized as standard for other teachers. Both they and their schools ultimately benefit from these arrangements. This principal-teacher interaction, referred to in the management literature as idiosyncratic deals which I discuss in more detail below, is a management phenomenon with which school administrators are familiar, even if they do not know the name for it.

In its well-established definition, the term “i-deals” (idiosyncratic deals) stands for “voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party” (Rousseau et al., 2006, p.978). These negotiations are not limited to those between employees and employers; they can be conducted between employees and their supervisors or HR managers as well (Hornung et al., 2018). Rousseau et al., (2016) attributed the growth of i-deals to several factors such as the decline of collective bargaining, the value that highly talented and motivated employees bring to their employers, the increasing responsibility placed on individuals to manage their employment and their increased effort in seeking personally favorable work arrangements. From these authors perspective, coupled with the vital importance of retaining star performers, idiosyncratic deals become the ideal way of using organizational resources for human resource management.

Rousseau et al., (2006) described the four key characteristics of I-deals as follows: (1) They are individually negotiated, that is, drawing on their perceived market values, individual employees bargain for their own arrangements distinct from those of their coworkers. (2) They are heterogeneous which means that at least some of the terms of an i-deal are tailored specifically to the dealmaker resulting in intragroup heterogeneity over some aspects of working conditions. This nonstandard nature of i-deals can cause the dealmaker's coworkers to view their organizations as unfair (Greenberg et al, 2004). (3) They benefit both employer and employee, such that for employees, i-deals address the need for personalized work arrangements, while also benefiting employers by attracting, retaining, and motivating valued employees. As a result, i-deals vary from the unfavorable person-specific arrangements such as favoritism or cronyism in that these arrangements are founded on the legitimacy of shared values (Bal and Rousseau, 2016). (4) They vary in scope in such a way that some employment packages can include only one or two idiosyncratic elements, while some others can be designed fully idiosyncratic. An employee may need only flexible work hours while another one needs every component, from work hours to pay or title as tailored to his or her needs.

The relevant literature suggests that depending on their timing and content, i-deals can take on a variety of types. Different timing and content of i-deals may have significantly different consequences for the i-dealer, the employer, and third parties, most importantly the i- dealer's coworkers (Rousseau et al., 2016). In terms of timing, earlier research (Rousseau et al., 2006, 2009; Rousseau and Kim, 2004) had classified i-deals as *ex ante* (i.e., during the recruitment process) and *ex post* (i.e., after working some time). However, in a recent study (Rousseau et al., 2016), a third dimension called “in responses to a threat to leave” appeared (p.186).

One of the conceptualizations of the content of i-deals can be seen in the scale developed by Rosen et al., (2013) which featured four dimensions: schedule flexibility (about being granted a work schedule that is suitable to off-the-job demands), location flexibility (about being able to work remotely from the main office), financial incentives (about being able to negotiate compensation arrangements), and task and work responsibilities (about being given tasks that are suitable to develop new or existing skills). The content dimensions can be categorized in other ways as well. In a more recent study, Rousseau et al., (2016) categorized the types of i-deals as “development,” “task,” “flexibility” (including schedule and location issues), “reduced workload,” and “financial” i-deals. From this perspective, task i-deals differ from development i-deals (“career i-deals” in Hornung et al., 2014) in that the former is about making the job content more enjoyable while the latter is about making it more conducive to personal development.

Based on my review of the literature, I grouped the factors affecting i-deals into the following three categories: (1) organizational characteristics, including organizations’ structural conditions (Hornung et al., 2008, 2009), human resource practices (Tuan, 2017; Villajos et al., 2019); and quality of the exchange relationship between i-dealers and supervisors (Hornung et al., 2010; Hornung et al., 2014; Rosen et al., 2013); (2) supervisor characteristics, including supervisors’ employee-oriented consideration (Hornung et al., 2011), perspective taking (i.e., cognitive empathy; Rao & Kunja, 2019), experience of being caregiver for elders (Las Heras et al., 2017), exchange ideologies, justice sensitivities and their experiences of having been granted i-deals in the past (Laulié et al., 2019), their perceptions of the extent to which i-deals are of benefit to both the employee and organization (Davis & Van der Heijden, 2018), and unfulfilled organizational responsibilities to employees (Hornung et al., 2009); (3) employee characteristics, including employees’ initiative (Hornung et al., 2008; 2009; Tang & Hornung, 2015), political skill (Rosen et al., 2013), networking skill (Guerrero & Jeanblanc, 2017), perception that they are overqualified for their current job (Huang and Hu, 2021), pursuing status striving goals and witnessing coworkers receiving i-deals (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), job level (i.e., employee socioeconomic position; Jonsson et al., 2021).

