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Exploring idiosyncratic deals as a managerial tool: a bibliometric and content analysis

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ABSTRACT

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are voluntary, customised agreements between employees and employers that meet individual needs. As a managerial tool, i-deals have become essential in today's work environment to attract, motivate and retain talent. This paper explores the evolution of i-deals research from its inception in 2001 to 2023. It combines a bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping of 192 articles from the Web of Science (Study 1), alongside a content analysis of the 30 most impactful publications (Study 2). Findings highlight key theoretical and methodological gaps discussed across both studies. Research remains geographically concentrated—particularly in the United States, China, and Germany—and largely confined to the human health and social work sectors, limiting its generalisability. Methodologically, the field relies heavily on quantitative approaches grounded in social exchange theory (SET) and leader-member exchange (LMX), with limited adoption of alternative theoretical perspectives or qualitative methodologies to enrich contextual understanding. Furthermore, existing studies predominantly explore ex-post i-deals from the employee perspective, often neglecting employer-initiated agreements and ex-ante negotiations. While developmental and flexibility i-deals receive considerable attention, other types and organisational settings remain underexplored. This study identifies emerging research trends and proposes future research avenues to address these gaps and broaden i-deals scholarship.

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Organizations;
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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, individually tailored work arrangements—commonly referred to as *idiosyncratic deals* or *i-deals* for brevity (Rousseau, 2006)—have become a strategic element in the workplace, used to attract, motivate, and retain valuable employees who might otherwise be beyond the reach of organisations (Everard-Igweh et al., 2025; Simosi et al., 2023; Wasti et al., 2022). As a result, research on i-deals has attained increasing global attention and has emerged as a prominent research topic in organisational behaviour and human resource management (Rousseau, 2006).

Despite this rapid growth, comprehensive contributions examining the evolution of academic research on i-deals over time remain limited. While a few systematic literature reviews have been conducted, none have employed a bibliometric mapping approach to visualise trends and connections within the field (Bal & Izak, 2021; Liao et al., 2016; Wasti et al., 2022). The most recent review of i-deals literature resulted in 74 articles, spanning from 2008 till November 2020 (Wasti et al., 2022).

Notably, since November 2020, an additional 88 documents have been published, making up 45.60% of all publications. This surge in scholarly interest is likely driven by the increased relevance of i-deals in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically disrupted work dynamics and accelerated the shift toward remote and flexible work arrangements to ensure safety and business continuity (Martínez-Corts et al., 2024; Van der Heijden et al., 2021).

Thus, there is a clear need for an updated and methodologically rigorous review of the literature. This paper addresses that gap by conducting both a bibliometric and content analysis to map the intellectual

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structure of i-deals research, trace its evolution over time, and critically assess its development to date. Based on the findings, future research directions are drawn to support the advancement of the field.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: [Section 2](#) outlines the theoretical framework. [Section 3](#) describes the methods employed. [Section 4](#) presents the results of the performance analysis using Web of Science Core Collection (WoSCC) data and science mapping generated with VOSviewer and answers the research question 1 and 2. [Section 5](#) discusses the key findings from the content analysis, answering the research questions 3 and 4. Lastly, [Section 6](#) presents the main conclusions, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Theoretical background

As defined by Rousseau, i-deals are ‘voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party’ including the employee, the organisation and co-workers (Rousseau et al., 2006, p. 978). Scholars have identified different types of i-deals based on the negotiation’s timing and content. Regarding the time, i-deals can be negotiated before—*ex-ante*—or after—*ex-post*—the start of the employment (Rousseau, 2001). In practice, *ex-post* i-deals occur more frequently because both employees and employers leverage their insider knowledge and history of exchange relationships to craft customised agreements (Rousseau et al., 2006; Tshabalala & Dhanpat, 2025).

In terms of content, flexibility i-deals adapt work hours, locations, or schedules, allowing employees to manage work-life balance better (Gajendran et al., 2015); development i-deals refer to customised training and growth opportunities for career advancement tailored to the individual’s aspirations (Garg & Sinha, 2024); task i-deals adjust employee job content and responsibilities, enabling employees to leverage their strengths and interests (Hornung et al., 2010); and financial i-deals involve unique compensation arrangements, such as salary, bonuses, or benefits, customised to the individual’s contributions and needs (Rosen et al., 2013). The negotiation of one type of i-deal can occur independently of bargaining for and receiving another.

The theoretical foundation of i-deals is multifaceted, drawing on key theories from organisational behaviour and psychology. Among these, social exchange theory (SET) suggests that individuals tend to reciprocate contributions within relationships, even if not required to do so (Blau, 1964; Rousseau et al., 2006). Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory emphasises the development of manager-subordinate relationships over time, wherein high-trust employees gain greater attention and opportunities to negotiate i-deals (Hornung et al., 2010). Recent research further highlights the importance of a strong relationship between both parties for the effective implementation of such agreements (Everard-Igweh et al., 2025; Garg et al., 2025).

The concept of i-deals has been extensively analysed in the academic literature from various perspectives, including their classification (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018; Hornung et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006) and the employee characteristics that influence the likelihood and outcomes of the negotiation (Hornung et al., 2009, 2014; Rosen et al., 2013). From these conceptualisations, new trends have emerged, such as the examination of the organisational context shaping the i-deals negotiations and implementation (Anand et al., 2010; Simosi et al., 2023), as well as the motivations driving i-deals request (Garg & Sinha, 2024; Simosi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the outcomes of i-deals have been assessed, including their impact on job satisfaction (Tshabalala & Dhanpat, 2025), organisational commitment, performance (Garg et al., 2025), and perceptions of fairness amongst other factors (De Winne et al., 2024; Hornung et al., 2008; Rofcanin et al., 2021; Singh & Vidyarthi, 2018; Velasco Vizcaino et al., 2023). Recently, a growing line of research has explored the third-party implications, particularly the role of co-workers and their consequences during the negotiation process (De Winne et al., 2024; Gachayeva et al., 2024).

Building on this framework, the present article aims to examine the evolution of academic research on i-deals. To achieve this objective, two complementary studies were conducted: Study 1, a bibliometric analysis and Study 2, a content analysis of the 30 most influential articles in the field. For Study 1, the following research questions are posed: **RQ1.** *What is the underlying structure of i-deals knowledge?* **RQ2.** *Which papers, authors and institutions have contributed the most to the i-deals domain?* Based on the findings of Study 1, Study 2 addresses the following research questions: **RQ3.** *What are the main findings of i-deals research up to 2023?* **RQ4.** *What future research directions emerge from the current research front?*

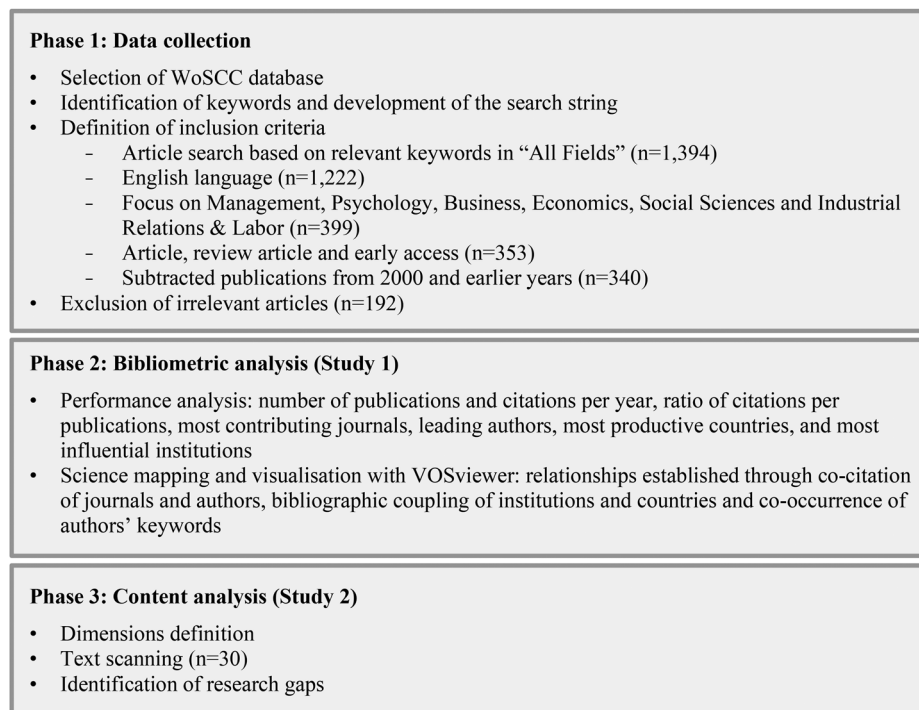


Figure 1. Workflow of the literature review process.

The results of both studies are examined in a discussion section, which provides a critical interpretation of the findings and offers responses to each research question.

3. Methods

To ascertain how workplace i-deals had been researched and discussed in the business and management context, we conducted this literature review in three phases spanning from August 2023 to April 2024, as depicted in Figure 1.

