Title: Co-workers' Reactions to (Mis)Alignment between Supervisors' Intentions and Co-workers' Perceptions of I-deal Secrecy: an Uncertainty Management Perspective

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Abstract

This study employs Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT) to explore how co-workers respond to supervisors' communication about idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), specifically comparing secrecy and transparency. We suggest that co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy, as opposed to transparency, lead to uncertainty. Moreover, misalignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions regarding i-deal communication may create a second source of uncertainty. We propose that co-workers cope with this uncertainty by forming moral judgments about the i-deal communication, which subsequently relate to their trust in their supervisor and their turnover intentions. Data were collected from 27 supervisors and 224 co-workers across 27 teams, resulting in 224 matched co-worker-supervisor responses. Polynomial regressions reveal varying outcomes depending on the (mis)alignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions. Co-workers' moral judgments, trust in their supervisor and turnover intentions are *optimal* when they perceive i-deal transparency, regardless of the supervisor's intentions. These factors are *suboptimal* when co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy align with supervisors' intentions, and *detrimental* when co-workers perceive i-deal secrecy while supervisors intend transparency. Our findings highlight the potential consequences of supervisors' intentions for i-deal transparency, showing they can be positive or negative depending on co-workers' perceptions. Moreover, supervisors' intentions for i-deal secrecy are not necessarily problematic as long as co-workers perceive transparency. Yet, once secrecy intentions are revealed, suboptimal co-worker reactions occur.

Key words: Idiosyncratic deals, secrecy and transparency, uncertainty management, moral judgment, trust in supervisor, turnover intentions.

Co-workers' Reactions to (Mis)Alignment between Supervisors' Intentions and Co-workers' Perceptions of I-deal Secrecy: an Uncertainty Management Perspective

Idiosyncratic deals or 'i-deals' refer to voluntary, personalized work arrangements of a nonstandard nature obtained through the negotiation between an employee (the 'i-dealer') and employer regarding terms that benefit both (Rousseau, 2005). They typically involve personalized training and development opportunities, work flexibility, compensation arrangements, or modifications to tasks and responsibilities (Rosen et al., 2013). In line with the ongoing trend toward the individualization of contract terms (Rousseau et al., 2016), i-deals have become omnipresent in organizations (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2016). This increasing trend can be ascribed to the mutual benefits of i-deals, since they create "win-win situations" for both i-dealers and employers (Rousseau et al., 2006; Simosi et al., 2021). I-dealers receive desired working conditions in line with their needs and/or contributions, and - in turn - reciprocate with positive work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and behaviors (e.g., in-role and extra-role performance) that ultimately benefit their employer (Liao et al., 2016).

Employees typically take the initiative for i-deal negotiation with their supervisor (Aryee et al., 2024; Rosen et al., 2013; Rousseau et al., 2006; Simosi et al., 2021). In turn, supervisors are responsible for the day-to-day implementation and communication of i-deals in their team, even when the deal has been granted by another representative of the organization, such as a previous supervisor or an HR representative (Anand et al., 2018; Rousseau et al., 2006). However, as i-deals create within-team inequalities in working conditions, they may trigger unfavorable reactions from co-workers, the direct colleagues of the i-dealer reporting to the same supervisor (Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Lai et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2016). As a result, supervisors might be tempted to keep the i-deals secret instead of communicating about them transparently. In doing so, they try to safeguard the win-win situation, as well as to avoid

negative co-worker reactions and an inflation in i-deal requests (Rousseau et al., 2016). However, keeping i-deals secret can be risky as well, as secrecy may undermine the legitimacy and fairness of i-deals (Liao et al., 2016; Rousseau et al., 2016), triggering negative consequences for the co-workers' relationship with their supervisor as well as the organization. In striving for a win-win situation, the supervisor may end up losing, particularly among the co-workers.

To explore this topic, we use Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT, Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) and argue that *co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy* cause uncertainty. When co-workers think their supervisor is being secretive about i-deals, uncertainty arises about whether they could receive equal opportunities for i-deal negotiations in the future (Rousseau et al., 2016). According to UMT, humans manage and cope with uncertainty in their environment by "restoring the balance" and reclaiming certainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). In the case of i-deal secrecy, we expect that—as a coping mechanism—co-workers will first form a negative moral judgment about their supervisor's i-deal communication (Reynolds, 2006), which subsequently lowers trust in their supervisor, and, ultimately, increases their turnover intentions. We focus on these outcomes as they align with the mechanisms that UMT proposes to explain how employees cope with uncertainty and because they capture both reactions directed towards – and therefore relevant to – the supervisor (moral judgment, trust) and the organization (turnover intentions) (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Reynolds, 2006). Next, we argue that a misalignment between *co-workers' perceptions* and *supervisors' intentions* regarding i-deal secrecy represents a second source of uncertainty. In this case, co-workers pick up cues from their environment that are inconsistent with their own cognitions (e.g., "I am convinced that my supervisor is transparent, but I just heard gossip about a colleague with a secret deal"), thereby causing uncertainty, and the coping mechanism mentioned above (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

In line with UMT, we expect that more uncertainty leads to stronger, and more negative, co-worker reactions (Lind & Van den Bos 2002; Thau et al., 2007; Tangirala & Alge, 2006). Therefore, the best co-worker reactions are expected when co-workers perceive transparency, and when their perceptions are aligned with the supervisor's transparency intentions, whereas the worst co-worker reactions are expected when co-workers experience uncertainty from both their i-deal secrecy perceptions and a misalignment with their supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). This implies that supervisors' intentions are important to consider when studying co-workers' reactions to their perceptions of i-deal communication. Moreover, it means that supervisors' intentions to be transparent about i-deals may either be positive or negative for co-worker reactions, depending on co-workers' perceptions.

This study contributes to the literature on i-deals in several ways. First, building on UMT, we identify the level and direction of misalignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions regarding i-deal communication as important drivers of co-worker reactions. We uncover cognitive and relational coping mechanisms (moral judgments and trust) that co-workers use to handle the uncertainty induced by i-deal communication. By integrating the perspectives of both stakeholders theoretically and methodologically (using polynomial regression with a surface response analysis), and unraveling these coping mechanisms, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of co-workers' reactions to i-deal communication and show how the relationship with the supervisor and organization can be either fostered or hindered. We thereby extend existing i-deal communication research which is currently underdeveloped (Marescaux et al., 2021; Simosi et al., 2023). Second, our examination of turnover intentions, as proposed by the UMT as a potential negative reaction to uncertainty, is crucial in the context of i-deals. It highlights that co-workers shape the social costs of i-deals and have the potential to undermine the benefits of i-deals by exhibiting withdrawal intentions

(Ng, 2017). Finally, we expect and show that supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions can either yield the most optimal or the most detrimental co-worker reactions, dependent upon the co-workers' perceptions. By uncovering these potential negative consequences of supervisors' i-deal transparency (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016), we show that intentions for i-deal transparency in itself are not enough to create positive co-workers' reactions.

Co-worker Reactions to I-deals

I-deals do not always operate in a dyadic vacuum of i-dealers and supervisors (Rousseau et al., 2006). Even though i-deals are considered legitimate practices—as their definition holds that they must be allocated to employees specifically based on contribution or need (as opposed to, for instance, favoritism)—they still create differences in employment conditions between i-dealers and their co-workers, and therefore foster within-group inequality (Rousseau, 2005). To get a complete picture of the effectiveness of i-deals, it is paramount that co-workers are recognized as third-party stakeholders (Rousseau et al., 2006). After all, the implementation of i-deals only makes sense if their benefits outweigh their costs, in other words, when all three parties (i.e., i-dealers, supervisors and co-workers) view i-deals as a "win–win–win" (or at least a "win–win–no loss") situation (Lai et al., 2009).

Past research into co-worker reactions to i-deals has often cited social comparison as the driving force behind these reactions (Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Marescaux et al., 2021; Simosi et al., 2023). As i-deals create differences between employees, co-workers will compare their own working conditions to those of i-dealers to assess their relative standing (e.g., Liao et al., 2016). Depending on the outcome of that comparison, co-worker reactions may vary in valence (positive, neutral, negative), target (i-dealer, supervisor, organization) and nature (emotional, behavioral) (Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Marescaux et al., 2021). Accordingly, empirical research has found that co-workers who believe in a comparable future opportunity for negotiating an i-deal of their own, are more accepting of existing i-deals in their team (Lai et al., 2009), and

display more extra-role behavior (Huo et al., 2014). Good relationships between co-workers and the i-dealer and supervisor also contribute to i-deal acceptance (Bal, 2017; Lai et al., 2009). In contrast, however, co-worker reactions also have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of i-deals by fostering malicious envy toward the i-dealer, a competitive climate, and turnover intentions (Ng, 2017), as well as injustice perceptions, and counterproductive voice and deviant behaviors (Kong et al., 2018; Marescaux et al., 2017). Consequently, co-worker reactions to i-deals can represent a substantial cost, which makes it imperative to study how i-deals are communicated to co-workers.