I prefer to present the outcomes of i-deals under two headings: Employee and supervisor perceptions of the positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcomes include work engagement (Hornung et al., 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Zhang & Wu, 2019), commitment (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Hattori et al., 2021; Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Hornung et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2013), job performance (Hornung et al., 2014), administrative error control (Tuan, 2017), client satisfaction (Bal & Boehm, 2019), OCB (Anand et al., 2010), employee initiative (Hornung et al., 2010), constructive voice behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2015), innovative work behavior (Kimwolo & Cheruiyot, 2020), psychological empowerment and taking charge (Wang & Long, 2018), perceived organizational support (Zhang & Wu, 2019), job satisfaction (Rosen et al., 2013; Ho & Tekleab, 2016), creativity (Wang et al., 2018), skill acquisition, job autonomy, reduced work overload, occupational self-efficacy and lesser work strain, (Hornung et al., 2014), job complexity, job control, and lesser job stressors (Hornung et al., 2010), psychological employment relationship (Rousseau et al., 2009), employability of older workers (Oostrom et al., 2016), and lastly, work-family enrichment (Tang & Hornung, 2015). While flexibility i-deals were found to relate negatively to work-family conflict (Hornung et al., 2008, 2011), developmental i-deals related positively to that problem (Hornung et al., 2008).

### ***Purpose of the Study***

I decided to do this research because I noticed some deficiencies in the literature on i-deals. The first was that the topic of i-deals in the context of educational organizations has not yet been thoroughly researched. It is not possible to know the exact number of teachers working worldwide, but in my home country alone, 1,112,305 teachers work at the K-12 level (Aktaş Salman et al., 2021), so we can assume that this phenomenon is very common in schools. However, we, the researchers in the field of educational administration, had not yet seen this phenomenon as a research topic. I conducted the first study on this topic (Özaslan, 2023) as a multiple case study on the factors that facilitate making ideals between principals and teachers in public and private schools. In this study, I identified 6 factors for professional development, 7 factors for task flexibility, fourteen factors for schedule flexibility, 8 factors for location flexibility, 7 factors for reduced workload, and 2 factors for pay-related i-deals. In addition, in this study, I also identified 8 factors that reduce the frequency of these idiosyncratic deals. As a researcher in educational administration, I believe that each principal has his or her own understanding of these personalized, nonstandard arrangements for teachers, and that it is of great importance to know the variety of these understandings, as knowledge of this variety can shed light on the circumstances under which idiosyncratic deals are made in schools. The second reason I started these studies is that the literature on i-deals, which has been very well developed over the last two decades, has focused almost exclusively on subordinates' perceptions and has not yet adequately considered managers' perceptions of these personalized arrangements (Bal and Rousseau, 2016). Two studies involving managers (Hornung et al., 2009; Lai et al., 2009) have focused on other issues and not on managers' understanding of these arrangements.

The purpose of this phenomenographic study, which I designed based on these two deficits I saw in the relevant literature, is to determine how many different ways school principals understand the i-deals they make with teachers. In this study, I have presented the different ways school principals understand i-deals, which could be stimulating for management researchers studying other industries. Furthermore, through the implications for practice, I believe I have contributed to the accumulation of knowledge needed for effective school management, and through the implications for research, I have provided a direction for future research on this topic. Finally, I have provided an accurate and easily understood example of phenomenographic research, of which there are very few examples in the field of educational administration.

### **Methodology**

Marton and Pong (2005, p. 335) define traditional phenomenography as research that “aims to investigate the qualitatively different ways in which people understand a particular phenomenon or an aspect of the world around them.” Since this work began with the intention of identifying the various ways in which a group of principals understood the idiosyncratic deals made with teachers, I felt that phenomenography was the most appropriate research design.