In the first stage, an initial keyword search was conducted across all databases available under WoSCC until August 2023. This comprehensive database has served as a primary data source for numerous workplace studies (Vizuet-Luciano et al., 2023). The terms ‘idiosyncratic deal*’ OR ‘i-deal*’ were used as keywords for ‘All Fields’. Only articles, review articles, or early access publications in English, within the areas described in Figure 1, were considered. Since the i-deals concept was introduced by Rousseau in 2001, earlier publications were excluded. This analysis identified 340 relevant articles. Following Bal and Izak (2021), each document’s title, abstract where applicable, and keywords were manually reviewed, selecting only those dealing with i-deals. Contributions outside our scope, such as those on Pedagogy, Reflexivity, and Financial instability, which featured the keyword ‘I deal’ without a hyphen, were excluded. Additionally, a correction from Bal and Vossaert (2019) was omitted. This resulted in a total of 192 documents with 5,333 citations for the period of analysis.

In the second stage, a bibliometric analysis was utilised to examine the intellectual structure of the i-deals domain across the 192 articles (Öztürk et al., 2024). Despite being relatively new in business research, bibliometric analysis is widely used to ‘gain a one-stop overview, identify knowledge gaps, and derive novel ideas for investigation’ (Donthu et al., 2021). This methodological approach enables the exploration of a scientific field’s cognitive structure and identification of key contributors (Noyons et al., 1999), enhancing understanding through visualising complex relationships across publications and themes (Merigó et al., 2016). VOSviewer version 1.6.20 was used to generate bibliometric maps, where nodes represent entities such as journals, authors, institutions, countries, or keywords, and edges illustrate relationships through co-citation, bibliographic coupling, or keyword co-occurrence (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). These visualisations depict the interconnectedness of disciplines and scholarly outputs by their spatial arrangement and proximity, as described by Small (1999). VOSviewer has been widely applied in bibliometric studies (e.g. Aiolfi & Luceri, 2024; Laengle et al., 2020; Li et al., 2025) and is

recommended for detailed network visualisations (Donthu et al., 2021). van Eck and Waltman (2017) demonstrated that VOSviewer produces accurate clustering solutions using a technique developed by Waltman et al. (2010), closely related to multidimensional scaling.

In the third stage, to complement the bibliometric analysis a comprehensive content analysis was conducted to examine the actual content of the 30 highest-impact publications and offer a nuanced understanding of the field (Sáez-Ortuño et al., 2024). Each publication was systematically coded across eight dimensions. First, the methodological approach was classified as qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, or conceptual. Next, the theoretical frameworks were analysed to identify foundational perspectives. The timing and content of i-deals were then coded. Building on Bal and Izak (2021), the main perspective of each study was identified, distinguishing whether it focused on the employee, organisation, co-worker, or a combination. Lastly, organisations sampled were categorised by economic sector, ownership status (public or private), and geographic context to assess the generalizability of findings, as negotiation styles can vary across cultures (Brett, 2014).

4. Study 1: Bibliometric analysis

4.1. Performance analysis

Following standard protocol, this section presents first, the publication and citation structure of the articles, serving as indicators of productivity and impact, respectively. It then reports the most influential papers and the top journals, followed by an introduction to leading authors, countries and institutions. In cases of equal publications, total citations were used for rankings (Öztürk et al., 2024).

4.1.1. Publication and citation structure of i-deals

This section provides an overview of i-deals' annual publications and citations from the first publication in 2001 to 2023, revealing overarching research trends and showcasing a distinct upward trajectory, as illustrated in Figure 2. Additionally, a summary of the top twenty journals with the highest number of publications and citations is described.

Table 1 shows that 2016 was the year with the highest number of citations, 596, although the highest number of publications was in 2022, with 32 documents. Besides, this table also presents data about the contributions that receive more than 200, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 citations. Of all the articles published over the past 22 years, only 2.08% received 200 or more citations, while 80.73% of the documents received at least one citation.

Table 2 shows the list of journals that contributed the most published articles to the field of i-deals. The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* each published 12 articles, the largest number in this field. Followed by *Frontiers in Psychology* with 10 articles and *Human Relations* and *Group & Organization Management* with 9 each.

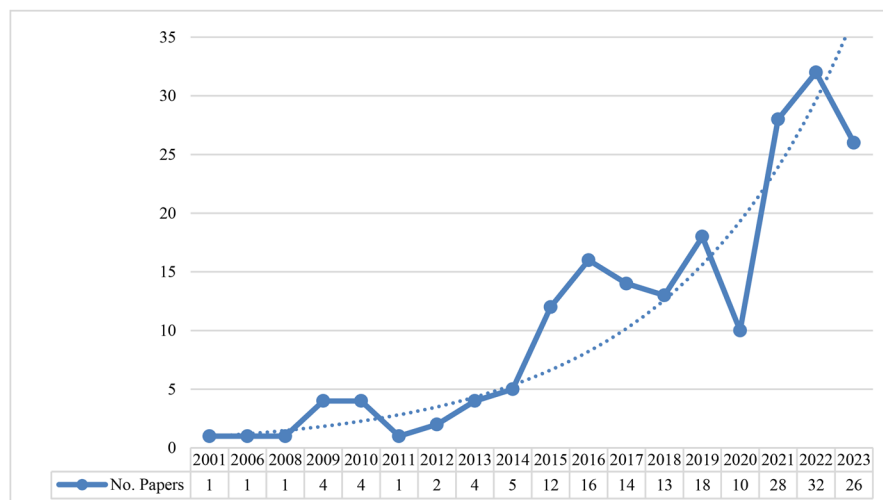


Figure 2. Publication trend over time on i-deals (June 2001–August 2023).

Table 1. Annual citation structure of publications.

Year	>200	>100	>50	>20	>10	>5	>1	TP	TC
2023	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	26	28
2022	0	0	0	1	2	6	18	32	131
2021	0	0	0	3	9	21	26	28	294
2020	0	0	1	4	6	10	10	10	210
2019	0	0	0	6	11	15	18	18	337
2018	0	0	1	5	9	10	12	13	296
2017	0	0	3	7	10	12	14	14	415
2016	0	1	3	13	15	15	16	16	596
2015	0	1	4	10	11	12	12	12	555
2014	0	0	2	5	5	5	5	5	218
2013	0	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	353
2012	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	190
2011	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	45
2010	2	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	536
2009	0	1	3	4	4	4	4	4	347
2008	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	259
2006	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	363
2001	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	160
Total	4	11	27	72	96	125	155	192	5,333
Percentage	2.08%	5.73%	14.06%	37.50%	50.00%	65.10%	80.73%	100.00%	–

Abbreviations: >200, >100, >50, >20, >10, >5, >1=Number of papers with more than 200, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, and 1 citations.

TP=total papers; TC=total citations.

Source: Authors own work.

Table 2. Top contributing journals.

R	Journal	2001–2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TP
1	<i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	4	0	2	2	2	2	0	12
2	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	3	0	1	0	3	4	1	12
3	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	0	0	0	0	4	5	1	10
4	<i>Human Relations</i>	2	2	1	0	1	1	2	9
5	<i>Group & Organization Management</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	8	9
6	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	8
7	<i>Human Resource Management Journal</i>	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	8
8	<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
9	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	3	1	0	1	0	1	0	6
10	<i>Personnel Review</i>	2	0	0	1	0	1	2	6
11	<i>Journal of Management</i>	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	5
12	<i>Journal of Managerial Psychology</i>	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
13	<i>Career Development International</i>	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
14	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
15	<i>Work Aging and Retirement</i>	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
16	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
17	<i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i>	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
18	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
19	<i>Leadership Quarterly</i>	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
20	<i>Journal of Business and Psychology</i>	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3

Abbreviations are available in previous tables.

Source: Authors own work.

4.1.2. Influential papers on i-deals

In this section, the 30 most cited articles on i-deals are outlined in Table 3. For each article, the table includes the author(s), year of publication, publishing journal, total and annual citation counts, key findings, i-deals timing, and type. These selected articles form our database for Study 2—the content analysis described in Section 5.

Table 3. Most cited articles in the i-deals literature.