I-deal Secrecy versus I-deal Transparency

Especially in the last decade, scholars have drawn attention to the phenomenon of i-deal secrecy (e.g., Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Liao et al., 2016; Marescaux et al., 2021; Rousseau et al., 2016). They define it as supervisors intentionally concealing information about the existence of i-deals and/or the decision-making processes behind them from the i-dealers' co-workers. Although no empirical work has investigated how co-workers are affected by the availability of information on i-deals, and the way in which this information reaches them, various conjectural assumptions have been formulated. For example, shrouding i-deals in secrecy is expected to blur the distinction between i-deals and favoritism, turning them into "shady" deals (Liao et al., 2016). The lack of information or incomplete information would make co-workers fill in the blanks themselves, and rumors may start circulating that may not be entirely accurate (Rousseau et al., 2006). Moreover, i-deal secrecy could raise questions of legitimacy, deservingness, and fairness among co-workers (Rousseau et al., 2016). This could subsequently spiral into distrust and suspicion towards the supervisor (Greenberg et al., 2004), as well as malicious envy (Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2017). Consequently, because of these assumed negative consequences, it is deemed advisable that supervisors openly communicate i-deals to co-workers and explain their legitimacy (Rousseau, 2005). After all, even if an i-deal represents a more

favorable outcome to the i-dealer compared to co-workers, it can still be perceived by the co-workers as fair when thorough and reasonable information is shared about the i-deal and its decision procedure, as well as the procedure behind it (Colquitt et al., 2001). The act of intentionally sharing information may show that the supervisor is trustworthy and has "nothing to hide" (Greenberg et al., 2004), and may send the message that co-workers will get an equal opportunity to negotiate comparable i-deals in the future (Lai et al., 2009).

To conceptualize i-deal communication, we draw from the literature on communication in organizations (Costas & Grey, 2016; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016), since i-deal secrecy/transparency constitutes a communication decision made by supervisors (Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Den Hartog et al., 2013). While transparency is often defined and operationalized in terms of information disclosure, secrecy is non-disclosure (Costas & Grey, 2016). However, full transparency requires information to both be clear on the side of the sender (in this case supervisors) as well as clearly, accurately, and transparently perceived on the side of the receiver (in this case co-workers) (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). In contrast, full secrecy does not imply that there is no communication at all. Rather, it implies that there is in fact communication about i-deals between insiders (here, supervisors and i-dealers), but no communication towards and between outsiders (here, co-workers) (Costas & Grey, 2016). Accordingly, the communication science literature suggests that intended transparency does not automatically imply perceived information clarity on the side of the receiver (Brashers, 2001), nor does intended secrecy automatically prevent information from slipping to and being discussed by outsiders (Eisenberg & Phillips, 1991).

It is, indeed, quite unlikely to assume that, despite the supervisor intending to be transparent and taking actions to do so, all co-workers will perceive the same level of transparency about each i-deal in their team (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Den Hartog et al., 2013). This is because i-deals are often informal agreements without formal procedures or

documentation in place (Rousseau et al., 2006); supervisors may not have sufficient abilities nor opportunities (e.g., time) to communicate well about each i-deal in their team (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016); and there is no guarantee that co-workers interpret i-deal information in the same way, or make similar attributions about it within their own frames of reference (Rousseau et al., 2016). On the other hand, i-deal secrecy is a form of informal organizational secrecy (i.e., unofficial, unrecorded and inter-personal secrecy) and secret i-deals are extremely vulnerable to revelation (Costas & Grey, 2016). They can "leak" for several reasons: i-dealers may communicate with co-workers about their i-deals, as the informal secrecy agreements with their supervisors may be rather indeterminate and sanctions for leaking i-deals may be fairly weak or nonexistent (Costas & Grey, 2016); i-deals can be highly visible (e.g., reduced working hours) such that even without communication, information gets through to co-workers through observation (Huo et al., 2014); and secrecy does not necessarily prevent co-workers from gossiping about i-deals they might observe in their environment (Day, 2012). In sum, a misalignment may emerge between supervisors' intentions and co-workers' perceptions of i-deal transparency.

(Mis)Alignment between Supervisors' Intentions and Co-workers' Perceptions

When supervisors' intentions regarding i-deal communication and co-workers' perceptions thereof are aligned, co-workers perceive i-deal transparency as intended by supervisors; or co-workers know supervisors keep i-deals a secret. In case of misalignment, co-workers do not have an accurate perception of the i-deal communication intentions of their supervisors. This happens when supervisors succeed in keeping i-deals a secret, while co-workers are under the impression that their supervisors are being transparent; or when co-workers perceive i-deal secrecy, despite supervisors' intentions to be transparent about i-deals. To support this, empirical evidence shows that misalignment can indeed exist between

managers' intentions and employees' perceptions regarding practices, such as i-deals (Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2016).

Importantly, such misalignment can subsequently affect employee outcomes (e.g., Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii et al., 2008; Nishii & Wright, 2008). For instance, Montag-Smit and Smit (2020) found that employees may not interpret pay communication policies as organizations intended them and suggest that this misalignment could explain inconsistent findings: whereas some studies find that pay secrecy negatively impacts employees' fairness perceptions and attitudes (Day, 2011), other studies do not (Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2010). Even though these findings refer to pay communication literature, they are relevant to the context of i-deals because i-deals are considered to be a form of remuneration, be it broader and less observable as compared to standard pay (Wong et al., 2023). Yet, like standard pay and total rewards, the negotiation of i-deals helps in attracting, motivating and retaining employees, but also raises concerns about equity, fairness, legal and ethical considerations (Lawler, 2011). As such, the findings from pay communication literature can be inspiring for research on i-deals.

Building on the above, we simultaneously consider co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions of i-deal secrecy (or transparency), so we can take into account the effect of their (mis)alignment. Figure 1 depicts the four possible situations that arise when supervisors' intentions of i-deal communication (horizontal axis) are combined with employees' perceptions thereof (vertical axis) and shows whether each combination results in alignment (quadrants 1 and 3; Q1 and Q3) or misalignment (quadrants 2 and 4; Q2 and Q4). In what follows, we build on Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) to explain how (un)certainty in each quadrant is triggered and to compare co-worker reactions between the four quadrants.

Uncertainty Management Theory: I-deal Communication and Co-worker Reactions

UMT assumes that people are generally motivated to reduce uncertainty in their work environment, or at least the discomfort that arises from it (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty is associated with anxiety about workplace worth (Colella et al., 2007), a felt lack of control, and threatens the quality of outcomes employees could receive in the future (Tangirala & Alge, 2006). This motivates employees to find ways to make uncertain situations tolerable and cognitively manageable (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Therefore, UMT proposes a coping mechanism explaining how people in an uncertain situation at work will try to find a "beacon of certainty", that will guide their subsequent reactions aimed at turning that situation around and "restoring the balance" (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). In line with this, we argue that, under specific circumstances, i-deal communication can cause uncertainty, and that co-workers will therefore try to cope with it by forming a moral judgment about i-deal communication (i.e., an evaluation of supervisor's i-deal communication in terms of right or wrong, fair or unfair; Reynolds, 2006). Co-workers will then generalize that specific moral judgment into an overall assessment of the trustworthiness of their supervisor (the relevant organizational authority in the i-deal context; Anand et al., 2018). Finally, trust in their supervisor will be related to their turnover intentions, indicating a desire to withdraw from the uncertain situation (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). We elaborate on these expectations in more detail below.

-- Insert Figure 1 about here --

According to UMT, uncertainty occurs when details of a situation are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; which is especially the case when information is unavailable (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Brashers, 2001). Therefore, co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy are a first source of uncertainty since co-workers lack complete and/or accurate information about i-deals (Q3 and Q4 in Figure 1) (Garg & Fulmer, 2017). This creates ambiguity and blurs the distinction between a legitimate practice and favoritism, thereby

creating uncertainty regarding the legitimacy, appropriateness, and fairness of i-deals in the eyes of co-workers (Liao et al., 2016; Rousseau et al., 2016). As a result, co-workers will also experience uncertainty on whether equal opportunities exist for themselves to negotiate and acquire i-deals in the future (Lai et al., 2009). In contrast, co-workers' perceptions of i-deal transparency (Q1 and Q2 in Figure 1) create a sense of certainty for co-workers, as a key function of open communication is to reduce uncertainty in social interactions, which renders organizational life more predictable (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Receiving information about the fact that i-deals exist in the team and gaining insight into the objective and legitimate reasons regarding i-deal allocation, are essential conditions for them to understand—with a level of certainty—whether the i-deals are legitimate, appropriate, and fair, and how they can successfully negotiate i-deals themselves (Bal, 2017).