In Marton's (1988) explanation of the research tradition, this design is based on a second-order perspective that describes "one aspect of the world as it appears to the individual" (p. 145) rather than a first-order perspective that describes an aspect of the world as it is. I chose phenomenography as the research method because in this study I did not want to find out what

a nonstandard, personalized arrangement is or means to everyone (only a first-order perspective can do that), but rather how principals understand these arrangements (second-order perspective). In phenomenography, knowledge is assumed to both depend on reality outside of individuals and to be based on individuals' thoughts; therefore, knowledge of reality may vary from individual to individual (Svensson, 1997). This neither exclusively positivist nor exclusively constructivist perspective is the second reason why phenomenography appeals to me as a non-positivist researcher oriented toward commonsense realism (as defined by Mark et al., 2000).

In phenomenography, the unit of description is the conception (Marton and Pong, 2005). Conceptions are represented in the form of categories of description (Barnard et al., 1999) and are used to explain how research participants understand a particular phenomenon in different ways (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). Research participants may express more than one understanding (Barnard et al., 1999; Marton & Pong, 2005). In phenomenography, conceptions cannot be attributed to specific participants (Barnard et al., 1999), as this research tradition focuses on the diversity of conceptions rather than the commonality of a particular conception (Orgill, 2012). For this reason, phenomenographic research does not report frequencies or discuss the degree of agreement in conceptions. There is a debate in the literature as to whether the terms category of description and conception are the same thing (Bowden, 2000). In my study, instead of using the terms of category of description or conception, I have preferred to use the term "understanding," which is frequently used in the literature and which, I think, is more comprehensible to readers.

### ***Informants***

Trigwell (2000) specifically pointed out that phenomenographic research should involve a minimum of fifteen participants (because a smaller number would not be able to capture the diversity of experiences) and a maximum of twenty participants (because the amount of data would be an overwhelming psychological burden). In my participant matrix, which I created with this caveat in mind, I decided that sixteen participants were best suited to cover the dimensions of variation that I felt were necessary. Another common practice to elicit variation in understanding of focused phenomena is to diversify the study group. In this regard, I found it appropriate to differentiate the participants in my study by sector, school level, and gender, and I ensured that my participants were distributed so that they did not overlap in any of these dimensions of variation. To illustrate, I have one male and one female participant in my study group who are principals in private elementary schools, and the same is true for my two participants in public elementary schools. So, of the 16 participants in my study group, eight work in private schools and eight work in public schools. At the school level, four are in preschool, four are in elementary school, and four are in high school. In terms of the gender dimension, eight of my participants are female and eight are male. The participants in the present study were the same principals as the participants in my previous study (Özaslan, 2023) on principals' views on the factors that facilitate idiosyncratic deals with teachers. Although the questions and methods of the two studies were completely different, I knew my participants more intimately because I had spoken to them as part of another study, which gave me a considerable advantage in interpreting their statements.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

After obtaining the necessary permissions for the research, I conducted my interviews with audio recordings in 2022. Prior to the interviews, I gave each participant a wet-signed commitment form informing them of their rights as participants. My previous research experiences have led me to believe that giving participants the opportunity to clarify their thoughts on the research topic by sending them research questions prior to each interview has a positive impact on the quality of the data. For this reason, after inviting participants to the research interview by phone, I sent them the interview questions and a one-paragraph explanation of the concept of i-deals to emphasize that the phenomenon I am studying is not nepotism but an ethical practice in schools. My interview questions were as follows:

1. Do you recall a clear example where a teacher asked you for a personalized arrangement (just for him/her)?
2. What are your feelings and thoughts about this example? How do you feel about this arrangement?
3. Do you remember any other examples?
4. Thinking of all these examples, how would you describe or imagine a personalized, nonstandard arrangement for teachers in general?

