

Examining the tactics and aftermath of Negotiation on Developmental idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) among Professional Women in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

The research investigated the tactics and aftermath of developmental idiosyncratic agreements (I-deals) negotiation from professional women in Hong Kong. It used data from interviews with 30 participants, all the participants are professional women who over age 25 and worked in Hong Kong over 5 years.

The research shows the challenges professional women who worked in Hong Kong face, the factors that lead to successful and unsuccessful negotiations and the aftermath of the negotiations. The findings highlight the importance of women in organizational coordination, and management support, revealing the impact of gender bias and hierarchical structure on negotiation dynamics. Previous literature has mainly focused on I-deals in Western countries, research gap in research explicitly focusing in Asian working women and their unique I-deals experiences. The research fills the gap in existing literature and provides practical suggestions for cultivating an inclusive work environment and promoting gender equality in careers.

Key words: I-deals; women; negotiation; HRM

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic global landscape, there has been a significant increase of number in professional women over the past two decades (World Bank, 2022). However, women continue to encounter persistent challenges, including issues related to salary, career development, and work flexibility, particularly in competitive and fast-paced organisation environments like Hong Kong (Angervall, 2016). In the pursuit of creating inclusive and diverse workplaces, Idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) becomes crucial to address the unique needs and preferences of employees. It is a voluntary, personalized agreements between individual employees and their employers (Rousseau et al., 2006: 978).

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The research focuses on developmental I-deals which focus on agreements related to expanding individual knowledge and pursuing career development opportunities (Hornung et al., 2008). It included career development activities that serve to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees (Ng et al., 2021). Also, customised learning opportunities, training programs, and skill development plans that align with employee desires to ensure employees have the necessary skills to thrive in a constantly changing work environment (Hornung et al. 2010, p. 188).

The concept of I-deals is available to employees of all genders; research focuses on professional women because women represent a large proportion of the workforce,

and their experiences, challenges and contributions need to be understood and addressed to create a more inclusive and balanced work environment (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020).

However, in the context of gender equality and women's empowerment, research focusing on working women can address the challenges they face in negotiating developmental i-deals (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020). However, not all employees who participate in “i-deal” negotiations are successful (Morf et al., 2019). A deeper understanding of how “i-deals” can improve employee engagement, productivity and career development can guide companies to formulate more flexible and employee-centric policies.

Hong Kong's unique socio-economic regulatory framework shapes the interplay of workplace negotiations. Its specific combination of Eastern hierarchy-based culture with Western commercial practices leads to a unique milieu. In a traditional Chinese workplace, hard work is one of the core values, while Western workplace culture is known for its individualism, advising that personal successes are more valuable than compromise harmony in the group (Berry and Triandis, 2004). Moreover, socio-economic events in Hong Kong, such as the recent influx of skilled professionals, have helped exacerbate the talent shortage. Career development opportunities have been proven to be important factors in job satisfaction and ultimately increasing rates of employee retention and organisational commitment (Saleem and Amin, 2013). If a company fails to meet the career development needs of employees, the company loses, as further loss of staff and talent will ensue. Employers should demonstrate

leadership by promoting negotiation for their employees' long-term development, particularly in light of the recent changes to the Hong Kong socio-economic landscape, and not treat negotiation as a simple transaction.

1.3 RESEARCH GAP

Existing research has reviewed experiences of I-deals within various contexts (Rousseau et al., 2006; Kelly et al., 2020), but there is still a gap in the research to examine Hong Kong professional women's experiences of I-deals in negotiations. Although there is some literature that examines gender differences in negotiation and career development outcomes (Kelly et al., 2020), studies on the specific outcomes of (I-deals) negotiations are still limited. Previous literature has focused mainly on I-deals within Western countries and not accounted for unique cultural or organisational specifics in Hong Kong (Jiang et al., 2012; Velasco et al., 2023).