R	TC	C/Y	Author; year; journal	Key findings	I-deals timing	I-deal content
1	363	21.35	Rousseau, Denise M.; Ho, Violet T.; Greenberg, Jerald. 2006. <i>Academy of Management Review</i>	Defines i-deals as individualised work arrangements negotiated between employees and employers for mutual benefit. Differentiates between functional and dysfunctional i-deals, stressing the role of timing, content, and co-workers' fairness perceptions in their effectiveness.	Ex-ante Ex-post	Concept definition
2	259	17.27	Hornung, Severin; Rousseau, Denise M.; Glaser, Juergen; 2008; <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	Studies development and flexibility i-deals among public employees. Development i-deals positively linked to work–family conflict and unpaid overtime, while flexibility i-deals have a negative association. Developmental i-deals were also positively related to job performance and affective commitment, while flexibility i-deals were unrelated to both outcomes.	Ex-post	Flexibility Development
3	223	17.15	Anand, Smriti; Vidyarthi, Prajya R.; Liden, Robert C.; Rousseau, Denise M.; 2010. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	Developmental i-deals are positively related to employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), especially among those with low-quality relationships with their leaders or co-workers. I-deals serve as substitutes for strong social exchange relationships, compensating for low LMX or team-member exchange (TMX). Even employees in weak workplace relationships can become good organisational citizens when granted i-deals.	Ex-post	Development
4	221	17.00	Hornung, Severin; Rousseau, Denise M.; Glaser, Juergen; Angerer, Peter; Weigl, Matthias. 2010. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	Task i-deals, supported by LMX, positively affect perceived job complexity and control, and reduce stressors—ultimately boosting personal initiative and work engagement. Employees whose requests for task i-deals were rejected tended to negatively evaluate their job characteristics.	Ex-post	Task
5	160	7.27	Rousseau, Denise M. 2001. <i>Organizational Dynamics</i>	Explores how i-deals arise and evolve in the modern workplace, emphasising their dual role in balancing individual flexibility with organisational fairness. It argues that i-deals offer a pathway for employee-driven customisation while presenting managerial challenges in maintaining fairness.	Ex-ante Ex-post	Concept definition
6	149	13.55	Bal, P. Matthijs; De Jong, Simon B.; Jansen, Paul G. W.; Bakker, Arnold B. 2012. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	Flexibility i-deals significantly enhance employees' motivation to continue working after retirement, regardless of the unit climate. In contrast, development i-deals only increase motivation under low accommodative climates. Thus, the motivational impact of development i-deals is climate-dependent, whereas flexibility i-deals have a consistent positive effect.	Not specified	Flexibility Development
7	144	14.40	Rosen, Christopher C.; Slater, Daniel J.; Chang, Chu-Hsiang (Daisy); Johnson, Russell E. 2013. <i>Journal of Management</i>	Develops and validates a multidimensional scale for measuring ex-post i-deals, confirming four distinct content dimensions—schedule and location flexibility, task and work responsibilities, and financial incentives. High LMX increases the likelihood of i-deal negotiation.	Ex-post	Flexibility Development Financial Task
8	124	17.71	Liao, Chenwei; Wayne, Sandy J.; Rousseau, Denise M. 2016. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	This review synthesises theoretical and empirical work on i-deals and confirms their positive effects on outcomes like job satisfaction, commitment, and proactive behaviours. It highlights that the impact of i-deals depends on their content, timing, and cultural context, with social exchange and job design theories offering partial explanations.	Ex-ante Ex-post	Flexibility Development Financial Task
9	123	15.38	Gajendran, Ravi S.; Harrison, David A. Delaney-Klinger, Kelly; 2015. <i>Personnel Psychology</i>	Telecommuting, framed as a flexibility i-deals, is positively associated with task and contextual performance. These positive effects are mediated by perceived autonomy and moderated by the social context, including LMX and team norms around telecommuting.	Not specified	Flexibility

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

R	TC	C/Y	Author; year; journal	Key findings	I-deals timing	I-deal content
10	110	7.86	Hornung, Severin; Rousseau, Denise M.; Glaser, Juergen. 2009. <i>Journal of Managerial Psychology</i>	Supervisors authorise different types of i-deals—developmental, flexibility, and workload reduction—based on employee initiative, structural job constraints, and unfulfilled obligations. According to supervisors, development i-deals lead to performance and motivation, flexibility i-deals enhance perceived work-life balance, and workload reduction i-deals serve as a compensatory resource when unfulfilled obligations towards their employees exist.	Ex-post	Flexibility Development
11	109	10.90	Liu, Jun; Lee, Cynthia; Hui, Chun; Kwan, Ho Kwong; Wu, Long-Zeng. 2013. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	Developmental and flexibility i-deals positively influence affective commitment and proactive behaviours through social exchange and self-enhancement mechanisms. Self-enhancement mechanisms are stronger among employees with high individualism, while social exchange mechanisms are more effective for low-individualism employees.	Ex-post	Flexibility Development
12	98	7.00	Lai, Lei; Rousseau, Denise M.; Chang, Klarissa Ting. 2009. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	Co-workers react to others' i-deals, and expectations of comparable future opportunities enhance acceptance. In contrast, economic exchange relationships reduce co-workers' willingness to support others' i-deals. The acceptance of another's i-deal is greater when the i-dealer is a close friend and when the relationship with the employer is based on a social exchange.	Ex-post	Concept definition
13	93	18.60	Wu, Chia-Huei; Parker, Sharon K.; Wu, Long-Zeng; Lee, Cynthia. 2018. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	Employees with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to exhibit work unit-oriented proactive behaviour when job interdependence is high. In contrast, employees with an independent self-construal engage in career-oriented, proactive behaviour when job autonomy is high.	Not specified	Concept definition
14	93	6.64	Rousseau, Denise M.; Hornung, Severin; Kim, Tai Gyu. 2009. <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	I-deals impact the employment relations; however, this differs depending on the content and timing of the agreements. Ex-post i-deals are more common and exert a stronger positive influence on the social exchange relationship, while ex-ante i-deals show limited effects. Among content types, developmental i-deals enhance perceptions of social exchange, whereas flexibility i-deals (hours) increase perceptions of economic exchange.	Ex-ante Ex-post	Flexibility Development
15	86	10.75	Kooij, Dorien T. A. M.; Zacher, Hannes; Wang, Mo; Heckhausen, Jutta. 2015. <i>Work Aging and Retirement</i>	Proposes a multilevel process model of successful ageing at work, emphasising the proactive maintenance or adaptive recovery of high levels of ability and motivation to work in older employees. The model integrates individual, job, organisational, and societal factors, offering actionable insights for future research and human resources (HR) practices.	Ex-post (implicit)	Concept definition
16	79	13.17	De Menezes, Lilian M.; Kelliher, Clare. 2017. <i>Human Resource Management</i>	Concludes the differences between formal and informal arrangements regarding flexibility (eg. remote working and working hours). Informal arrangement over flexible working is positively associated with job satisfaction and organisational commitment, while formal flexibility has more mixed effects, leading to higher satisfaction but lower performance. The findings emphasise the importance of the negotiation process and perceived autonomy in shaping employee outcomes.	Ex-post	Flexibility

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

R	TC	C/Y	Author; year; journal	Key findings	I-deals timing	I-deal content
17	79	7.90	Marescaux, Elise; De Winne, Sophie; Sels, Luc. 2013. <i>Human Resource Management Journal</i>	Employees' perceived favourability of differentiated HR practices (i.e. i-deals) is positively related to affective organisational commitment, but this relationship is curvilinear: gains in commitment diminish at higher levels of favourability. The effect is stronger for socio-emotional HR practices—like autonomy and development—than for economic ones—like bonuses.	Not specified	Flexibility Development Financial
18	75	9.38	Ng, Thomas W. H.; Feldman, Daniel C. 2015. <i>Journal of Management</i>	Scheduling flexibility and development i-deals positively influence employees' voice behaviour. These effects are mediated by flexible work role orientation, internal networking, and organisational trust. Effects are stronger for development i-deals and among Chinese (collectivist) employees. I-deals function as valued social exchange resources, encouraging reciprocal pro-organisational behaviour over time.	Not specified	Flexibility Development
19	74	9.25	Boehm, Stephan A.; Dwertmann, David J. G. 2015. <i>Work Aging and Retirement</i>	Proposes a model to enhance the positive effects—and mitigate the negative effects—of age and disability diversity in the workplace. It identifies leadership, inclusive organisational climates, and supportive HR practices, including i-deals, as key moderators in the diversity–performance relationship.	Not specified	Concept definition
20	72	12.00	Ng, Thomas W. H. 2017. <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	Developmental i-deals granted to a colleague can trigger malicious envy and feelings of being envied towards the i-dealer, increasing perceptions of a competitive climate. This competitive climate leads to felt ostracism, which ultimately predicts voluntary turnover, especially among young, educated employees.	Ex-post	Development
21	72	8.00	Hornung, Severin; Rousseau, Denise M.; Weigl, Matthias; Mueller, Andreas; Glaser, Juergen. 2014. <i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i>	Task, career, and flexibility i-deals operate through distinct mediators—job autonomy, skill acquisition, and reduced work overload, respectively—each influencing different work outcomes each job performance, self-efficacy, and psychological work strain. LMX serves as a key antecedent for all three i-deal types.	Ex-post	Flexibility Development Task
22	70	10.00	Luksyte, Aleksandra; Spitzmueller, Christiane. 2016. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	Perceived overqualification is positively related to supervisor-rated creativity, but only under specific contextual conditions: high perceived organisational support (POS), opportunities to mentor others, and successful negotiation of developmental i-deals. Developmental i-deals emerged as a contextual factor to maximise the contributions of overqualified employees.	Not specified	Development
23	70	5.38	Ng, Thomas W. H.; Feldman, Daniel C. 2010. <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	Perceptions of idiosyncratic contracts are positively related to affective organisational commitment, and this relationship is moderated by individual differences—perception of self-worth. Affective commitment appears to be stronger for employees with low core self-evaluations who feel the obligation to reciprocate for the i-deal granted.	Not specified	Flexibility Development Financial
24	68	7.56	Ng, Thomas W. H.; Feldman, Daniel C.; Butts, Marcus M. 2015. <i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i>	Psychological contract breaches (PCBs) reduce constructive voice and slightly increase aggressive voice, but only under certain relational conditions. Increases in co-worker exchange (CWX) and LMX over time weaken the negative impact of PCBs on voice behaviours.	Not specified	Concept definition