I conducted my phenomenographic analysis in the following steps:

1. I completed the transcription by using MacOS speech recognition software.
2. I read each transcribed text twice from beginning to end to familiarize myself with what the participants were saying.
3. Using MaxQDA 2022 software, I did my first-level coding on the transcripts to identify the structural dimension of what the participants were talking about.
4. I undertook first-level coding to identify the referential dimension in which participants spoke about how they understood this phenomenon.
5. I analyzed the expressions in the referential and structural dimensions together. In this phase, I created and named understandings.
6. I read all the understandings comparatively and checked their relevance. In this phase, I often returned to the raw data to reread and review all the participants' interview statements from beginning to end to understand them (iteration), and I tried to see if there was a hierarchical relationship between them. This approach allowed me to better understand the participants' understandings on a holistic level.
7. I created the outcome space and presented the hierarchical arrangement of understandings as a shape drawing in this space.
8. I sent the outcome space to the participants and gave them time to see if they had any objections or further contributions.

As a limitation, I would like to point out that I took the validity measures I mentioned above, but instead of the data being analyzed by only one researcher, the analysis of all data by two

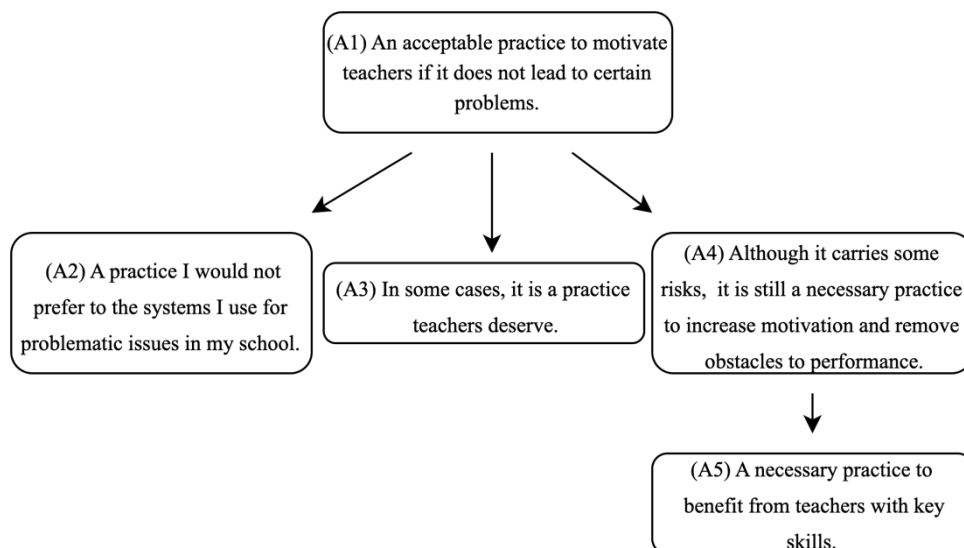
researchers independently could have resulted in different perspectives on the participants' understandings.

## Findings

Some of the participants from the private sector considered the personalized agreement with the teacher as an indispensable condition for success, while another from the same sector stated that he aligned his management practices with the principles of the institution rather than with the demands of the teacher. On the other hand, some participants working in public schools were concerned that i-deals with a teacher negatively affects the other teachers' perception of organizational justice by disrupting equity in the school and expressed their tendency to set up systems in the school to prevent this, while some other participants from the same sector expressed that they risk violating the written rules to some extent to create the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively. I am of the opinion that the determining factor in making i-deals with a teacher is not the sector, but the manager's attitude in this regard. I found no relationship between any of the variables (sector, gender, branch, school level) that I adopted as dimensions of variation in this research and participants' understanding of i-deals with a teacher. On the other hand, as seen in Figure 1, I would say that there is a hierarchical relationship between participants' understandings in terms of scope.

**Figure 1**

*Hierarchical Structuring of the Participants' Understandings of i-deals with a Teacher*



In this hierarchy, all participants viewed i-deals as "an acceptable practice to motivate teachers if it does not lead to certain problems," but a step later, they differed in their overall attitudes toward these arrangements. For example, in this hierarchical classification, participants with the A5 understanding also had the A4 and A1 understandings. In contrast, participants with A2 understanding had no understanding other than the A1.