A second source of uncertainty according to UMT is inconsistency between cognitions and experiences (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). In the context of i-deal communication, such inconsistencies would manifest when there is misalignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions of i-deal communication (Q2 and Q4 in Figure 1). For instance, co-workers in Q2 perceive i-deal transparency while their supervisor intends to keep i-deals secret. Despite believing their supervisor behaves transparently, co-workers may nonetheless pick up situational cues from their environment that are inconsistent with their beliefs, for example through gossip between employees or by observing deviations from standard working conditions that may indicate an i-deal they were not informed of (e.g., working hours of a co-worker that seem to deviate from the supervisor's initial communication, a co-worker having a workload different from wat was communicated before). Indeed, we recall that secret i-deals are highly vulnerable to revelation; Costas & Grey, 2016; Rousseau et al., 2016). This would represent major inconsistencies between employees' cognitions and their experiences at work. We argue that this creates uncertainty about the true intentions of their supervisor (Van den Bos

& Lind, 2002). In contrast, when there is alignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions (Q1 and Q3 in Figure 1), co-workers are accurately aware of their supervisors' intentions to either communicate openly about i-deals or to keep them secret, respectively. As a result, the cues co-workers pick up from their environment about i-deals and the way they are communicated would, therefore, be consistent with their own cognitions. As a result, there is certainty and predictability regarding the supervisor's intentions (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Edwards & Cable, 2009).

Figure 1 summarizes that the four quadrants differ with regard to the sources and the amount of uncertainty present. In Q1, there is *no uncertainty* for co-workers, as their i-deal transparency perceptions are aligned with their supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions. In Q2, there is one source of uncertainty caused by *misalignment* between co-workers' i-deal transparency perceptions and supervisors' i-deal secrecy intentions. In Q3, there is also one source of uncertainty caused by co-workers' *i-deal secrecy perceptions* that however align with their supervisor's secrecy intentions. In Q4, finally, there is *uncertainty co-existence* as the two sources of uncertainty are present: co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy are misaligned with their supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions. Building on the coping mechanisms presented in the UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), and cognitive biases in information processing when judgments are made under uncertainty (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), we can break down how co-workers react in each of the quadrants.

UMT predicts that uncertainty makes co-workers extra sensitive for environmental cues that help them judge how they are being treated by their supervisor, which manifests in paying more attention to readily available cues and overweighing negative information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Colella et al., 2007; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002). Co-workers who experience uncertainty would therefore focus less on cues signaling i-deal transparency, and more on those signaling i-deal secrecy, which in turn would raise

suspicions that supervisors have something to hide (Rousseau et al., 2006). We therefore expect that i-deal communication induced uncertainty increases the odds that co-workers form negative moral judgments about i-deal communication (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). Indeed, UMT research supports the idea that moral judgments become more negative as the degree of communication-induced uncertainty increases (e.g., Lind et al., 2000; Thau et al., 2007; Tangirala & Alge, 2006).

This implies that we expect moral judgments to significantly differ between the quadrants. Co-workers in Q1 (transparency perceptions aligned with the supervisor's intention) would have the most positive moral judgments as they experience no communication-induced uncertainty. In contrast, co-workers in Q2 and Q3 would have more negative moral judgments as they experience one source of uncertainty (either through secrecy perceptions or a misalignment between their own perceptions and their supervisor's intention). Finally, co-workers in Q4 would have the most negative moral judgments as they experience two sources of uncertainty (secrecy perceptions and a misalignment with their supervisor). Hence, we formulate the following "uncertainty co-existence" hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1: Co-workers' moral judgments about i-deal communication are optimal (most positive) when co-workers' transparency perceptions are aligned with supervisors' transparency intentions (Q1); suboptimal (second positive) when co-workers perceive transparency whereas supervisors intend secrecy (Q2), and when co-workers' secrecy perceptions are aligned with supervisors' intentions (Q3); and detrimental when co-workers perceive secrecy whereas supervisors intend transparency (Q4).*

Following an initial moral judgment described in hypothesis 1, co-workers' trust in their supervisor represents a second stage psychological coping mechanism in UMT to actively manage the uncertainty (Alterman et al., 2021; Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). Trust is defined as

co-workers' confident and positive expectations of their supervisors' future conduct toward them (McAllister, 1995). UMT suggests that, under conditions of uncertainty, a substitutability effect takes place in which co-workers' negative moral judgment about a single environmental cue of supervisory treatment (here, i-deal secrecy) becomes the basis for an overall sense of distrust towards that supervisor (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). It therefore follows from UMT, that co-workers' negative i-deal secrecy-based moral judgments translate into distrust towards their supervisor. Indeed, support for the link between moral judgment and trust is well documented in the literature on trust (for an overview, see Colquitt et al., 2012).

Finally, UMT would suggest that co-workers' trust in their supervisor serves as a key link between uncertainty-based moral judgments and turnover intentions, i.e., the desire to move to a different organization (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). Indeed, trust is highly robust in that once it has been established, it "serves as a heuristic for interpreting subsequent events" (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Accordingly, a negative moral judgment can elicit a downward spiral for co-workers in which all their supervisor's actions are met with distrust (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). A typical way, then, in which co-workers can react to this generalized distrust in their supervisor, is to withdraw from the negative and uncertain situation (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Consequently, we expect that co-workers in such a situation are motivated to consider alternative employment (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). Consistent with such logic, Bijlsma and Koopman's (2003) meta-analysis indicates a negative relationship between trust and turnover intentions. We therefore hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 2: Co-workers' moral judgments about i-deal communication relate positively to trust in their supervisor, which – in turn – relates negatively to their turnover intentions; such that these co-worker reactions are optimal in Q1, suboptimal in Q2 and Q3, and detrimental in Q4 of Figure 1.*

Methods

Procedure and Sample

We surveyed teams of knowledge workers in six large organizations in Belgium—a team being a group of employees reporting to the same supervisor (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). In all six organizations, HR representatives provided us with contact information. Only teams with a minimum of five employees were withheld, to allow for sufficient variation in i-deals and (mis)alignment between co-workers and supervisors regarding i-deal communication. Within each team, both individual employees and their direct supervisor received an online Qualtrics survey. Two reminder mails were sent to all respondents to ensure maximum participation. To achieve a matched dataset (using personal codes), fully completed surveys were required from at least three co-workers per team and the team supervisor.

In the survey, employees were first asked about the i-deals in their team. We described the concept of i-deals, the four i-deal content types (i.e., financial, flexibility, development, and task i-deals), and the two legitimate allocation bases (i.e., contribution, and personal need) as opposed to favoritism, with definitions and examples from the i-deals literature (Rousseau et al., 2006; see appendix). For each i-deal type, then, employees indicated whether they had successfully negotiated such an i-deal themselves, and whether they had one or more team members with this type of i-deal. We note that only employees who self-identified as "co-worker"—by indicating that at least one team member had at least one i-deal—were able to fill out the rest of the survey (Lai et al., 2009). The remaining questions assessed co-workers' *perceptions* of i-deal secrecy/transparency, moral judgments about i-deal communication, trust in their supervisors, and turnover intentions. The supervisor survey mirrored the first two questions from the employee survey, inquiring supervisors to give a summary of the i-deals in their team, and to report on their *intentions* of i-deal secrecy/transparency.

Our final sample consisted of 224 employees and 27 supervisors within 27 teams, spread across the six organizations. Response rates within teams were overall high (M = .64; SD = .18; median = .61). The average team sample size was 8.30 (SD = 5.04; median = 7). 24 (88.88%) teams belonged to the consultancy sector, while the remaining three teams (11.11%) were situated in the chemical, agro-industrial, and insurance sectors. In our sample, 71% were women, with an average age of 33.30 years old (SD = 8.27), and an average organizational tenure of 4.60 years (SD = 5.66). In terms of education, 12.9% obtained a high school degree or less, 41.5% held a bachelor's degree, 32.6% achieved a master's degree, and the remaining 12.9% had a post-university degree. Of the supervisors, 40% were women with an average age of 42.01 years (SD = 7.58), and an average organizational tenure of 13.97 years (SD = 7.95). In terms of education, 46.3% obtained a bachelor's degree, 30.3% a master's degree, and 23.4% a post-university degree. Finally, the pool of supervisors consisted of both line managers (67%) and higher management (33%).