While there appears to be global literature examining I-deals and negotiation strategies, the socio-cultural and organisational landscape of Hong Kong can present various dynamic factors that impact professional women's negotiation contexts and outcomes. Hong Kong's highly competitive and fast-paced business environment, cultural expectations, and organisational norms may present barriers affecting the effectiveness of developmental i-deals when compared to western environments.

In addition, while previous literature on I-deals has examined considerations of flexibility (work-life balance), and finance (compensation), it has not sufficiently explored developmental “personal deals”. Regardless of the existing literature identifying positive outcomes of the negotiation process, it does not provide us with insight into the actual outcomes of successful negotiations. The goal here is to cultivate a better understanding of what Hong Kong professional women may gain through "personal agreements" in terms of improved career prospects and access to skill development opportunities (Shin et al., 2017).

Understanding the actual outcomes of personal agreements can assist organisations in providing supportive and inclusive environments that foster the career development of women. Developmental I-deals are personalized skill development, training, and career advancement opportunities that can significantly impact employees’ long-term career paths and job satisfaction (Hornung et al., 2010, p. 188). Exploring these dimensions is particularly important for working women.

While negotiation and “personal bargaining” have been studied separately, comprehensive research on the interaction between these two concepts is notably lacking. Similarly, existing research on i-deals mainly focuses on their antecedents, consequences, and types, while ignoring the negotiation process that leads to the emergence of i-deals (Van der Heijden et al., 2021). This research gap is significant due to the potential synergies and complexities in examining the impact of negotiation strategies on the achievement of i-deals and their immediate consequences.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND PURPOSE

The research investigated the “I-deal” negotiation strategies of professional female employees in Hong Kong and their direct consequences. The research aims to understand the strategies used by professional women in negotiating developmental I-deals and how the consequences of successful/failed negotiations directly affect employees’ career development.

Research Questions:

What are the differences in negotiation strategies and subsequent impacts between successful and failed negotiations in developmental I-deals among Hong Kong professional women?

Research Objectives:

- Understand the strategies used by working women in Hong Kong when negotiating developmental I-deals.
- To identify the factors that lead to successful and failed negotiations for developmental i-deals among working women in Hong Kong.
- Study the direct consequences of successful and failed I-deals negotiations among professional women in Hong Kong.

- Provide suggestions to create an inclusive working environment for working women in Hong Kong.

1.5 CONTRIBUTIONS.

This research conducted qualitative interviews with working women in different industries in Hong Kong. Participants will be divided into two groups: a) women who are successful on developmental I-deals negotiation; b) women who are unsuccessful on developmental I-deals negotiation. By analyzing their experiences and outcomes, aims to provide insights and recommendations to help organisations, policymakers, and individuals create more supportive and equitable work environments for working women.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The research draws on various academic sources, such as scholarly articles, books, and research, to explore different aspects of negotiation and the various types of negotiation tactics. The chapter further identifies research gaps, emphasizing the need for more research on developmental I-deals in the specific cultural and organisational context of Hong Kong.

2.2 DEFINITION ON NEGOTIATION

Negotiations start when individuals consciously initiate them on their terms (Reif & Brodbeck, 2014). Negotiation is essential in our interactions, as various definitions highlight its complexity. Lewicki, Saunders, and Barry (2019) highlight the pervasive nature of negotiation, emphasizing its presence in everyday life. Overton and Lowry (2013) highlight the role of negotiation as a life skill that facilitates compromise when conflicts of interest arise. Bowles, Thomason, and Bear (2019) defined negotiation as an interactive process involving ongoing communication to resolve trade-offs and conflicts.

As Lewicki, Saunders, and Barry (2019) stated, resolving conflicts of interest has become a central theme in negotiations. Zohar (2015) offers a different perspective, emphasizing that negotiation is the resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups who need to share resources to achieve common goals. In addition, Stevens et al. (2018) expanded the negotiation perspective, emphasizing the role of negotiation in cultivating relationships and building connections. They emphasize that negotiation is also useful for resolving conflicts and other problems. Fisher, Patton, and Ury (2011) elaborate on "principled negotiation," which emphasizes interests rather than positions. Describe negotiation as a process that involves interaction, participation, and compromise.