**(A1) An acceptable practice to motivate teachers if it does not lead to certain problems.** In this understanding, which all participants have, i-deals with a teacher is an acceptable practice to increase the teacher's motivation and thus make her more useful to the students, as long as it does not lead to some problems that the participants care about. The extent to which participants are willing to make such arrangements also varies. To illustrate this with an example, the difference in the degree of willingness is visible among the two participants whose direct excerpts I have quoted below:

The teacher will have a request, and you will not make that request! ... The teacher must enter the lesson willingly. This is how success increases. I have never sent a teacher to the classroom with heartbreak. Why? It's easy to break hearts. It's easy. If I went up to the hallway and hung up my face, I would break the hearts of twenty teachers. But they go into class, and I'm the one who is responsible for their poor performance in that class. That's what I think. (Private middle school, Male)

The absence of a teacher in school is a big problem. Imagine that for seven hours, there is no teacher in the class. Sometimes the teacher on duty takes care of those students. But when that coincides with the time when the teacher on duty and the administrators are busy, the school is in chaos. So, we can't imagine that the administrators would cheerfully say, 'Okay, my teacher is going to improve himself.' But sometimes there's nothing to do, and we just have to accept that.' That makes us uncomfortable. I think everybody who sits in the principal's chair feels that because, as I said, a lot of work in the school is going to be interrupted. They don't want that disruption, that chaos. It's not because we don't want our teachers to improve. (Public middle school, Female)

The participants who have this understanding described the problems that the i-deal should not cause can be summarized under three headings. These are (1) a violation of laws and regulations for some participants working in public schools, (2) a violation of policies established by school founders for some participants working in private schools, and (3) an interference with teachers' perceptions of organizational justice for some participants from both sectors. This last factor is evident in the following excerpt:

It is very important to create equal conditions for teachers, because if you give even one teacher advantages that you don't give to others, the inner peace in the school is disturbed. I have to balance that inner peace. If I meet teacher A's demand, teacher B will hear it. If he demands the same thing tomorrow and I cannot fulfill that demand, then the peace in the school is disturbed. (Private primary school, Male)

The fact that a teacher is helpless in any matter seems to increase the likelihood that i-deals will be granted. This is evident in the following excerpt:

The teacher may have experienced an unexpected event, lost a child, or lost her spouse. How efficient can this teacher be? If we force this teacher to do certain things, she will be tormented. Her mind would be somewhere else. ... We must help that teacher. (Public middle school, Male)

In such a case, the question might arise whether the deal for a personalized arrangement can fall under the concept of i-deals, which by definition should also benefit the institution. Considering the benefits of the teacher's increased commitment to his or her school after overcoming that difficult period, I believe that deals such as the one described above meet the mutual benefit criterion of the concept of i-deals.

**(A2) A practice I would not prefer to the systems I use for problematic issues in my school.** The statements of some participants suggest that they are concerned that the i-deals they grant to individual teachers may undermine other teachers' perceptions of organizational justice, and therefore choose to create rule systems that apply to all teachers and cannot be stretched, especially on issues that may cause conflict between teachers. Two of the participants who have this understanding explained that teachers who knew they could not bend the systems



established in the school accepted over time not to make conflicting demands regarding those established systems.

When teachers come to me, they know I will give them permission if they have a valid excuse. At the teachers' board meeting earlier this year, I said, "Don't come to me asking for permission if you would say, 'I am going to my relative's wedding' or 'I am going sightseeing,'" My red lines are clear. Teachers don't come to me with requests like that. I like to speak openly. Everything is transparent. My red lines are clear; no one comes and makes such demands. ... My rules are clear. I am known here as a strict person. I don't go beyond my rules, and I don't have headaches. My rules are unchangeable. (Public middle school, Male)

Participants who have the A2 understanding, as mentioned earlier, also have the A1 understanding. Thus, they are aware of the advantages that the i-deals granted to teachers can offer and do not reject these agreements completely if these agreements do not cause problems in the subjects that concern them.