Measures

I-deal Transparency. This was measured with one item on a three-point scale, in both the co-worker and supervisor surveys. For co-workers, we asked: *"In general, what decision does your supervisor make regarding the communication about i-deals in your team?"*. The answering categories reflected two aspects of top-down transparency regarding resource allocation decisions, recently identified in the pay secrecy literature—outcome transparency (here, transparency about the actual i-deals in the team) and process transparency (here, transparency about the processes regarding i-deal allocation decisions) (Smit & Montag-Smit, 2019). This distinction is also consistent with Huo and colleagues' (2014) identification of two kinds of idiosyncratic deals information: i-deal content and procedures. Co-workers indicated their choice for 'no transparency' *("My supervisor is not open, not about who of my team members has an i-deal, and not about the reasons regarding the i-deal allocation")*, 'partial

transparency' (*"My supervisor is open about who of my team members has an i-deal, but not about the reasons regarding the i-deal allocation"* – process transparency*)*, or 'full transparency' *("My supervisor is open about who of my team members has an i-deal, and also about the reasons regarding the i-deal allocation"* – outcome and process transparency*)*. Hence, the single item consists of three answering categories with an increasing degree of i-deal transparency. The instruction and answer categories were slightly adapted in the supervisor survey, e.g., *"I am open about…"*.

Moral Judgment. Co-workers' moral judgment about i-deal communication was measured by three items on a seven-point Likert scale (cf. Steinbauer et al., 2014) (α = .83). One item was based on Haidt's (2001) definition of moral judgment: *"My supervisor's decision about whether or not to communicate transparently about i-deals in our team is ethically responsible"*. The other two items were adapted from Reynolds' (2006) "perceived violation of a behavioral norm" scale: e.g., *"My supervisor communicated as he/she is supposed to about the i-deals in our team"*. Respondents answered using a seven-point Likert scale going from (1) totally disagree to (7) totally agree.

Trust. Co-workers' general trust in their supervisor was captured by three items from the six-item scale for cognition-based trust developed by McAllister (1995), on a seven-point Likert scale (going from (1) totally disagree to (7) totally agree). *"My supervisor is trustworthy"* is an example item (α = .83).

Turnover Intentions. Co-workers' turnover intentions were measured by Konovsky & Cropanzano's (1991) three-item scale (with a seven-point Likert scale, going from (1) totally disagree to (7) totally agree). For example: *"I often think about quitting my job at this organization"* (α = .89).

Control Variables. Previous research has shown that both theoretically and empirically, certain control variables matter in the context of i-deals. First, women are found to react more

strongly when organizations disclose information on outcomes and/or procedures, because they attach greater value to welfare, information, and social harmony in the workplace (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2012). Second, with longer organizational tenure come more opportunities for employees to experience breaches of trust, especially under conditions of secrecy, which is why tenure may particularly matter in a context of i-deal secrecy (Pearce & Klein, 2017). Empirically speaking, gender and tenure are control variables that are frequently used and reported in i-deals research as they affect key variables in the context of i-deals (e.g., Hornung et al., 2010; Marescaux et al., 2021). Third, co-worker reactions are also affected by whether they have an i-deal of their own, as this determines the social comparison between themselves and team members, which in turn triggers their reactions (e.g., Marescaux et al., 2021). Indeed, previous research has shown that having an i-deal and witnessing other team members' i-deals can simultaneously affect the same outcome variables (e.g., Huo et al., 2014; Kong et al., 2018; Ng, 2017). Fourth, we controlled for the average number of i-deals per team member (as reported by supervisors). This is because in teams with a higher proportion of i-deals, i-deals are more likely to appear normative and be indicative of an i-deal supportive climate, which can positively affect co-worker reactions (Bal & Dorenbosch, 2015; Lai et al., 2009). Finally, our data came from six different organizations, which may differ in terms of culture, climate, and practices. Because these factors may associate with co-worker reactions, we controlled for the organization using dummies.

Results

Factor Analysis

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to check the validity of all multi-item measures at the employee level (i.e., moral judgment, trust, and turnover intentions). The following fit indices assessed model fit: CFI (> .90); TLI (> .90); RMSEA (< .08); and SRMR

(< .08) (Bentler, 1990; Byrne, 2001). The measurement model resulted in a good fit: CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05. Figure 2 shows the factor scores.

-- Insert Figure 2 about here --

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and correlations) for all variables of interest and control variables. The reliabilities of multi-item measures are reported on the diagonal. Co-workers' i-deal transparency scores are positively correlated with moral judgment (β = .45; p < .001), and trust (β = .23; p < .001); and negatively with turnover intentions (β = -.17; p < .01). Supervisors' i-deal transparency scores correlate negatively with moral judgment (β = -.15; p < .05). Moral judgment positively correlates with trust (β = .56; p < .001); and negatively with turnover intentions (β = -.26; p < .001), while trust is negatively correlated with turnover intentions (β = -.36; p < .001). Finally, 80% of respondents reported having an i-deal of their own, which is positively correlated with both moral judgments (β = .21; p < .01) and trust (β = .16; p < .05).

When studying (mis)alignment between two parties, it is important to first inspect the level and direction of this (mis)alignment. The non-significant correlation between co-workers' and supervisors' i-deal transparency scores (r = -.05; p = .45) already implies that misalignments may exist. Indeed, in only 25.9% of the cases, co-workers' i-deal transparency scores are aligned with their supervisors', be it both high or low (i.e., within a range of plus and minus half a standard deviation of each other; Shanock et al., 2010); 38.4% of co-workers have low i-deal transparency scores, while their supervisor reports high scores; and 35.7% of co-workers have high i-deal transparency scores, while their supervisor reports low scores Hence, we can conclude that the empirical data supports studying the level and direction of (mis)alignment between co-workers' and supervisors' i-deal transparency scores.

-- Insert Table 1 about here --

Multilevel Polynomial Regression Analysis

To test hypothesis 1, we conducted polynomial regression analysis in Mplus, in combination with a response surface analysis (Table 2; Figure 3) following the recommendations of a wide range of authors (e.g., Humberg et al., 2019; Shanock et al., 2010; Yao & Ma, 2023). Since we measured some variables at the employee level (e.g., employees' perceptions of i-deal transparency), while others were measured at the team level (e.g., supervisors' intentions of i-deal transparency), we performed multilevel analyses. Polynomial regression analyses allow us to test whether the level and direction of (mis)alignment between co-workers' and supervisors' i-deal transparency scores relates to co-workers' moral judgments about i-deal communication. Prior to analysis, two assumptions need to be met: the predictor variables should concern the same conceptual domain and should be measured on the same scale (Shanock et al., 2010). Both assumptions hold, as both predictor variables represent i-deal transparency scores, provided by different i-deal stakeholders (co-workers and supervisors), and were measured on the same three-point scale (see Measures).

The first step was to conduct polynomial regression analyses, in which both independent variables are included, as well as their squares and interaction (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Humberg et al., 2019). The regression was as follows:

$$(1)\ \mathrm{M} = b_0 + b_1\,\mathrm{C} + b_2\,S + b_3\,\mathrm{C}^2 + b_4\,(\mathrm{C}x S) + b_5\,S^2 + control\ variables + e$$

where M refers to co-workers' moral judgment scores, C to co-workers' i-deal transparency scores, and S to supervisors' i-deal transparency scores (see Table 2 for results). Following recommendations by Edwards and Cable (2009), we scale-centered all predictor variables (C and S) to remove multicollinearity issues. The regression was specified in a multilevel way because some variables are situated at the team-level (level 2), and others at the individual-level (level 1). Specifically, S and S^2 were variables modelled at the team-level, as these are variables measured among supervisors, and are therefore constant across teams. In contrast, C and C^2

were modelled at the individual-level, as well as the interaction term (CxS), because its values differ across individual co-workers rather than across teams. Indeed, the relatively low ICC1 value for co-worker's transparency scores (.05) indicates low agreement among co-workers within the same team regarding i-deal transparency such that these scores cannot be aggregated but should be considered at the individual level (Lebreton & Senter, 2008).