2.3 IDIOSYNCRATIC DEALS (I-DEALS)

Idiosyncratic Deals (I-deals) have been used as an explanation for various personalized, non-standard arrangements between employees and employers that can help satisfy the individual's needs while serving the organization (Rousseau, et al.,

2006). Unlike in their standard employment contract, I-deals allow employees to negotiate aspects of their work situations that are important to them vis-à-vis their careers and their lives.

I-deals take on many forms, such as flexibility, financial, and development agreements. The focus of this research is on development I-deals, which refers specifically to arrangements for a career, training, and skill development.

Development I-deals refer to the employee has an individualized agreement that helps them realize their career objectives and helps the organization improve their capabilities and performance.

I-deals allow the employee to gain access to organization resources through personal sponsorship. About differentials again, it is not likely that all employees will receive development I-deals because there is a norm that allows only a select few to have access to developmental I-deals (Rousseau, et al., 2006). Everyone wants access to development resources, and this situation can create competition between employees for the limited organization resources and the fewer than select developmental I-deals. By providing development I-deals, employers articulate their view that they believe the employees have the potential for development and significant contributions to the organization (Hornung, et al., 2014). Thus, organisational agents are likely to award developmental I-deals only to employees whom they believe contribute valuably to the organisation.

Successful negotiations for idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are closely linked to positive outcomes for both employees and organisations. Employees who negotiate

customized work arrangements based on their preferences experience greater job satisfaction, reduced work-related stress, and improved work–life balance (Gautam & Riggio, 2018; Kossek et al., 2011). These outcomes are vital to improving employee well-being and retaining valuable talent. Successful negotiation of i-deals helps to increase employee engagement and initiative, thereby improving performance and productivity from an organisational perspective (Lekies & Avery, 2011; Biron & Boon, 2013). In addition, organisations that effectively manage their internal negotiation processes build a reputation as employee-focused and forward-thinking. This reputation helps attract and retain top talent in a highly competitive job market.

The successful negotiation of i-deals can influence colleagues' emotional responses to some extent. According to Rousseau (2005, p. 154), employees who do not have their i-deal requests granted perceive them as causing a token loss because they believe it damages the value or worth of others. Therefore, observing other employees successfully negotiate i-deals may lead to feelings of envy, as their success could impact the status of others (Smith & Kim, 2007). Ng (2017) confirmed that observing others' developmental I-deals is positively correlated with feelings of envy. This feeling of jealousy can create a competitive atmosphere, which can result in feelings of rejection and the decision to leave voluntarily. Garg and Fulmer (2017) propose that co-workers' emotions can be influenced by their perceptions of entitlement and their evaluation of the i-deal itself.

Negative emotions and voluntary turnover may be negative consequences of unsuccessful I-deals for employees. Unsuccessful I-deals negotiation of

developmental opportunities can inadvertently create an environment of competition between employees. If some employees are receiving benefits of development, like professional training or career development, they can create a feeling of jealousy from other employees without the benefits. Jealousy can spur severe competition amongst employees, according to Ng (2017). increased competition decreases teamwork and can reduce employee morale as a whole. Some employees can benefit from developmental I-deals, while others will see it as exclusion or an unfair situation if they are not granted a similar opportunity (Morf et al., 2019). The link of exclusion and mobility shows that when employees see unappreciation or a lack of equal opportunities, they will be encouraged to look for job opportunities elsewhere (Renn et al., 2013).

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory explains people's views about the reciprocity in social interactions and people's reactions to organisational policies or support are dependent upon their exchange ideology (Andrews et al., 2003). Therefore, the notion of exchange ideology is relevant to understanding I-deals 's impact to work (Liu et al., 2013). Humans orient their I-deals negotiations to obtain maximum outcomes and minimum costs, or practices of I-deals negotiation, in the work process look to obtain work arrangements in accordance to their desires, preferences and needs. In turn, they can exchange some of their skills, through commitment or contribution, back to the organisation. For both organizational I-deals and ideologies, employees could perceive the amount of I-deals they have as a form of reciprocity and potentially, as they see this aspect of I-deals as something they deserve, could lead to a heightened

sense of worth which could lead to a perceived or psychological, sense of entitlement, and workplace bias due to as it relates to I-deals factors (Wu et al., 2022).