**(A3) In some cases, it is a practice that teachers deserve.** Some participants made a clear distinction between equality and fairness, making it clear that they were more inclined toward fairness than equality. In this understanding, an i-deal granted to a teacher serves as a means of ensuring fairness in school, as the following direct quote shows:

Are equality and justice the same thing? Is not that very important? There is no equality in these personalized arrangements, is there? I think there should be no negative discrimination between civil servants, but there should certainly be a positive discrimination. Did you understand my sentence? Instead of demoting the low-performing teacher, you should elevate the high-performing teacher. Here you can't take away from the teacher something that the state gives, but you can give him something that the state doesn't. ... His salary will be the same, his duties will be the same, his weekly schedule will be the same, but if I give a certificate of achievement, I am not going to give it to every teacher. If there's no positive discrimination, the motivation of the high-performing teacher goes down. The guy says, 'I work harder, but I have the same conditions as the others. Then why am I working?' (Public high school, Male)

**(A4)** Although it carries some risks, it is still a necessary practice to increase motivation and remove obstacles to performance. I-deals with a teacher may carry the risk of stretching written rules too far or angering other teachers. On the other hand, some participants reported taking risks in stretching written rules to ensure that teachers work efficiently:

The teacher was from another school, but she volunteered to participate in the preparatory courses for eighth graders that were held on weekends at our school. This teacher was doing her doctorate. She asked me, 'Can we move the class time up an hour?' ... If the inspectors had come and asked, 'Is there a class at that hour?' I might have gotten in trouble, but this teacher was hardworking and successful. As I said, she helped us a lot. Since she came to help us, I said, 'OK, I'll move the class an hour early.' It was a risk, but I said yes without hesitation. (Public primary school, Female)

In this understanding, making i-deals with teachers is a necessary practice to remove obstacles that stand in the way of teachers doing their jobs and to create the conditions for effective work. This practice enables teachers to reach their potential, as the following quote shows:

For example, I have an English teacher who loves to teach elementary students through play. She said, 'I don't want to teach for exams; send me to elementary school. I'm happy there.' We said, 'Okay.' ... Next year, I'll try to get this teacher to work full time at the elementary school. I will advise the school administration to do that, because this teacher teaches English much better there and the students learn it much better. The parents are happy, the teacher is happy, and the students are happy. (Private middle school, Female)

**(A5) A necessary practice to benefit from teachers with key skills.** In this understanding, in order to benefit from a teacher who has a skill that other teachers in the school do not have, it

is necessary to accept the arrangement that that teacher requires. On the other hand, I must remind you that participants with this understanding also have the A1 understanding, so their teachers' demands should also be within acceptable limits. Participants with this understanding work in schools from which there is a tangible expectation of success -at a much higher level than from the other participants' schools- and the professional skills of some teachers are of great importance in meeting this expectation. The following excerpt illustrates how this situation shapes participants' attitudes toward i-deals.

If two math teachers leave my school now, can I find teachers of the same quality to replace them? That is the first question. If I find the teachers, can I hire them at the same salary? That's the second question mark. So, if you say I have red lines here, you will have to padlock the door of the school and walk away. (Private high school, Male)

Another final point I would like to make about the results is that some participants gave as examples some practices to which teachers are legally entitled or the requirements that must be met in order to do their job (which almost any administrator will accept without much thought). On a cursory analysis, these examples might lead to the misleading conclusion that all participants are in favor of granting i-deals to teachers. However, when all texts are subjected to a participant-centered, holistic analysis rather than a code-centered one, it becomes clear that the participants who have the A2 understanding are not ready to make i-deals with teachers. Of course, these participants also have the A1 understanding ("An acceptable practice to motivate teachers if it does not lead to certain problems"). However, this does not mean that the participants in question are eager to grant i-deals to teachers. The A1 understanding stems from the fact that -for some participants- the teachers' personalized arrangement demands that do not seem to cause problems can be taken care of through routine management decisions. Participants with the A4 understanding ("Although it carries some risks, it is still a necessary practice to increase motivation and remove obstacles to performance") also have the A1 understanding. This finding suggests that there is a limit to the risk a participant can take (e.g., i-deals granted to teachers at a private school should not conflict with school policies established by the school's founders).