The second step—necessary for interpretation purposes—was to execute a surface response analysis (Humberg et al., 2019; Shanock et al., 2010; Yao & Ma, 2023). On the one hand, this uses the polynomial regression coefficients ($b_{1\text{-}5}$) to test slopes and curvatures along two lines: the alignment line (C = S) and the misalignment line (C = -S) (see Table 2). In other words, it tests what happens to the outcome variable (moral judgment) when both independent variables (co-workers' and supervisors' i-deal transparency scores) are highly aligned (Q1 and Q3) versus misaligned (Q2 and Q4). These lines were subsequently used to create a three-dimensional graph (Figure 3). On the other hand, the polynomial regression coefficients are used to estimate the first principal axis ($S = p_{10}+p_{11}*C$; where S stands for supervisors' i-deal transparency scores and C for co-workers'). To conclude there is an alignment effect, this first principal axis should not deviate from the alignment line, such that p_{10} equals zero and p_{11} equals 1 (Humberg et al., 2019; Yao & Ma, 2023). The joint interpretation of the slope and curvature tests and the first principal axis enabled us to evaluate hypothesis 1.

-- Insert Table 2 and Figure 3 about here --

Table 2 shows the results of our analyses. In step 2, we added the polynomial terms (C^2, S^2 and C*S), which shows that – together – they increase the model fit significantly (ΔR^2 in moral judgment = .03; $p < .01$). Moreover, we note that we compared the results in step 2 with and without control variables and concluded that the model fit (in R^2 in Moral Judgment) is significantly higher with control variables (.27 vs .23)[1]. As such, we report the results with

[1] Results available upon request.

control variables (Becker et al., 2016). When looking at the results and comparing it with Yao and Ma (2023)'s typology of congruence effects, we conclude that we found an '*Exact correspondence and linear level effect*' ($a_1 \neq 0$, $a_2 = 0$, $p_{10} = 0$, $a_4 \neq 0$ and $p_{11} = 1$). However, additionally, we also found that a_3 is significant. All of this leads to the following conclusions in relation to hypothesis 1.

First, it implies that – on average – alignment leads to higher moral judgments than misalignment, which Yao and Ma (2023) label a correspondence effect. We can draw this conclusion because the *curvature of the misalignment line* is significant, which compares the quadrants where there is alignment (Q1/Q3) with those where there is misalignment (Q2/Q4) (a4: $\beta = -.50$; $p < .05$). In Figure 3, we see that moral judgment increases along the misalignment line from both the left and the right side (where there is misalignment) to the middle (where there is alignment). This means that moral judgments are more favorable in Q1 and Q3 (alignment), and less favorable in Q2 and Q4 (misalignment). Second, there is a linear level effect (Yao & Ma, 2023) for the alignment line, which is visible through the significance of the slope of the alignment line (a1: $\beta = .28$; $p < .05$) and the lack of significance of the curvature of the alignment line (a2: $\beta = -.10$; $p > .05$). This allows us to compare quadrants Q1 and Q3 where there is alignment. Specifically, it implies that moral judgment significantly increases when following the alignment line from the front to the back end of the graph in Figure 3. In other words: moral judgments are significantly more positive when co-workers and supervisors share i-deal transparency scores (Q1), as opposed to when they share i-deal secrecy scores (Q3).

Finally, while not technically required to evaluate an alignment effect (Humberg et al., 2019; Yao & Ma, 2023), but important to explicitly compare quadrants where there is misalignment (Q2 and Q4), we look at the *slope of the misalignment line,* which is significant ($\beta = .73$; $p < .001$). In Figure 3, this implies a significant difference between the right extreme of the graph with higher moral judgments than the left extreme. Moral judgments are thus

significantly more positive when co-workers report i-deal transparency and their supervisors i-deal secrecy (Q2) rather than the other way around (Q4).

Hypothesis 1 can now be evaluated by taking together the abovementioned results. We found that moral judgments are more favorable in Q1 and Q3 combined versus Q2 and Q4 combined; more favorable in Q1 versus Q3; and more favorable in Q2 versus Q4. These results are in line with our predictions that moral judgments are most *optimal* in Q1 and most *detrimental in* Q4 (cf. Figure 1). The results also show that moral judgments are *suboptimal* in Q3, since they are significantly lower compared to Q1. However, we find no conclusive evidence that Q2 (where employees perceive transparency, but supervisors intend secrecy) is significantly different from employees and supervisors being aligned that there is transparency (Q1). The graph in Figure 3 shows these conclusions visually. However, this does imply that the uncertainty co-existence effect from hypothesis 1 is partially supported by the data: co-workers' moral judgments become more negative as the level of uncertainty rises (no uncertainty in Q1, one element of uncertainty in Q3, and two elements of uncertainty in Q4).

Mediated Multilevel Polynomial Regression Analysis

To test hypothesis 2, we conducted multilevel mediated polynomial regression analysis in Mplus, with the block variable approach (for a recent example, see Griep et al., 2023). We calculated one coefficient to represent the five polynomial terms C, S, C^2, CxS, and S^2 by treating the five terms as a block variable. A block variable is a weighted linear composite of the variables that constitute the block, in which the weights are the estimated regression coefficients for the variables in the block (Edwards & Cable, 2009). As such, it represents the joint effects of the five terms. In line with our serial mediation hypothesis, we regressed moral judgment on the i-deal transparency block variable; trust on moral judgment; and turnover intentions on trust. The path coefficients obtained from these procedures were used to assess the direct, indirect, and total effects, allowing us to determine the extent to which each of the

mediators in our model (i.e., moral judgment and trust) carried the effects of the i-deal transparency block variable on turnover intentions (Table 3).

-- Insert Table 3 about here --

Table 3 shows that the direct effect of moral judgment on trust is significant and positive (β = .50; p < .001), and the direct effect of trust on turnover intentions is significant and negative (β = -.47; p < .001). Importantly, the indirect effect through moral judgment and trust is significant (β = -.24; p < .05). Moreover, adding direct paths (e.g., between moral judgment and turnover intentions) did not produce significant coefficients, nor did it significantly improve the explained variance in the different variables. Finally, testing the serial mediation model without control variables leads to a significant drop in the explained variance of moral judgment (from .32 to .26; similar to the analyses above), yet the total indirect effect remains the same. As such, we report the results with the control variables in Table 3 (Becker et al., 2016). We therefore infer that the serial mediation described in hypothesis 2 is fully supported by the data.

Discussion

In this paper, we took an uncertainty management perspective (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) on co-worker reactions to i-deal communication. We were guided by the organizational and pay communication literature to argue that supervisors' communicational intentions do not automatically trickle down to aligned co-worker perceptions. As a result, we identified the (mis)alignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions of i-deal secrecy and transparency as an important factor to explain co-worker reactions to i-deal communication. Building on UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), we conceptualized co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy and a misalignment with supervisors' intentions as two sources of uncertainty for co-workers and connected these to different co-worker outcomes (moral judgment, trust and turnover intention).

In line with our expectations, co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy were associated with a more negative moral judgment than i-deal transparency perceptions. In turn, this translated into less trust in their supervisors, and ultimately higher turnover intentions. Moreover, when co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy were coupled with supervisors' intentions of i-deal transparency, moral judgments (and its associated trust and turnover intentions) were at their worst, which is in line with our prediction that in this case, two sources of uncertainty co-exist. Overall, these findings align with earlier pay communication research in which pay secrecy is seen as a generator of uncertainty (e.g., Alterman et al., 2020; Colella et al., 2007).

Contrary to our expectations, we did not find evidence for a significant difference between Q1 and Q2. In both quadrants co-workers perceive i-deal transparency. The key difference lies in the intentions of supervisors. It seems as if the supervisor's intentions, while important when co-workers perceive i-deal secrecy, become irrelevant when co-workers perceive transparency. This contradicts what UMT predicts. One possible explanation is that when co-workers believe they have received all necessary information, they are less concerned with or receptive to situational cues about the supervisor's intentions that might contradict their beliefs. It is also possible that perceptions of transparency help in establishing a baseline level of morality and trust. Once these are in place, co-workers might not question the supervisor's intentions as closely. Future qualitative research could go into this process of information seeking depending upon the co-workers' perceptions of i-deal communication.

With these findings, we address the need to empirically investigate the implications of supervisors' i-deal communication decisions as articulated in the i-deals literature (e.g., Liao et al., 2016). In addition, our study supports the idea that it is useful to simultaneously consider multiple stakeholder perspectives (here, co-workers—who can be fellow i-dealers—and supervisors), in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the impact of i-deals in teams

(Greenberg et al., 2004; Lai et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006). We believe that our study contributes to i-deal theory and practice in several important ways.