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

R	TC	C/Y	Author; year; journal	Key findings	I-deals timing	I-deal content
25	57	19.00	Kehoe, Rebecca R.; Han, Joo Hun. 2020. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	Line managers shape differentiated employee experiences across and within units. Proposes that i-deals are a micro-level mechanism through which line managers contribute to workforce differentiation and offers an aspirational research agenda.	Not specified	Concept definition
26	56	9.33	De Vos, Ans; Cambre, Bart. 2017. <i>Human Resource Management</i>	One central path to firm success includes developmental i-deals, supportive practices, and individual career responsibility. The findings conclude that a combination of supportive and developmental practices with i-deals and individual responsibility for career management are core building blocks of high-performance organisations.	Ex-post	Development
27	52	7.43	Ng, Thomas W. H.; Lucianetti, Lorenzo. 2016. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	Achievement and status striving are positively associated with employees' receipt of i-deals, which in turn enhance in-role job performance. Moreover, perceived co-worker i-deals strengthen the effect of status striving on i-deal receipt. The findings highlight both personal motivation and social context in i-deal negotiation and outcomes.	Not specified	Flexibility Development
28	48	6.00	Bal, P. Matthijs; Dorenbosch, Luc. 2015. <i>Human Resource Management Journal</i>	Availability and use of individualised development practices are positively related to organisational performance. Results also indicate lower sickness absence in organisations where individualised work schedules are available. Furthermore, authors argued and found support that employee age would moderate the relationship between the use of individualised work schedules and sickness absence.	Not specified	Flexibility Development Financial
29	46	3.29	McInnis, Kate J.; Meyer, John P.; Feldman, Susan. 2009. <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	Psychological contract features to employees' affective and normative commitment. Higher levels of commitment were reported when contracts were viewed as built on trust, mutually negotiated, equitable, and designed for the long term. Conversely, commitment was generally lower when contracts were seen as imposed, unfair, or short-term in scope. Complementarily, i-deals were positively related to normative but not to affective commitments, suggesting that they foster a sense of obligation rather than genuine emotional attachment to the organisation.	Ex-post	Concept definition
30	45	45.00	Malik, Ashish; Budhwar, Pawan; Patel, Charmi; Srikanth, N. R. 2022. <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	AI-driven HR applications significantly improved HR cost efficiency, employee experience quality and reduced turnover intentions in multinational enterprises (MNEs). These tools—such as bots, virtual assistants, and digital platforms—were integrated across various HR functions, including those supporting individualised practices like i-deals,	Ex-ante Ex-post	Flexibility Development Task Financial

Abbreviations are available in previous tables except for: C/Y=Citations per year.

Source: Authors own work.

The article by Rousseau et al. (2006) published in the *Academy of Management Review*, which develops propositions specifying both how i-deals are formed and how they impact workers and co-workers, tops the list with 363 citations received, an average of 21.35 per year. It is followed by Hornung et al. (2008) study, which explores distinct i-deals by examining individual proactivity and organisational practices as antecedents, and assesses their impact on employees' attitudes, performance, and work-life conflict, with 259 citations received, 17.27 per year. Notably, the rest of the table presents a wide diversity of authors.

The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* boasts four of the 30 most cited articles. Meanwhile, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* has the highest proportion of citations per article per year, with 45.

4.1.3. Leading authors, countries, and institutions publishing on i-deals

This part of the study shows in [Tables 4–6](#) the most prolific authors in i-deals publications, the institutions to which they have been affiliated and the countries of these institutions.

[Table 4](#) shows the top 30 most active authors according to the number of total peer-reviewed articles. Additionally, author affiliation, residing country and *h* index are also reported. Based on the obtained results, Rousseau from Carnegie Mellon University (USA), Rofcanin from the University of Bath (UK) and Bal from the University of Lincoln (UK) are the three leading authors in terms of number of publications. Notably, Rousseau is the clear leader in total citations, with 1,865.

The next analysis of this section describes the leading countries by the number of i-deals publications. [Table 5](#) ranks the productivity of the top 30 countries, including their respective supraregion, total publications, citations, *h* index, the population of each country to compute publications per capita, as well as various ratios between them. The top three countries with the highest number of publications and citations in i-deals are the United States, China and the United Kingdom.

[Table 6](#) shows the top 30 institutions that have the most influence in shaping the i-deals field with respect to published papers. We have also included the total number of citations, *h* index, citation-to-publication ratio, and the number of articles with more than 50, 25, or 5 citations. The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the Quacquarelli Symonds University Ranking (QS) are also reported to enable a comparison between institutions (Sáez-Ortuño et al., 2024). The last column of the table shows the number of articles that each institution has among the 30 most cited. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University tops this list, followed by the University of Hong Kong. Next, we find Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Bath and the University of Quebec at Montreal all of them with 5 publications. Notably, 9 of the top 30 universities are in the United States and another 5 in China, which is consistent with the results in [Table 5](#).

Similarly, [Table 7](#) shows the trend of publications by geographical region by using total publications, total citations, the *h* index, the ratio of total citations divided by total publications and the share of each region among the top 30 most cited papers. Based on this classification, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, specifically Northern America, are the top regions for these indicators. The list of geographic regions comes from the UN Statistics Division database (Sáez-Ortuño et al., 2024). Each of these regions is based on continental regions, which are further subdivided into sub-regions to obtain greater homogeneity in sizes of population and demographic circumstances. Therefore, the detailed results for each sub-region are also shown in [Table 7](#).

4.2. Science mapping

In this last section, the VOSviewer software is used to perform network analysis and to graphically display the co-citation of journals and authors, bibliographic coupling of institutions and countries, and co-occurrence of keywords defined by the authors, as well as those extracted from article titles and abstracts.

[Figure 3](#) shows the co-citation of journals in the field of this study with a threshold of 10 and the 100 most representative co-citation connections. A journal co-citation refers to ‘a citation from a publication by two different publications from distinct journals’ (Cancino et al., 2019, p. 8). As shown as follows, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and the *Academy of Management Journal* are the two journals that receive the most co-citations.

[Figure 4](#) shows the co-citation of authors in i-deals field with a threshold of 10 and the 100 most representative co-citation connections. These findings are in line with the previous results obtained from the analysis of the authors in [Table 4](#). The different clusters are shown in different colours, and the links between them are also indicated.

Another item that was analysed using this software is the bibliographic coupling of institutions with a threshold of at least 3 publications, identifying 42 that met the criteria. [Figure 5](#) shows that the University of Bath, the Carnegie Mellon University, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the University of Hong Kong are the most prominent institutions. These findings are consistent with the earlier outcomes derived from the examination of the most productive and influential institutions in [Table 6](#).

Table 4. Top 30 leading authors.

R	Author	Institution	Country	TP	TC	H	TC/TP
1	Rousseau, Denise M.	Carnegie Mellon University	USA	18	1,865	14	103.61
2	Rofcanin, Yasin	University of Bath	UK	14	261	9	18.64
		University of Warwick	UK	12	213		
		University of Essex	UK	1	28		
				1	20		
3	Bal, P. Matthijs			12	386	10	32.17
		University of Lincoln	UK	8	137		
		University of Bath	UK	3	100		
		Erasmus University Rotterdam	Netherlands	1	149		
4	Las Heras, Mireia	University of Navarra	Spain	10	169	6	16.90
5	Hornung, Severin			9	847	8	94.11
		Hong Kong Polytechnic University	China	6	491		
		Technical University of Munich	Germany	2	352		
		University of Innsbruck	Austria	1	4		
6	Luu, Tuan Trong			8	90	7	11.25
		Swinburne University of Technology	Australia	4	60		15.00
		Ho Chi Minh City University Economics	Vietnam	4	30		7.50
7	Glaser, Juergen			7	733	6	104.71
		Ludwig-Maximilians-University	Germany	3	288		
		Technical University of Munich	Germany	2	369		
		University of Innsbruck	Austria	2	76		
8	Ng, Thomas W. H.	University of Hong Kong	China	7	381	6	54.43
9	Marescaux, Elise			7	195	6	27.86
		IÉSEG School of Management	France	6	116		
		Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	Belgium	1	79		
10	Vidyarthi, Prajya R.			6	345	6	57.5
		Indiana University Kokomo	USA	1	223		
		University of Texas System	USA	5	122		
11	Anand, Smriti			6	332	6	55.33
		Illinois Institute of Technology	USA	5	109		
		University of Illinois System	USA	1	223		
12	Guerrero, Sylvie	University of Quebec at Montreal	Canada	6	79	4	13.17
13	Ho, Violet T.			5	458	4	91.60
		University of Richmond	USA	4	95		
		Nanyang Technological University	Singapore	1	363		
14	Liden, Robert C.	University of Illinois System	USA	5	320	5	64.00
15	De Winne, Sophie	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	Belgium	5	157	4	31.40
16	Stollberger, Jakob			5	94	4	18.80
		Aston University	UK	2	48		
		Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Netherlands	2	8		
		University of Cambridge	UK	1	38		
17	Bosch, Maria J.	ESE Business School	Chile	5	79	4	15.80
18	Van der Heijden, Beatrice I. J. M.	Open University of the Netherlands	Netherlands	5	71	4	14.20
19	Feldman, Daniel C.	University of Georgia	USA	4	254	4	63.50
20	Zhang, Xiaoyan	Beijing Jiaotong University	China	4	11	2	2.75
21	Weigl, Matthias	Ludwig-Maximilians-University	Germany	3	338	3	112.67
22	Jansen, Paul G. W.	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Netherlands	3	181	3	60.33
23	Wayne, Sandy J.	University of Illinois System	USA	3	167	3	55.67
24	Liao, Chenwei	Michigan State University	USA	3	163	2	54.33
25	Boehm, Stephan A.	University of St. Gallen	Switzerland	3	124	3	41.33
26	Kelliher, Clare	Cranfield University	UK	3	111	3	37.00
27	Meuser, Jeremy D.			3	55	3	18.33
		University of Mississippi	USA	2	16		
		University of Illinois System	USA	1	39		
28	Simosi, Maria			3	41	2	13.67
		University of London	UK	2	13		
		Roehampton University	UK	1	28		
29	Rowley, Chris	City University London	UK	3	22	3	7.33
30	Sun, Ning			3	16	2	5.33
		Nankai University	China	2	10		
		Hong Kong Polytechnic University	China	1	6		