Social comparison theory

With the incidence of “I-deals” on the rise in organisations, this theory is pertinent when working with I-deals (Liao et al., 2016). “I-deals” and personalized working conditions can introduce differences between employees (Rousseau, 2005). As posited by social comparison theory, individuals define and evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others of differing social status. This helps reduce uncertainty and provides semantic or socially motivated self-improvement (Brown et al., 2007). Again, in the context of social comparison theory, within a workplace, employees forage for an alternative to benchmark themselves on the outcomes to social comparisons and social relationships, from rewards, working conditions, and, co-workers (Greenberg et al., 2007). Based on social comparison theory there is a socialization dimension when people define and evaluate themselves from a social comparison standpoint with others with whom they share some dimension (Brown et al., 2007). In the workplace, once again, employees seek reference points to and with which to compare themselves on outcomes (such as rewards and working conditions), their own performance, and social relationships (Greenberg et al., 2007).

When scoring through social comparisons, employees also arouse emotional processes (Greenberg et al., 2007) that can be influenced through the nature of the comparison (upward or downward) and affective response premise (pleasant or unpleasant) (Smith, 2000). Upward or downward mobility can be observed in relation to individuals who are more affluent or less affluent, respectively (Brown et al., 2007). The direction of this outcome depends on the nature and outcome of the i-deals

negotiated by colleagues, both successfully and unsuccessfully. I-deals have benefits, such as meeting specific needs, promoting work-life balance, and providing recognition (Rousseau, 2005). However, they also have costs, such as jeopardizing future opportunities for salary increases and promotions. When colleagues who did not receive an I-deal believe that others have better I-deals, they will engage in downward comparison.

2.5 GENDER DYNAMICS IN NEGOTIATION

Women who initiate negotiations may face social disapproval and be perceived as violating traditional gender roles (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). According to social role theory, because the negotiation environment does not conform to women's traditional gender roles, women are less likely to initiate negotiations and have lower expectations for successful negotiations.

Women's gender roles often include traits such as nurturing, caring about the well-being of others, and focusing on relationships (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The male gender role is characterized by action traits such as competitiveness, self-confidence and interest orientation. Gender roles are both descriptive and normative in that they dictate expectations for female and male behavior (Wood & Eagly, 2010). Research suggests that women often worry about facing disapproval and tend to adjust their behavior accordingly (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). However, deviations from these roles may be viewed negatively by their negotiation counterparts (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013).

Women may face additional barriers, such as gender stereotypes and bias, which limit their effectiveness in advocating for personalized work arrangements (Bowles et al., 2019). Like individuals with low interpersonal orientation (IOs), males tend to focus on the impersonal task of maximizing income (Horgan and Smith, 2006). Men tend to compete when they can maximize their income through competitive strategies. In contrast, they cooperate when a cooperative strategy is more likely to maximize their income. The analysis shows that men and women have different negotiation agendas (Prassa and Stalikas, 2020).

Mutual benefit in negotiations is not a fixed value, as it depends on the negotiator's ability to make the optimal trade-off (Gratch, 2021). As collaboration and information exchange increase, theoretical perspectives suggest that women may be able to increase expected value in negotiations more than men (Thompson et al., 2010). Recent research by Holmes and Marra (2002) suggests that gender-related communication tendencies may persist but may also be influenced by factors other than gender, such as culture and social norms. The findings of DiMenichi and Tricomi (2015) contradict those of Holmes and Marra (2002) who argued that men mentioned money earlier in negotiations than women, suggesting that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on relationship building. (2020), women are generally more friendly than men. In the prisoner's dilemma scenario, women were more likely than men to believe that cooperative behavior would improve their career prospects. These behavioral differences suggest that men are better at acquiring economic resources than women. In contrast, female negotiators are expected to leave a more favorable impression than male negotiators (Cigarini et al., 2020).