Implications for Theory

We introduced UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) into the i-deals literature, building on its successful application in the pay communication literature (Alterman et al., 2020; Colella et al., 2007). UMT proves to be a worthy theoretical lens in the i-deals context, as our hypotheses about co-worker reactions to i-deal communication-induced uncertainty were at least partially confirmed by the data. Specifically, we found that co-workers' i-deal secrecy perceptions are associated with more negative reactions, and that this was further exacerbated when supervisors intended to be transparent, implying misalignment, and therefore, a second source of uncertainty. We also found support for the coping mechanism proposed by the UMT, linking i-deal communication to co-workers' turnover intentions, through uncertainty-based moral judgments and trust. As such, we contribute to the i-deals literature, where the cognitive mechanisms underlying co-worker reactions are currently underdeveloped (Marescaux et al., 2021). In addition, we show that i-deal communication can undermine the intended mutual benefits of i-deals (motivation and retention of i-dealers) if co-workers develop desires to withdraw from the organization because of their perceptions of i-deal communication. This represents the social costs of i-deals (Liao et al., 2016).

Our findings also bring nuance to the conjectural assumptions present in i-deal theory (Greenberg et al., 2004). From the perspective of co-workers, we indeed found that—in general—i-deal transparency *perceptions* (Q1 and Q2) are associated with more favorable moral judgments, trust and turnover intentions, compared to i-deal secrecy perceptions (Q3 and Q4). This is in line with the assumption that perceptions of i-deal secrecy could cast doubt on the legitimacy and appropriateness of i-deals (Greenberg et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 2016). However, an important nuance is that co-workers' i-deal secrecy perceptions do not always

come with the most detrimental outcomes. When co-workers' i-deal secrecy perceptions are aligned with their supervisor's intentions (Q3), co-workers report more favorable moral judgments, trust and turnover intentions than when their i-deal secrecy perceptions are misaligned with supervisors' transparency intentions. Consequently, our findings show that co-worker reactions to i-deal communication not only depend on co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy and transparency (as is assumed in i-deal theory), but also on the (mis)alignment between co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions of i-deal communication. As such, studying this (mis)alignment is an important addition to existing i-deals research.

Finally, by focusing on the supervisor perspective on i-deal communication, we were also able to bring nuance to the debate on supervisor's intentions to be transparent. Supervisors' i-deal transparency *intentions* can yield both the most optimal (Q1) and the most detrimental (Q4) results in terms of co-workers' moral judgments, trust and turnover intentions. Supervisors' i-deal secrecy intentions on the other hand led to the most optimal (Q2) or suboptimal (Q3) outcomes. It follows that the greatest risk in terms of co-worker reactions seems to be tied to i-deal transparency intentions, and not i-deal secrecy intentions. Support for this finding can be found in the literatures on pay communication (e.g., Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2017) and organizational communication (e.g., Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016), where the potential risks tied to transparency have been documented. Consequently, our findings call into question statements made in i-deal theory that "attempting to "hide" i-deals from co-workers does not work" (Liao et al., 2016, p.25), and that it is advisable to communicate and explain i-deals to other parties external to the negotiation (Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2016).

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Despite several strengths, this study faces some limitations that can generate future research opportunities. First, our data are cross-sectional, meaning that all co-worker measures were assessed at the same point in time. That said, the data were not single-source, and unlikely

to be prone to common method bias since we use validated measures and executed tests (e.g., factor analysis) showing validity and conceptual clarity in the heads of the respondents (Doty & Glick, 1998). Instead of assessing and interpreting reports of past attitudinal and behavioral reactions to i-deal secrecy, future research could focus on the temporal dimensions of uncertainty related to i-deals with longitudinal designs (e.g., habituation to i-deal secrecy, fluctuation in team prevalence i-deals, successful negotiation of own i-deals). Uncertainty can be short-lived or ongoing, there can be evolutionary or revolutionary changes across time, and its subtle meanings can shift over time as people become accustomed to it (Mishel, 1990). Because the nature of uncertainty is temporal, the appropriateness and effectiveness of responses used to manage it are likely to vary across contexts and situations (Brashers, 2001).

Second, we considered perceptions of secrecy and transparency about i-deals "in general", even though different i-deal content types have been identified in the literature (i.e., flexibility, development, financial, and task i-deals; Rosen et al., 2013). Studies have found that co-workers react differently to different types of i-deals (for an overview, see Liao et al., 2016). Future research could study the influence of i-deal type on co-workers' moral judgments about intentional i-deal secrecy and transparency. For instance, i-deal secrecy could be more acceptable to co-workers when it pertains to resources that are less important to them (Rousseau, 2005). Employees tend to care more about and attach equal value to financial resources (tangible and universal economic resources); while the value of flexibility, development, and task i-deals (abstract and particularistic socio-emotional resources) is much more circumstantial and person-dependent (Marescaux et al., 2021). Related to this, we did not go into supervisors' motives for being secret or transparent. Yet, the attributions that co-workers make about the ethical motives (e.g. egoism, deontology, utilitarianism) for supervisors' i-deal secrecy or transparency decisions may influence their reactions in terms of moral judgment. Future research could dig deeper into this issue.

Third, we used UMT to identify two sources of uncertainty related to i-deal communication (i.e., co-workers' perceptions of i-deal secrecy and misalignment with supervisors' intentions). A similar approach was used in the pay secrecy literature that operationalizes secrecy as uncertainty (e.g., Colella et al., 2007; Alterman et al., 2020). Future quantitative research could however measure uncertainty more directly (four-item scale Colquitt et al., 2012; e.g., *"I cannot predict how things will go at work"*), and explore boundary conditions in the relationship between secrecy, uncertainty, and subsequent co-worker reactions. For instance, pay secrecy scholars found that employees with pay secrecy preferences react more favorably to pay secrecy policies (Montag-Smit & Smit, 2020); and UMT scholars suggest that employees with a high tolerance for ambiguity may be less inclined to reduce work-related uncertainty (Brashers, 2001). In addition, future qualitative research could dive deeper into how employees experience uncertainty in the different quadrants of Figure 1, by letting them engage in sensemaking, defined as "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking arises in conditions of uncertainty, because individuals lack access to a plausible interpretation (e.g., they don't know which inferences to make about their supervisors' intentions) and cannot see (or are unsure) how their actions will affect the future (Weick et al., 2005). For instance, in quadrant 3 of Figure 1, co-workers know that their supervisors keep i-deals secret from them and may wonder *"Will my supervisor allow me to negotiate future i-deals of my own?"*.

Finally, as mentioned in the results, 80 percent of the co-workers that participated in our study were also i-dealers. Against the backdrop of the global trend toward employment relationship individualization (Anand et al., 2018; Bal, 2017; Rousseau, 2005), it is not surprising that employees, in many cases, have become both the recipients of i-deals and witnesses of co-workers' i-deals (Greenberg et al., 2004; Huo et al., 2014; Ng, 2017). Research has shown that receiving and witnessing i-deals can simultaneously affect the same outcome

variables, whether or not in the opposite direction (e.g., Huo et al., 2014; Kong et al., 2018; Ng, 2017). We controlled for co-workers' own i-deals in all our analyses, but future research could study how being a "dual-status" employee affects employee reactions to supervisors' i-deal secrecy/transparency decisions. For instance, having successfully gone through the process of negotiating an i-deal with their supervisor, gives employees an opinion about the fairness of the procedures (Bal, 2017). Also, Marescaux and colleagues (2021) pointed out that the relative favorability of one's own i-deals compared to other team members' i-deals can influence co-worker reactions to i-deals.

Implications for Practice

In the current "age of transparency"—fueled by rapid information processing and global networking—access to information has become a political demand (Costas & Grey, 2016). Supposedly, only in this way can democratic, fair, and efficient decision-making processes take place with the involvement of different stakeholders (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Despite the appeal of organizational transparency, our study gives insight into its potential downsides as well. Co-worker reactions to supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions can be either optimal or detrimental in terms of turnover intentions. As turnover intentions remain one of the best predictors of actual voluntary turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000), which can be extremely costly to organizations (Park & Shaw, 2013), keeping i-deals secret thus may seem like a safer bet to supervisors. However, as secrets often leak (Costas & Grey, 2016), supervisors' i-deal secrecy intentions can backfire in the longer term. As such, the key challenge for supervisors remains to avoid that their i-deal communication is done ambiguously, causing uncertainty for co-workers.