Abbreviations are available in previous tables except for: H=h index; TC/TP=Ratio of citations divided by publications.

Source: Authors own work.

Table 5. The most productive and influential countries.

R	Country	Supraregion	TP	TC	H	TC/TP	Population	TP/pop	Top 30
1	USA	Northern America	42	1,351	23	32.17	340.0	0.12	9
2	China	Eastern Asia	40	486	14	12.15	1,425.7	0.03	9
3	UK	Northern Europe	25	1,150	15	46.00	67.7	0.37	3
4	Australia	Australia and New Zealand	12	375	8	31.25	26.4	0.45	2
5	Netherlands	Western Europe	10	185	6	18.50	17.6	0.57	2
6	Canada	Northern America	8	195	5	24.38	38.8	0.21	1
7	Spain	Southern Europe	6	179	4	29.83	47.5	0.13	–
8	Germany	Western Europe	5	104	3	20.80	83.3	0.06	1
9	Vietnam	South-eastern Asia	4	190	4	47.50	98.9	0.04	–
10	Turkey	Western Asia	4	158	2	39.50	85.8	0.05	–
11	India	Southern Asia	4	91	1	22.75	1428.6	0.00	–
12	France	Western Europe	4	76	4	19.00	64.8	0.06	–
13	Belgium	Western Europe	4	56	2	14.00	11.7	0.34	2
14	Switzerland	Western Europe	4	22	4	5.50	8.8	0.45	1
15	Greece	Southern Europe	2	48	2	24.00	10.3	0.19	–
16	Scotland	Northern Europe	1	223	0	223.00	5.5	0.18	–
17	Chile	South America	1	144	1	144.00	19.6	0.05	–
18	South Africa	Southern Africa	1	70	0	70.00	60.4	0.02	–
19	Kuwait	Western Asia	1	56	1	56.00	4.3	0.23	–
20	Kenya	Eastern Africa	1	36	1	36.00	55.1	0.02	–
21	Argentina	South America	1	33	0	33.00	45.8	0.02	–
22	Japan	Eastern Asia	1	23	1	23.00	123.3	0.01	–
23	Ecuador	South America	1	23	0	23.00	18.2	0.05	–
24	Pakistan	Southern Asia	1	14	1	14.00	240.5	0.00	–
25	Korea	Eastern Asia	1	12	1	12.00	26.2	0.04	–
26	Sweden	Northern Europe	1	10	1	10.00	10.6	0.09	–
27	Afghanistan	Southern Asia	1	9	1	9.00	42.2	0.02	–
28	Taiwan	Eastern Asia	1	7	1	7.00	23.9	0.04	–
29	Austria	Western Europe	1	7	1	7.00	9.0	0.11	–
30	Italy	Southern Europe	1	0	1	0.00	58.9	0.02	–

Abbreviations are available in previous tables except for: Population=In millions of inhabitants by 2023; TP/Pop=Total papers per million inhabitants; Top 30=The 30 most cited papers.

Source: Authors own work.

Next, the bibliographic coupling of countries was analysed, with a threshold of at least 3 publications per country throughout 2001–2023. Here, a larger node size indicates a higher frequency of documents from that country. [Figure 6](#) illustrates that the most prominent countries in i-deals research are the United States, United Kingdom, and China, as also indicated in [Table 5](#), with evident strong collaborative ties highlighting their extensive historical and ongoing partnerships. The colour gradient reveals that Germany, Canada and Vietnam have established collaborations dating back to earlier years. Furthermore, the analysis shows that India, Chile, and New Zealand are recent entrants to the research landscape, with significant contributions emerging after 2020.

The following analysis examines the frequency with which specific keywords appear together in i-deal articles by a particular author during the study period [Figure 7](#) shows the co-occurrence of all keywords present in the analysed documents with a minimum threshold of five occurrences per term regardless of whether they are specified by the author. To standardize terms and reduce variations in spelling and synonyms (e.g. ‘idiosyncratic deal’ and ‘i-deals’) a thesaurus file was used (van Eck & Waltman, 2020). As can be seen, 93 keywords out of 1041 meet the criteria, including the terms ‘i-deals,’ ‘performance,’ ‘work’ and ‘antecedents’ are the most prominent. Each cluster is explained in detail in the following section.

4.3. Discussion of Study 1

The bibliometric analysis addressed the first two research questions presented in the Theoretical background. To answer the first question, *What is the underlying structure of i-deals’ knowledge?*, we conducted a cluster analysis using VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Based on the keywords of the 192 papers, we applied combined mapping and clustering techniques following Waltman et al. (2010) to structure the main topics within the i-deals scientific domain. Keyword-based clustering is a suitable method for large publication sets (Weißer et al., 2020). The resulting network visualisation map reveals five thematic clusters, each represented by a different colour, with keywords shown in their respective cluster colour (McAllister et al., 2022).

Table 6. The most productive and influential institutions.

R	Institution	Country	TP	TC	H	TC/TP	>50	>25	>5	ARWU	QS	Top 30
1	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	China	9	499	6	55.44	3	4	7	151–200	57	3
2	University of Hong Kong	China	7	381	6	54.43	5	6	6	69	17	5
3	Carnegie Mellon University	USA	5	644	4	128.80	3	4	4	101–150	58	3
4	University of Bath	UK	5	123	5	24.60	0	2	5	501–600	150	1
5	University of Quebec at Montreal	Canada	5	76	4	15.20	0	2	4	801–900	–	–
6	Michigan State University	USA	4	185	3	46.25	1	2	3	151–200	152	1
7	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Netherlands	4	70	4	17.50	0	1	3	151–200	221	–
8	University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	Vietnam	4	60	4	15.00	0	1	4	–	–	–
9	University of Lincoln	UK	4	59	3	14.75	0	1	3	–	851–900	–
10	Swinburne University of Technology	Australia	4	30	3	7.50	0	0	3	201–300	291	–
11	University of Illinois System	USA	3	350	3	116.67	2	2	2	301–400	365	2
12	California State University System	USA	3	81	3	27.00	0	2	3	–	–	–
13	IÉSEG School of Management	France	3	77	3	25.67	0	2	3	–	–	–
14	Illinois Institute of Technology	USA	3	41	3	13.67	0	1	3	–	601–610	–
15	Shanghai University	China	3	40	2	13.33	0	1	2	201–300	489	–
16	Beijing Jiaotong University	China	3	11	2	3.67	0	0	1	501–600	901–950	–
17	Erasmus University Rotterdam	Netherlands	2	169	2	84.50	1	1	2	101–150	158	1
18	University of London	UK	2	106	2	53.00	1	1	2	801–900	477	1
19	University of St. Gallen	Switzerland	2	94	2	47.00	1	1	2	–	–	1
20	Tilburg University	Netherlands	2	89	2	44.50	1	1	1	701–800	347	1
21	University of Western Australia	Australia	2	79	2	39.50	1	1	2	101–150	77	1
22	University of Texas System	USA	2	68	2	34.00	0	1	2	801–900	1001–1200	–
23	University of Navarra	Spain	2	61	2	30.50	0	1	2	501–600	249	–
24	Rutgers State University of New Jersey	USA	2	60	2	30.00	1	1	1	101–150	328	1
25	University of Richmond	USA	2	58	2	29.00	0	1	2	–	–	–
26	Manchester Metropolitan University	UK	2	51	2	25.50	0	1	2	601–700	601–610	–
27	University of Newcastle	Australia	2	46	1	23.00	0	1	1	401–500	179	1
28	Purdue University	USA	2	44	2	22.00	0	1	1	–	89	–
29	University of Macedonia	Greece	2	17	2	8.50	0	0	2	–	–	–
30	Nankai University	China	2	10	1	5.00	0	0	1	151–200	377	–

Abbreviations are available in previous tables except for: ARWU=Academic Ranking of World Universities; QS=QS Ranking.