## Discussion

If you look at the results, you can see that the A1 understanding, which I call "An acceptable practice to motivate teachers if it does not lead to certain problems," and the A4, which I call "Although it carries some risks, it is still a necessary practice to increase motivation and remove obstacles to performance," have a common denominator, which is to increase teachers' motivation and thus increase their performance. Given that professional freedom and peer support have a positive influence on teachers' intentions to remain in the teaching profession (Webb et al., 2004), it is not surprising that the teacher motivation function has been one of the defining characteristics since the development of i-deals (Rousseau et al., 2006). In the literature on i-deals, there is research suggesting that employee-centered leadership behaviors lead to positive managerial attitudes toward i-deals (Hornung et al., 2011) and that not only the benefits to employees but also the benefits to the organization may be important to the manager in accepting i-deals (Davis and Van der Heijden, 2018). Parallel to these findings, the A1 and A4 understandings suggest that both teacher well-being and benefits to the school (in terms of benefits to students) may be important to principals in accepting the granting of i-deals to

teachers. As can be seen in a previous study, the participating principals' perception that the personalized arrangements requested by a teacher will not cause serious problems is crucial in granting professional development, schedule, location and reduced workload i-deals to that teacher (Özaslan, 2023). A review of i-deals research shows that these arrangements are positively associated with work engagement (Hornung et al., 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Zhang & Wu, 2019), commitment (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Hattori et al., 2021; Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Hornung et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2013), job performance (Hornung et al., 2014), client satisfaction (Bal & Boehm, 2019), organizational citizenship behavior (Anand et al., 2010), employee initiative (Hornung et al., 2010), and employees' taking charge (Wang & Long, 2018). Although these studies did not involve teachers, it is reasonable to assume that the school is very likely to benefit from teacher satisfaction with i-deals.

The A4 understanding, which I refer to as "Although it carries some risks, it is still a necessary practice to increase motivation and remove obstacles to performance," and the A2 understanding, which I refer to as "A practice I would not prefer to the systems I use for problematic issues in my school, are at the two extremes of possible attitudes toward i-deals. When a teacher is granted an i-deal, other teachers naturally feel certain emotions, and it is possible that these are negative emotions. Participants with the A2 understanding are able to grant teachers i-deals on topics that do not cause problems because they also have the A1 understanding and see i-deals as useful for motivating teachers. However, they indicated that they do not bend the systems they develop on issues that could cause conflict between teachers (such as determining which grade levels teachers teach or where they are on duty) because this could lead to new demands from other teachers, and these demands would eventually cause conflict between teachers. In support of participants' concerns, Ng and Lucianetti's (2016) study showed that employees who witness a coworker receiving an i-deal are more likely to seek i-deals as well. This finding is consistent with the perception expressed by some participants in this study that when one teacher is granted an i-deal, other teachers begin to request i-deals. Ng (2017) has shown that receiving development i-deals is related to being envied while observing that other employees can make such agreements is related to feelings of envy, a more competitive work climate and the resulting feelings of perceived ostracism leading employees to leave their jobs voluntarily. A recent field study (Kong et al., 2020) found a positive relationship between an employee's ability to make an i-deal about the content of work and the emotional exhaustion of other employees. Lee and Chung's (2019) study points to the possibility that participants' concerns with A2 understanding about undermining teachers' perceptions of organizational justice are far from unfounded. In that study, it was shown that there was a negative relationship between an employee's observation that his or her colleagues can receive flexibility (in terms of work location, work hours, and work content) i-deals and that employee's perception of justice. A study conducted in Turkey also shows that teachers' perceptions of distributive justice (along with task visibility) may even influence their perceptions of their colleagues' social loafing levels (Himmetoğlu et al, 2022). Consequently, it is not unwarranted for school administrators to be concerned about their teachers' perceptions of organizational justice. On the other side of the attitudinal continuum, according to participants with the A4 understanding, making i-deals with teachers involves risks, but they are willing to take those risks. To increase motivation and remove barriers to teacher motivation, principals may tend to grant task flexibility, schedule flexibility, and location flexibility i-deals to teachers (Özaslan, 2023). The i-deal literature shows that employees' ability to make i-deals

has positive effects on psychological empowerment and taking charge behaviors (Wang & Long, 2018) and that i-deals, especially about professional development, are positively associated with perceived organizational support and work engagement (Zhang & Wu, 2019). These findings suggest that participants with A4 understanding may have made the right choice by taking the risks of i-deals. Regarding the risks, Rousseau et al., (2016) emphasized the importance of considering the potential reactions of the i-deal maker's coworkers so that i-deals do not lead to problems between coworkers.