In that sense, we can give several practical recommendations. I-deal transparency requires time and support from the organization (Kehoe & Han, 2020). In practice, supervisors often lack the time and support to communicate on the practices they implement in their team

(Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Support could take different shapes. First, maintaining a climate of transparency within the organization can go a long way in setting the right example for supervisors to be equally transparent in their work teams (Costas & Grey, 2016). Specifically, this stimulates bidirectional open discussion without repercussion and leaves room for voice and participation, whenever employees face any doubts or uncertainties (Costas & Grey, 2016). Second, organizations could boost the quality of supervisors' i-deal communication through training. Special attention should be given to techniques to communicate clearly and accurately, as well as speak about sensitive issues—which i-deals clearly are by causing inequality (Rousseau et al., 2006). In doing so, organizations could also train supervisors in specific "codes of conduct" with best practices of how to handle (communication about) i-deals, that serves as a compass for supervisors.

Conclusion

This study examines co-worker reactions to i-deal communication, by considering the mutual and combined effects of co-workers' perceptions and supervisors' intentions of i-deal communication. Following the reasoning of UMT, i-deal communication can create two sources of uncertainty for co-workers, specifically, when they perceive i-deal secrecy, and when their secrecy perceptions are misaligned with their supervisors' transparency intentions. To manage the uncertainty stemming from i-deal communication, co-workers cope by forming negative moral judgments about i-deal communication and trust in their supervisors, resulting in higher turnover intentions. We bring nuance to the debate on i-deal transparency, by showing that co-worker reactions are detrimental when co-workers' i-deal secrecy perceptions are misaligned with their supervisors' i-deal transparency intentions (i.e. the co-existence of two sources of uncertainty). To reduce the risk of i-deal transparency backfiring, supervisors are advised to work on the quality of their transparent communication in an effort to reduce uncertainty for co-workers.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Employee-level variables																
1. I-deal transparency (C)	1.91	.87	--													
2. Gender[a]	.71	.46	-.08	--												
3. Organizational tenure	4.60	5.66	.13*	-.16*	--											
4. Own i-deals[b]	.80	.40	.17*	.08	.03	--										
5. Moral judgment	4.33	1.12	.45**	-.07	.11	.21**	(.83)									
6. Trust	5.45	1.14	.23**	.03	.02	.16*	.56**	(.83)								
7. Turnover intentions	3.00	1.49	-.17*	-.01	-.07	-.07	-.26**	-.36**	(.89)							
Team-level variables																
8. I-deal transparency (S)	2.10	.74	-.05	.13*	-.01	-.00	-.15*	-.11	-.04	--						
9. Proportion i-deals	.96	.93	-.02	.19**	-.22***	-.00	-.01	.08	-.07	.19**	--					
10. Organization 1	.30	.46	.13*	-.11	-.01	-.05	.03	.00	.28***	-.36***	-.39***	--				
11. Organization 2	.52	.50	-.24**	.28***	-.29***	.02	-.07	.04	-.17*	.34***	.58***	-.68***	--			
12. Organization 3	.08	.27	.22**	.04	.11	.11	.12	.05	-.10	.15*	-.20**	-.19**	-.31***	--		
13. Organization 4	.03	.16	-.11	-.20***	-.10	-.06	-.09	-.05	.16*	-.25***	-.05	-.11	-.17**	-.05	--	
14. Organization 5	.04	.19	-.01	-.03	.35***	.04	.09	.05	-.19**	-.29***	-.19**	-.13	-.20**	-.06	-.03	--
15. Organization 6	.04	.20	.10	-.32***	.36***	-.07	-.06	-.17*	-.05	.25***	-.08	-.13*	-.21**	-.06	-.03	-.04

Note. N = 224. Coefficient alpha reliabilities in parentheses along diagonal. (C) = Co-worker score; (S) = Supervisor score.

Correlations are calculated by disaggregating the team-level variables to the employee level

[a]Gender: male = 0, female = 1. [b]Own i-deals: no = 0, yes = 1.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Table 2

Results Multilevel Polynomial Regressions and Response Surface Analysis for Hypothesis 1

	Moral judgment	
	Step 1	Step 2
Constant (b_0)	4.10*** (.18)	3.54** (.57)
Gender^E	-.17 (.14)	-.18 (.15)
Organizational tenure^E	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Own i-deals^E	.42** (.14)	.39** (.15)
Proportion i-deals^T	-.01 (.11)	-.07 (.12)
Polynomial terms		
b_1: Co-worker score i-deal transparency^E (C)	.52*** (.08)	.51** (.07)
b_2: Supervisor score i-deal transparency^T (S)	-.18 (.12)	-.23* (.11)
b_3: C^{2E}		-.13 (.12)
b_4: C x S^E		.20* (.09)
b_5: S^{2T}		-.17 (.20)
R^2	.24***(.05)	.27** (.06)
ΔR^2		.03***
Response surface analysis		
a_1: Slope along C = S (alignment)		.28* (.14)
a_2: Curvature along C = S (alignment)		-.10 (.26)
a_3: Slope along C = -S (misalignment)		.73** (.14)
a_4: Curvature along C = -S (misalignment)		-.50* (.25)
p_{10} : intercept first principal axis		
p_{11} : slope first principal axis		-.68 (3.88)
		.83 (.90)

Conclusion

H1 description: Q1 > Q2 = Q3 > Q4

H1 findings: partial support (Q1 = Q2 > Q3 > Q4)

Note. N = 224. Unstandardized regression coefficients; standard deviations in parentheses.

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001; ^{E} = variable at the employee level; ^{T} = variable at the team level

Table 3

Results Multilevel Mediated Polynomial Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 2

	Moral judgment	**Trust**	**Turnover intentions**
Control variables			
Gender[E]	-.17 (.14)	-.03 (.20)	.13 (.29)
Organizational tenure[E]	.02 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Own i-deals[E]	.41** (.14)	.15 (.16)	.02 (.15)
Proportion i-deals[T]	-.07 (.12)	.04(.14)	.11 (.14)
Organization 2[T]		.15 (.29)	-1.04*** (.27)
Organization 3[T]		-.18 (.24)	-1.01 (.57)
Organization 4[T]		.18* (.59)	.59** (.42)
Organization 5[T]		-.10 (.20)	-2.00*** (.33)
Organization 6[T]		-.68* (.28)	-1.18*** (.32)
Block variable[E]	1.03*** (.14)		
Moral judgment[E]		.50*** (.09)	
Trust[E]			-.47** (.11)
R^2 (within teams)	.32*** (.06)	.30*** (.07)	.13* (.06)
Serial Mediation			
Total indirect effect Block → Moral Judgment → Trust → Turnover Intention			-.24** (.07)
Conclusion			
H2 description: full serial mediation			
H2 findings: full support			

Notes. N = 224. Unstandardized regression coefficients; Standard deviations in parentheses.
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
[E] = variable at the employee level; [T] = variable at the team level