Source: Authors own work.

The VOSviewer analysis, presented in [Figure 7](#), yields several insights. First, it uncovers five thematic clusters. Second, it shows that cluster 1 (red) is central, with most publications either belonging to or linked to it. Third, only 8% of publications belong exclusively to one cluster, highlighting the strong interconnections among clusters. Moreover, clusters 2 (green) and 3 (blue) are closely related, while

Table 7. Publications by geographic regions.

R	Supraregions	TP	TC	H	TC/TP	Top 30
1	Europe	66	2,060	23	31.21	9
	Northern Europe	28	1,383	15	49.39	3
	Western Europe	28	450	15	16.07	6
	Southern Europe	10	227	7	22.70	–
2	Asia	58	1,046	16	18.03	9
	Eastern Asia	43	528	14	12.28	9
	Southern Asia	6	114	2	19.00	–
	Western Asia	5	214	2	42.80	–
	South-Eastern Asia	4	190	4	47.50	–
3	Americas	54	1,746	24	32.33	10
	Northern America	50	1,546	24	30.92	10
	South America	4	200	1	50.00	–
4	Oceania	12	375	8	31.25	2
	Australia and New Zealand	12	375	8	31.25	2
5	Africa	2	106	1	53.00	–
	Southern Africa	1	70	0	70.00	–
	Eastern Africa	1	36	1	36.00	–

Abbreviations are available in previous tables.

Source: Authors own work.

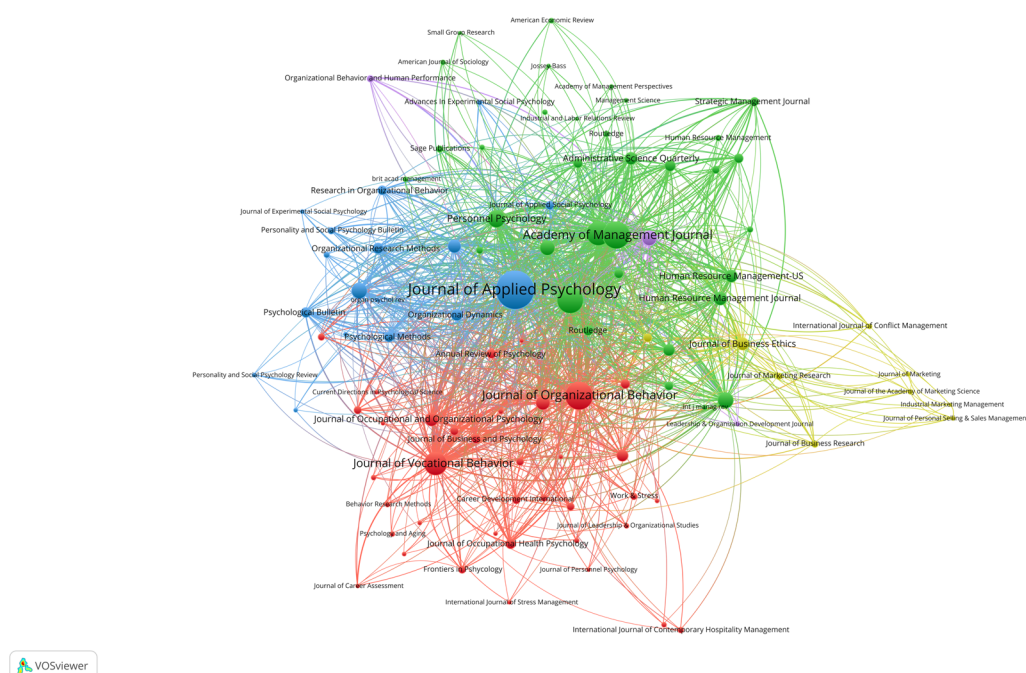


Figure 3. Co-citation of journals.

cluster 5 (purple) appears the most independent. No publications belong exclusively to cluster 2. Below, we describe each cluster in more detail:

- *Cluster 1: Flexibility (Red)*. Keywords include 'flexibility', 'quality', and 'self-efficacy'. Works in this cluster explore the benefits of flexibility i-deals, often linked to age, psychological contracts, and quality of the agreement. A study representing this cluster is *An exploration of older worker flexible working arrangements in smaller firms* by Atkinson and Sandiford (2016), showing flexibility i-deals' positive impact on productive ageing.
- *Cluster 2: Antecedents and Consequences (Green)*. Involving keywords like 'antecedents', 'consequences', 'organisational citizenship behaviour', and 'work-life balance'. Works within this cluster explore the antecedents for negotiating i-deals and the consequences of being granted for employees and organisations. A key study representing it is *'Idiosyncratic deals and employee outcomes: The mediating roles of social exchange and self-enhancement and the moderating role of individualism'* by Liu et al. (2013), analysing i-deals' impact in outcomes such as commitment and proactive behaviours.

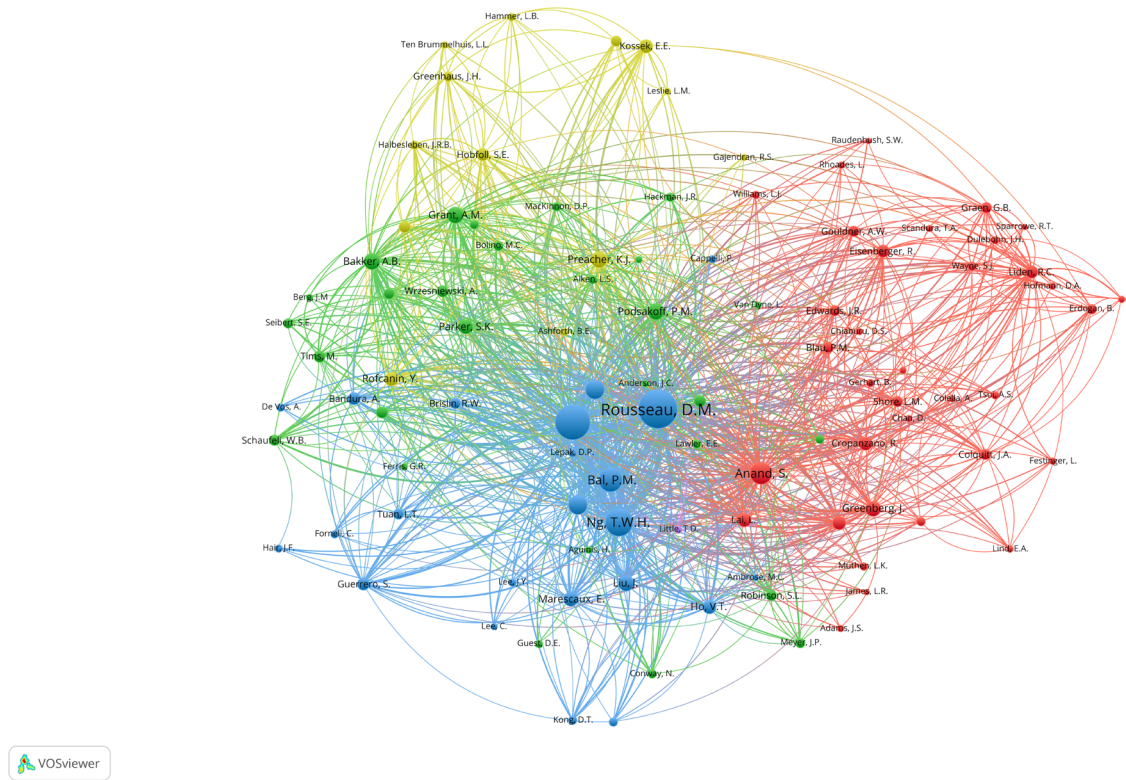


Figure 4. Co-citation of authors.