I would like to begin the discussion of "In some cases, it is a practice teachers deserve" (A3) by mentioning some field studies that I can relate to this understanding. These studies show (1) that managers' consideration of employees is positively related to the extent to which employees negotiate development and flexibility ideals (Hornung et al., 2011), (2) that managers' emphatic concern is positively related to their tendency to approve developmental, schedule, flexibility, and location flexibility (Rao & Kunja, 2019), (3) that managers' perceptions that the organization is not meeting its obligations to employees lead them to grant workload reduction i-deals to employees (Hornung et al., 2009), and (4) that the quality of leader-employee relationship (LMX) influences i-deals between managers and employees (Hornung et al., 2010; Hornung et al., 2014; Rosen et al., 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that principals who have reason to believe that a teacher has the right to request a personalized arrangement can grant that teacher a flexible schedule, a reduced workload, and even pay-related i-deals (Özaslan, 2023). When the positive impact of principals' tendency to care about teachers' rights and well-being on their acceptance of granting i-deals to teachers, as reflected in the A3 understanding, is evaluated along with the above research findings, it becomes clear that in the school environment, just as in the work environment outside of school, there is a relationship between administrators' appreciation for their subordinates and openness to i-deals.

Field studies showing that organizational conditions, including factors such as employment conditions (Hornung et al., 2008), type of job (Hornung et al., 2009), HR practices (Tuan, 2017; Villajos et al., 2019), and managers' expectations that an i-deal will benefit both the organization and the employee (Davis & Van der Heijden, 2018), influence i-deals suggest that some conditions of the organization can be effective in achieving personalized arrangements with employees. The present study makes the following contribution to the knowledge of organizational conditions referred to in the i-deals literature: I observed the A5 understanding ("A necessary practice to benefit from teachers with key skills") among principals of two high schools that were expected to be remarkably successful. The success of these schools was only possible if some teachers were willing to use skills that other teachers did not have. The willingness of teachers with skills that other teachers do not have is of great importance at these two schools, at least to their principals. The findings from the i-deals literature that the ability to make i-deals is negatively related to turnover intentions (Ho & Tekleab, 2016) and positively related to intentions to continue working after retirement (Bal et al., 2012) suggest that the two participants whose schools must demonstrate clear success are making the right choices to approach i-deals positively. Taken together with the findings of these two studies, it is no surprise to see that to retain qualified teachers in their schools and benefit from their unique skills, principals tended to accept teachers' demands for i-deals on task flexibility, pay-related, and reduced workload (Özaslan, 2023).

### ***Implications for Research and Practice***

The numerous field studies on i-deals clearly show the benefits that the organization derives from the impact of these arrangements on employee motivation. Given the totality of the statements made by the participants in this study, it is reasonable to assume that these experienced school leaders also believe in the benefits that i-deals will bring to the school. However, the results of this study also suggest that certain factors make some participants hesitant to initiate i-deals. Informing all stakeholders of i-deals -particularly the founders who set employment policies in their private schools and all teachers who are sometimes opponents of i-deals granted to their colleagues- about the importance and function of i-deals and the benefits they can provide to school effectiveness will help school principals in their efforts to implement these personalized arrangements.

There are some recommendations in the literature on how managers should conduct i-deals. For example, early in the development of the concept, Rousseau (2001) pointed out that i-deals that cannot be disclosed to other employees should not be made. However, it is also apparent that the i-deals literature does not adequately address how these agreements should be executed. The problem is that there are few works on how i-deals should be handled by administrators, and these works do not address the unique characteristics of the field of school administration. I believe that there is a need to train school administrators on how to implement these personalized arrangements without interfering with other teachers' perceptions of organizational justice, but this will first require the results of field research to create the content of this training. To be more specific, the results of this study show how much some participants feared that i-deals granted to one teacher might draw the reaction of other teachers. Therefore, researchers should focus on how i-deals granted to one teacher is perceived by the teacher's colleagues and what factors lead those colleagues to consider i-deals appropriate or unacceptable. Educational administration researchers interested in the concept of i-deals can make an important contribution to efforts to increase school effectiveness by focusing on this practical dimension.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

### ***Research and Publication Ethics Statement***

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