Figure 1

Proposed quadrant model of i-deal transparency intentions and perceptions

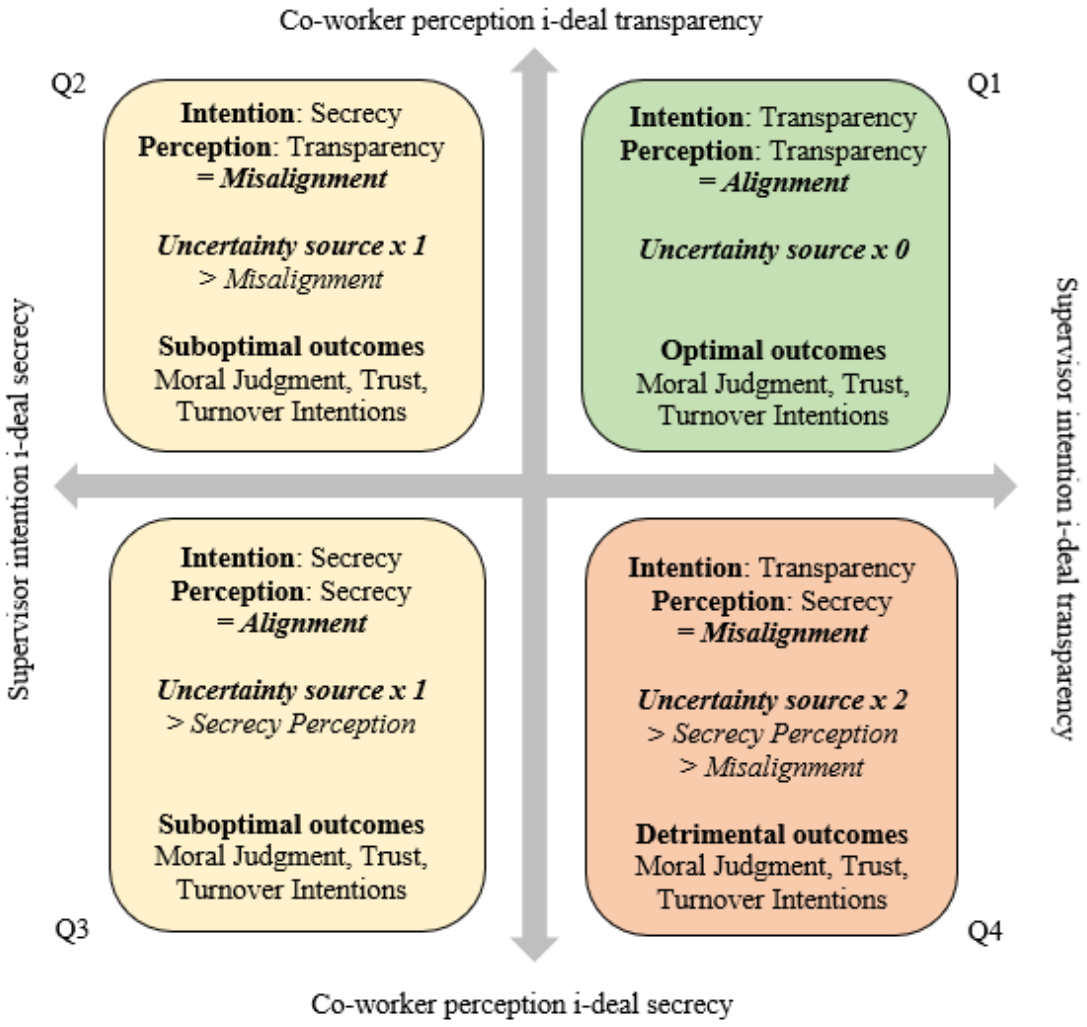


Figure 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Multi-item Measures among Employees

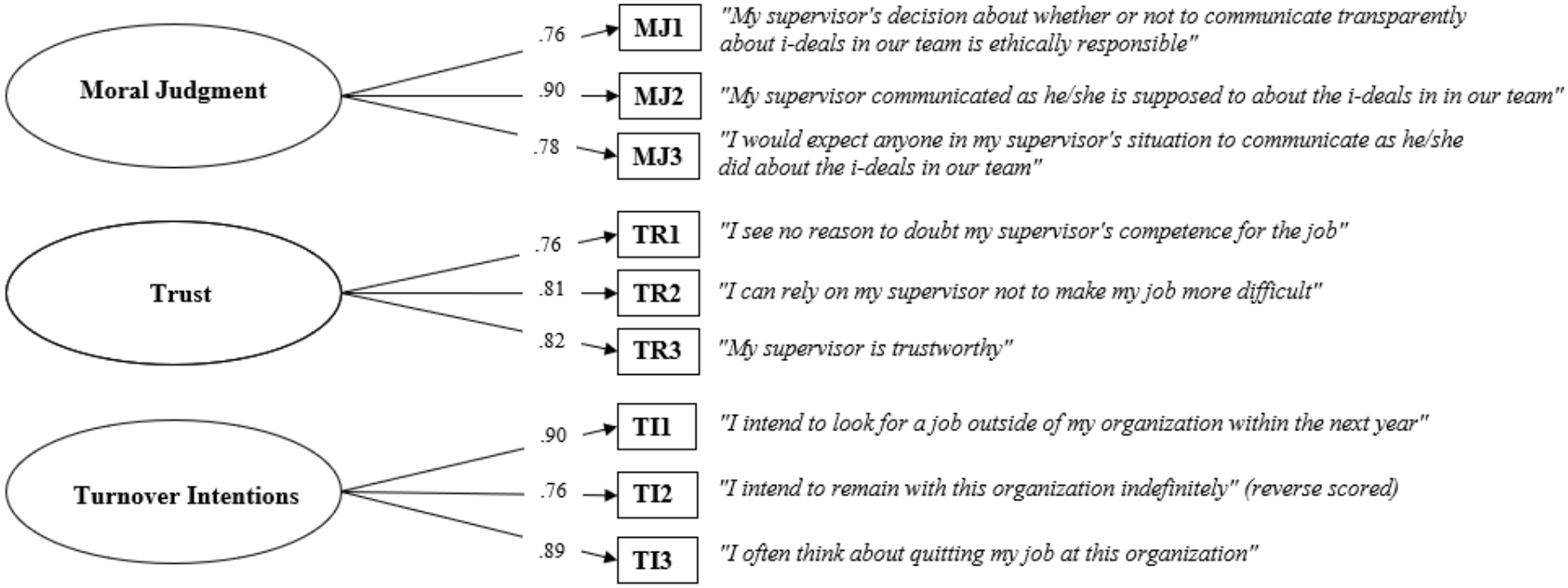
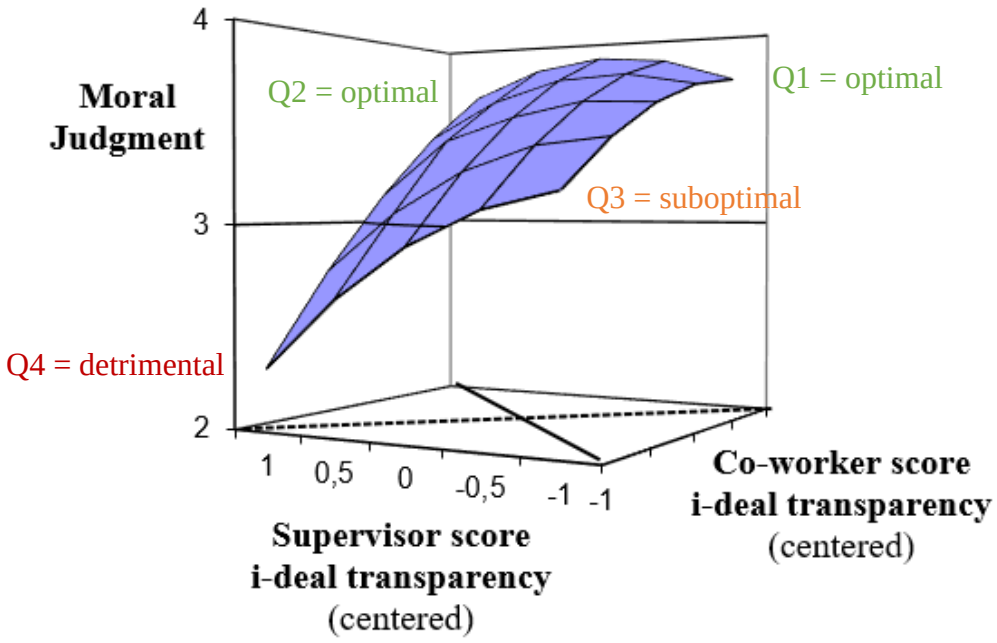


Figure 3

Response Surface Analysis Results for Hypothesis 1: 3D Graph



Note. Dotted line is misalignment line (Co-worker score i-deal transparency = – Supervisor score i-deal transparency); solid line is alignment line (Co-worker score i-deal transparency = Supervisor score i-deal transparency).

Q1 = employee transparency + supervisor transparency

Q2 = employee transparency + supervisor secrecy

Q3 = employee secrecy + supervisor secrecy

Q4 = employee secrecy + supervisor transparency

Appendix

Description of i-deals in the questionnaire

I-deals

The goal of this study is to investigate the **impact of i-deals** in teams.

An i-deal is a **unique employment arrangement**, that an **individual employee has requested him/herself and successfully negotiated** with his/her supervisor, and that **differs from the standard employment arrangements** of the other team members.
I-deals are **mutually beneficial arrangements**, both for the employee who negotiated the i-deal, as for the supervisor who allocated the i-deal.

There are **4 types** of i-deals:

Type 1: Flexibility i-deals
E.g., regarding the number of working hours, flexible working hours, work schedule, work planning, work-life balance, working from a different location, or working from home.

Type 2: Development i-deals
E.g., regarding training opportunities, special opportunities for skill development, career development, or mentoring.

Type 3: Financial i-deals
E.g., regarding pay, salary, bonuses, or fringe benefits (meal vouchers, supplementary pension, ecocheques, cost reimbursement).

Type 4: Task/workload i-deals
E.g., regarding job tasks, (more or less) responsibilities, or workload.

Below, we ask you to **describe your team** and the **i-deals** that are in place within your team at this very moment.