Gender role stereotypes are indicative norms that refer to shared beliefs about how group members should behave. According to Hentschel, Heilman, and Peus (2019), women achieve better outcomes in negotiations when they behave in ways that reflect traditional gender norms through stability and consistency in roles and responsibilities. Bowers, Thomason, and Bell (2019) point to the influence of a gendered social construction of negotiation on women being able to successfully negotiate for salary.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY:

While objectivism attempts to find universality in patterns and relationships, subjectivism allows us to derive insights about workers' I-deals negotiation strategies through their experiences and interrogates how those experiences shape their careers. The emphasis on individuals' experiences and perspectives is an integral aspect of subjectivism, which enables researchers to study individuals' subjective experiences, perspectives, and approaches supporting gender equality, career development, and HR integration of working women in Hong Kong.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

This research seeks to investigate the techniques and impacts of negotiating "I-deals" for professional female workers. For this purpose, the interpretive research methods seem more suitable. Interpretivism accepts that individuals create meaning and interpretation of their own experiences (Crotty, 1998). These understandings could

also take shape through positivist methods as needed. In conclusion, there was research that describes individual views and resulted in good findings that front an understanding of gender equality and career growth in the particular context of Hong Kong.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The choice of qualitative research approaches is contingent on the research questions, as well as the data required and research approaches. Deciding to employ qualitative approaches allows for a contextualized, in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and more specific details about the feelings, nuances, and strategies of professional women engaged in the negotiation of developmental I-deals (Anderson et al., 2020). This research topic investigates the strategies, successes, failures, and implications surrounding I-deals negotiations. Qualitative methodologies serve an important purpose in complex and differently defined contexts, which is particularly pertinent given the ubiquitous complexities of human interactions and subjective interpretations of what occurred in these negotiations (Anderson et al., 2020).

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

3.4.1 Semi-structure interview

Interviews enable real stories, life experiences and emotions that position the basis of an argument (Kumar, 2011). The relationship between micro-level stories and macro policies is a distinguishing characteristic of qualitative inquiry.

In developing this research question, I created five interview questions to prepare a semi-structured interview. These questions guided the interviews in critical areas of

interest as well as managing the interviews to ensure all interviews comparatively touched upon essential topics associated with developmental i-deals negotiations particularly strategies involved and impact of the negotiations. Using a semi-structured interview as a research method presents certain pitfalls, particularly due to the time-consuming nature of interviews. After selecting relevant participants, it is necessary to arrange interviews with them. Then, conducting the interviews and subsequently transcribing and analysing the collected data can be a very time-consuming task (Denscombe, 2014, p.232).

3.5 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

Characteristics of the participants:

The participants in this research are professional women working in different industries in Hong Kong. What they all have in common is having proposed and completed developmental I-deals negotiations within the past 10 months. Participants must meet certain criteria to answer the research question. First, they should be involved in negotiating developmental I-deals within the stipulated 10-month period. This standard ensures that participants have direct and up-to-date experience in the type of negotiation being investigated. Furthermore, participants' negotiation needs to be developmental I-deals “voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standardized nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers” (Rousseau et al., 2006: 978). This ensures that the negotiation experience of participants is focused on actual I-deals, not on natural negotiation tactics.

The selected participants acknowledge that career women with over a decade of experience may have made significant progress in their careers. Their negotiation

experiences may revolve around strategic career i-deals, promotions, or seeking opportunities that align with their long-term aspirations.

3.6 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The research used snowball sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique that is especially helpful when researchers are working with hard-to-reach populations or when individuals possess unique characteristics or experiences (Silvia 2020).

Snowball sampling will often utilize personal networks and referrals so that the researchers may leverage existing relationships to identify prospective participants (Silvia, 2020).