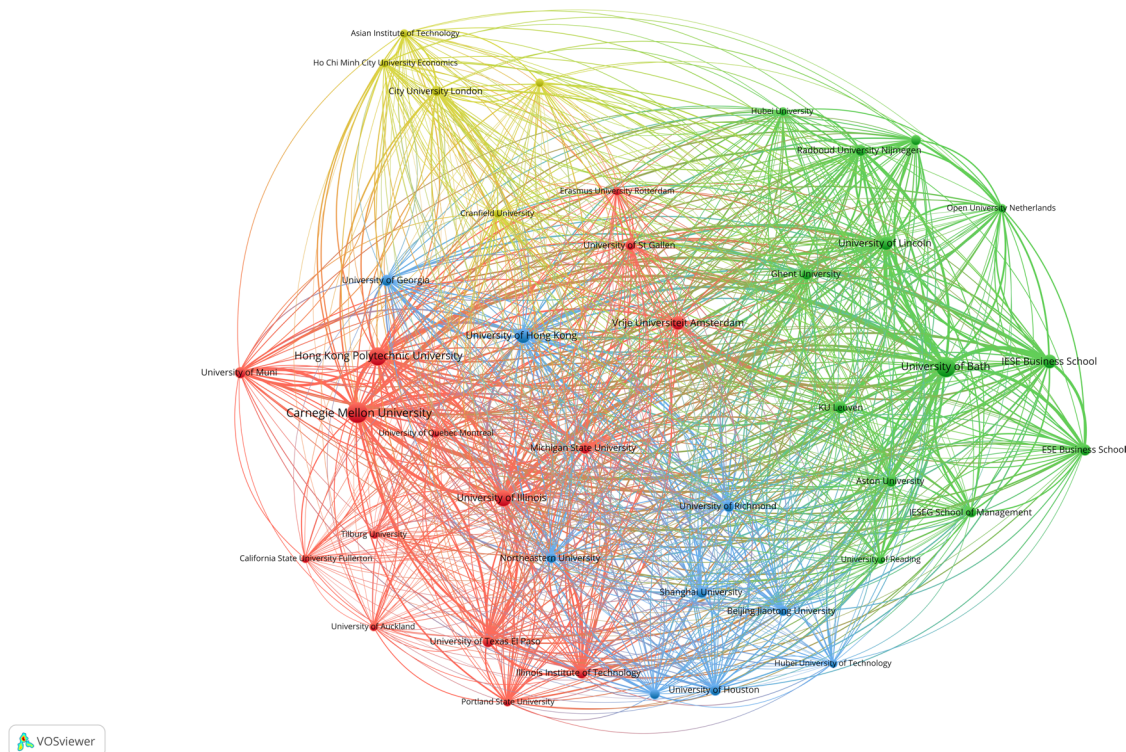


Figure 5. Bibliographic coupling of institutions.

- *Cluster 3: Leadership (Blue).* Keywords include 'leader-member exchange', 'performance', and 'support'. Research inside this cluster emphasises leader-employee relationships in negotiating i-deals. Exemplified by 'Leader-member exchange as a linking pin in the idiosyncratic deals—Performance



A horizontal timeline bar with a color gradient from dark blue on the left to yellow on the right. It has tick marks for the years 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022.



- *Cluster 4: Co-workers' Perspective (Yellow)*. Keywords comprise 'justice'—distributive and procedural—, 'fairness', and 'performance'. This cluster addresses one of the main challenges of i-deals, how co-workers perceive i-deals granted to their colleagues. A work representative of this cluster is

'Co-worker reactions to i-deals through the lens of social comparison: The role of fairness and emotions' by Marescaux et al. (2021), which examines how co-workers' emotions influence their reactions and behaviours—positively or negatively—toward colleagues' i-deals.

- *Cluster 5: Proactivity (Purple)*. Keywords include 'proactive behaviour', 'creativity', 'innovation', 'job satisfaction', and 'social exchange' among others. This cluster focuses on the positive outcomes of i-deals, such as innovation and psychological empowerment, as seen in *'Idiosyncratic deals and employee creativity: The mediating role of creative self-efficacy'* by Wang et al. (2018) Wang et al. (2018). This study analyses the impact of flexibility and development i-deals on employee creativity, also exploring the mediating effect of creative self-efficacy.

Overall, this structural analysis reveals that i-deals research is highly interconnected yet centralised around the cluster of flexibility, which appears as a main area of research. While five distinct clusters emerge, topics like the perception of justice and fairness by co-workers appear as a significant cluster, and the cluster on innovation and creativity shows important cross-cluster links, especially with leadership and psychological contracts.

To address the second research question: *Which papers, authors, and institutions have contributed most to the i-deals domain?* Table 3 presents the 30 most influential studies, which will be examined in greater depth in the content analysis of Study 2. However, to answer this research question we advance here that leading contributions come from Anand et al. (2010), Hornung et al. (2008, 2010), Rousseau (2001), and Rousseau et al. (2006). Rousseau emerges as the most prolific researcher, with 18 publications and 1,865 citations, while Weigl holds the highest citation-to-publication ratio.

Interestingly, the years 2015 and 2016 saw the highest citation counts, marking the onset of exponential growth, with 28 articles published. This rise was driven by the increasing complexity of employment relationships and evolving workforce dynamics, fuelled by globalisation and technological progress. Additionally, the 86 articles published in the last three years have not yet had time to gain traction and accumulate comparable citations. Overall, the 192 articles were published across 75 journals, with the top 20 accounting for 63.54% of the papers. The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management* are the most prolific, each publishing 12 articles.

In terms of geography, the United States leads in both publications and citations, followed by China and the United Kingdom. Among institutions, Hong Kong Polytechnic University ranks highest in publications, followed by the University of Hong Kong and Carnegie Mellon University, the latter also leading in citations. Notably, Glaser, one of the most productive authors, and Weigl, who has the highest ratio of citations per publication, are not affiliated with any of the 30 most productive institutions in the field.

In summary, while i-deals research remains concentrated among a small group of scholars, in recent years this group has grown, adding diversity in terms of cultures, theoretical, and methodological approaches. This trend reflects growing academic and organisational interest across cultures in individualised employment relationships and adaptability to employee needs.

5. Study 2: Content analysis

Each of the 30 highest-impact studies listed in Table 3 was coded using the eight categories outlined above. This coding process was used to identify recurring patterns in the i-deals literature over time and to highlight potential gaps for future research. The frequency distributions of these categories are presented in Table 8. Most of the studies (73.33%) employed quantitative methods. There are five conceptual studies for which the timing of i-deals, economic sector, ownership status, and geographic context was not classified. The analysis of the theoretical frameworks used in i-deals research reveals a predominant reliance on SET, which was employed in 33.33% of the studies. Followed by i-deals theory, being used in 14.29% of the research, LMX theory (7.14%), equity theory, job design theory and self-enhancement theory (4.76% each). A variety of other theories were each used in a smaller proportion.

In terms of i-deal timing, 40.00% of the articles did not differentiate between ex-post and ex-ante arrangements, while 43.33% focused exclusively on ex-post. Regarding i-deal content, the studies showed greater diversity, 33.33% focused on development i-deals, 28.89% on flexibility, 4.44% on task, and only

Table 8. Overview of studies on i-deals.

R	Dimension	TP (%)
1	Methodology	
	Quantitative	22 (73.33%)
	Conceptual	5 (16.67%)
	Mixed	2 (6.67%)
	Qualitative	1 (3.33%)
2	Theoretical framework	
	Social exchange theory	14 (33.33%)
	I-deals theory	6 (14.29%)
	Leader-Member Exchange theory	3 (7.14%)
	Equity theory	2 (4.76%)
	Job design theory	2 (4.76%)
	Self-enhancement theory	2 (4.76%)
	Continuity theory	1 (2.38%)
	Personality theory	1 (2.38%)
	Activity and disengagement theory	1 (2.38%)
	Human Capital theory	1 (2.38%)
	Lifespan theory	1 (2.38%)
	Person–environment fit theory	1 (2.38%)
	Self-construal theory	1 (2.38%)
	Trait activation theory	1 (2.38%)
	Cognitive appraisal theory	1 (2.38%)
	Signalling theory	1 (2.38%)
	Socioemotional selectivity theory	1 (2.38%)
	Strategic human resource management theory	1 (2.38%)
	Not specified	1 (2.38%)
3	I-deals timing	
	Ex-ante	0 (0.00%)
	Ex-post	13 (43.33%)
	Both	5 (16.67%)
	Not specified	12 (40.00%)
4	I-deals content	
	Development	15 (33.33%)
	Flexibility	13 (28.89%)
	Task	2 (4.44%)
	Financial	3 (6.67%)
	All	3 (6.67%)
	Concept definition	9 (20.00%)
5	Perspective	
	Employee	13 (43.33%)
	Organisation	7 (23.33%)
	Co-workers	1 (3.33%)
	Mixed	9 (30.00%)
6	Economic sector	
	Human health and social work activities	9 (15.79%)
	Consulting (HR, law, management, tax)	8 (14.04%)
	Information technology and communication (incl. software & IT services)	7 (12.28%)
	Financial services (incl. banking, insurance, investment, real estate)	5 (8.77%)
	Education and training	4 (7.02%)
	Manufacturing	4 (7.02%)
	Trade (wholesale/retail)	4 (7.02%)
	Architecture and engineering	2 (3.51%)
	Advertising/design/marketing	0 (0.00%)
	Construction	0 (0.00%)
	Tourism and leisure	0 (0.00%)
	Other services (e.g., transportation)	4 (7.02%)
	Various	5 (8.77%)
	N/A	5 (8.77%)
7	Ownership status	
	Private	8 (26.67%)
	Public	4 (13.33%)
	Both	3 (10.00%)
	Not specified	10 (33.33%)
	N/A	5 (16.67%)
8	Country	
	United States	12 (31.58%)
	China	5 (13.16%)
	Germany	5 (13.16%)
	India	3 (7.89%)
	Netherlands	3 (7.89%)
	Belgium	2 (5.26%)
	Korea	1 (2.63%)

(Continued)

Table 8. Continued.

R	Dimension	TP (%)
9	Italy	1 (2.63%)
	United Kingdom	1 (2.63%)
	N/A	5 (13.16%)
	Geographical subregions	
	Northern America	12 (31.58%)
	Western Europe	10 (26.32%)
	Eastern Asia	6 (15.79%)
	Southern Asia	3 (7.89%)
	Southern Europe	1 (2.63%)
	Northern Europe	1 (2.63%)
	N/A	5 (13.16%)

Abbreviations are available in previous tables.

Source: Authors own work.

6.67% examined financial i-deals or addressed all types. Additionally, 20.00% of the studies concentrated on defining the overall concept. As for perspectives, most studies (43.33%) captured only the employees' view, while 23.33% adopted an organisational perspective.

The distribution of studies across different economic sectors was varied. Human health and social work activities were the most frequently represented, accounting for 15.79% of the studies. This was followed by the consulting sector, including HR, law, management, and tax, which represented 14.04% of the studies, and the information technology and communication sector, which accounted for 12.28%. In terms of ownership status, the studies showed a preference for private sector organisations, which were the focus of 26.67% of the research while public organisations studies represent 13.33%.

Geographically, the studies were predominantly focused on the United States, which was the subject of 31.58% of the research. China and Germany each accounted for 13.16% of the studies, while India and the Netherlands were represented in 7.89% of the research. Other countries such as Belgium, Korea, Italy, and the United Kingdom had limited representation, each contributing to only a small fraction of the studies. In terms of broader geographical subregions, Northern America was the most studied area (31.58%), followed by Western Europe (26.32%) and Eastern Asia (15.79%).

5.1. Discussion of Study 2

Following the descriptive results, the analysis turns to interpreting their significance by answering the third research question: *What are the main findings of i-deals research up to 2023?* The literature overwhelmingly concludes that differentiated HR practices are becoming increasingly necessary in contemporary workplaces, with i-deals serving as a central mechanism to support this shift.

I-deals are consistently associated with positive outcomes for both employees and organisations. At the employee level, they lead to increased job satisfaction, work-life balance, autonomy, and motivation. At the organisational level, i-deals contribute to outcomes such as affective commitment, performance, creativity, and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB); as well as acting as a strategic tool for attracting and retaining highly skilled talent.

However, a recurring challenge identified in the literature involves the impact of i-deals on co-workers, particularly in relation to fairness perceptions. When co-workers anticipate similar opportunities in the future, their reactions tend to be positive, often supporting the i-dealer. In contrast, perceived unfairness can provoke envy and resistance, ultimately negatively affecting team dynamics. This line of research is expanding rapidly, as concerns over perceived favouritism and discriminatory individualisation in HR practices may undermine the intended benefits of this HR tool.

To address the fourth research question, *What future research directions emerge from the current research front?* we examined the gaps identified in both Study 1 and Study 2. These gaps are summarised in Table 9, organised by research area, specific theme, and the objective of each suggested direction.

6. General discussion

This bibliometric and content analysis examined i-deals research from 2001 to 2023 using the WoSCC database. The performance analyses reveal a surge in i-deals studies over the past decade, with 141 of

192 articles (73.44%) published in this period, suggesting strong potential for further growth. The growing focus on i-deals, particularly post COVID-19, underscores how new types of i-deals are emerging to accommodate flexibility and remote work. These findings provide valuable insights for organisational leaders seeking to develop personalised employee strategies that enhance attraction, retention and engagement, which is a key challenge in appealing to the new generation of workers (i.e. Gen Z), who strongly value flexible work arrangements and self-management opportunities (Martínez-Corts et al., 2024).

The science mapping uncovered several emerging trends across five clusters, revealing that i-deals are studied within a multidisciplinary context, with strong connections to flexibility, antecedents and outcomes, leadership, the role of the co-workers and innovation and creativity.

When exploring the most influential papers on the topic, we find that the methodological approach is predominantly quantitative. Since Bal and Izak (2021) study on workspace flexibility, quantitative research has notably risen—from 58% in 2021 to 73.33% in 2023. In terms of theoretical framework, this is primarily grounded in SET and LMX frameworks, which offer robust lenses for understanding the relational and reciprocal nature of i-deals within organisational contexts (Anand et al., 2010). Regarding the type of i-deal studied, developmental (33.33%) and flexibility i-deals (28.89%) emerged as the most common, with a notable dominance of ex-post research (43.33%) conducted from the employee perspective (43.33%). Overall, the most influential studies revealed that granting i-deals has positive outcomes for both employees and organisations, though co-worker perceptions of fairness remain a key risk factor.

6.1. Limitations

As with any research, our study has several limitations. First, it relies solely on bibliographic data exported from WoSCC. Nonetheless, this decision was deliberate, since conducting such a comprehensive analysis would not have been feasible with a combination of multiple databases; the results may vary depending on the database used (Visser et al., 2021). In the future, it would be imperative for researchers to combine additional prominent databases such as Scopus, Microsoft Academic, and Dimensions.

Second, the documents were restricted to articles, review articles and early access articles to aggregate homogeneous information and enhance data comparability. However, the inclusion of other document types—such as books or proceedings papers—may yield different results. Researchers examining the field in the future could consider a broader range of document types to capture a more comprehensive view of the field.

Third, the analysis considered exclusively publications with the terms ‘idiosyncratic deal*’ OR ‘i-deal*’, which may limit its scope by overlooking studies on related subjects like flexible work arrangements or workplace flexibility.

Finally, the dataset presents contextual limitations. A significant portion of studies draw samples from the United States (31.58%), China and Germany (13.16% each), and are concentrated within the human health and social work sectors (15.79%)—particularly in hospital settings where flexible work schedules are critical for operational continuity (Hornung et al., 2014). This concentration limits the generalisability of findings to cultures with different negotiation styles and sectors with distinct dynamics. Expanding geographic and sectoral coverage would strengthen the relevance and applicability of future research across a broader range of work contexts.

6.2. Future research

As discussed in the previous section, several limitations of the present study point toward important directions for future research (Table 9). These can be structured across three levels: macro, organisational, and individual.

At the macro level, greater attention should be paid to cross-cultural dynamics, as the current dominance of studies from a few countries limits global generalisability. At the organisational level, exploring the link between i-deals and inclusion policies, as well as their integration into broader corporate social responsibility frameworks, could illuminate how personalised arrangements align with organisational

Table 9. Future research suggestions.

Research area	Specific theme	Objective
Employee & employer well-being	Work engagement post-COVID-19	Explore how i-deals influence engagement in remote and hybrid work setups within the new normal landscape.
	Psychological well-being and entrepreneurial orientation	Investigate how i-deals may mitigate stress and burnout while promoting well-being and entrepreneurial orientation.
Leadership models	Transformational and proactive leadership	Examine how transformational leadership supports i-deals, fostering job crafting and flexibility.
	Servant and ethical leadership	Explore how servant and ethical leadership may act as antecedents of i-deals, fostering supportive environments that enable personalised work arrangements.
Flexible work arrangements	A 360-degree perspective on flexible arrangements	Assess how i-deals address the needs of specific organisational groups by advocating for qualitative research that incorporates insights from multiple stakeholders, including employers and co-workers.
	Diversity and inclusion	Analyse the challenges and barriers faced by minority groups such as trans workers or workers with disabilities, during the i-deals negotiation process.
Organisational outcomes	Organisational commitment and retention	Investigate i-deals' effects on loyalty and retention, particularly in industries or business contexts with high turnover rates, such as start-ups or scale-ups.
	Corporate social responsibility and justice	Examine how fair i-deals align with CSR and justice principles, enhancing perceptions of organisational fairness.
Global research	Cross-cultural studies on i-deals implementation	Enhance the cultural relevance and generalizability of i-deals research by exploring unique economic and cultural factors beyond the Anglosphere for a more comprehensive understanding of i-deals practices.
Theoretical frameworks for job crafting	Longitudinal studies on job crafting and career development	Study the long-term impacts of i-deals on career progression, skill development, and employee performance.

Source: Authors own work.

ethics and values. At the individual level, a deeper investigation into the effects of i-deals on employee well-being is essential.

Methodologically, scholars are encouraged to expand the use of qualitative approaches—such as case studies and in-depth interviews—to capture contextual nuances that quantitative methods may overlook. Moreover, longitudinal research designs are needed to examine the process and sustained effects of i-deals over time.

Future studies could also examine how different leadership models contribute to the successful negotiation and implementation of i-deals. While transformational leadership has received some attention, servant and ethical leadership styles remain underexplored in this context (Al Halbusi et al., 2024; Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2025). Investigating how these value-driven approaches foster trust, psychological safety, and inclusive climates may reveal important antecedents of i-deals, particularly in ethically oriented or change-prone organisations. Additionally, integrating these leadership styles into broader theoretical and empirical models could clarify their role in shaping personalised work arrangements and promoting outcomes such as employee empowerment, innovation, and organisational commitment.

6.3. Conclusion

This study combines bibliometric and content analyses to contribute to the advancement of the HR management field by offering a comprehensive overview of i-deals and their scholarly development through 2023. It identifies critical research gaps and suggests future directions with both theoretical and practical relevance. In an era marked by uncertainty and change—where organisations and employees increasingly negotiate under turbulent conditions—i-deals emerge as a strategic managerial tool. A nuanced understanding of their antecedents and outcomes across levels is essential for building sustainable, win-win employment relationships.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, I.S.T., upon reasonable request.

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