The data saturation for this research was grounded in inductive thematic saturation, the point at which no themes or sub-themes emerged from the data (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). NVivo was useful for tagging the themes, indicators of theme development, and themes frequency, allowing more dependable and transparent judgments of saturation. In addition, the qualitative analysis process also captures the data analysis in continually updated memos, and node summaries, which can be beneficial for the audit trail and to make for more reliable and traceable process.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

3.7.1 Thematic Analysis Method

The research was underpinned by a thematic analysis of the negotiation strategies and outcomes of development-oriented special deals (I-deals) for women workers in Hong Kong. Thematic analysis provided an organized, flexible way to identify, analyze and

report patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For this research, thematic analysis was appropriate to capture the complexity and context of the interviews with the 30 participants, as these elements were important considerations.

Thematic analysis was chosen as it provided a systematic way to explore the experiences and narratives with respect to the participants' negotiation strategies in order to identify similarities and differences in their meanings and descriptions. Since this research was exploratory in nature, thematic analysis was well-suited in that it allowed for the identification of themes relating to participants' negotiation strategies, perceived barriers and their outcomes, without being overly bound to 'theories'.

3.7.2 ANALYSIS PROCESS

The research used a combination of Microsoft Excel and qualitative data analysis software NVivo 15 to analyze the data collected from semi-structured interviews. First, the interview transcripts were manually reviewed and organized in Excel to gain an initial familiarity with the data and generate early descriptive codes to identify recurring themes, thereby broadly categorizing the data. Subsequently, systematic coding and theme development were conducted using NVivo. The software helped to efficiently organize the qualitative data and apply the inductive thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). All transcripts were imported into NVivo, with Excel used for early descriptive mapping and NVivo used for in-depth coding. The combination of the two enhances the credibility and reliability of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

The analysis process have six key stages, based on Braun and Clarke's (2006), first phase involves becoming familiar with the data. The second stage, generating initial codes, involves systematically coding meaningful segments of information.

Guidelines were developed to capture concepts such as *"perceived fairness," "confidence," "organisational support," and "gender-based negotiation challenges."*

In the third phase, guidelines related to preparation and relationship building were discovered, grouped under a broader theme of "pre-negotiation strategies." Likewise, guidelines for addressing feelings of rejection, frustration, and empowerment are clustered under the theme *"The Emotional Consequences of Negotiation."*

The fourth stage is reviewing the themes, which involves refining the themes to ensure they accurately capture the material. The topic of "perceived fairness" was split into two sub-topics: *"process fairness"* and *"result fairness"* to distinguish procedural fairness from the final outcome of the negotiation.

The fifth stage, defining and naming themes, requires assigning a clear definition to each theme to clarify their relevance to the research question. Themes such as *"Gender Barriers to Negotiation"* were defined based on examples of participants describing biases and stereotypes that impacted their ability to successfully negotiate.

Finally, in the sixth stage of producing the report, the findings are organized into a coherent narrative supported by direct quotes from participants. One participant's statement, *"Before they would consider my request for training, I had to take on additional tasks without formal recognition,"* exemplified the theme of *"demonstrating value before negotiating."*

3.7.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that participants were not biased or reluctant to disclose their failure experiences, it used several methodological strategies to promote openness and minimize response bias. First, before the interview starts the researcher will provide brief questions and a consent form, and participants will be fully aware that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. This autonomy helps to create an environment (Miracle, 2016). The research used semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to describe specific experiences in their own words, increasing the authenticity of responses, and participants' recent participation in developmental I-deals negotiations ensured accuracy and recall. The research strictly adhered to the ethical considerations of the Belmont Report, such as confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms for anonymization, and secure data storage, creating a safe environment for participants to discuss successes and failures candidly without worrying about professional risks (Cassell, 2000).

CHAPTER 4: RESULT AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 30 professional women working in various industries in Hong Kong were interviewed. They all held mid- and senior-level positions in companies of different sizes and had participated in the negotiation of developmental idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) in the past year. The average age of the participants was 34 years old, and their professional experience ranged from 3 years to more than 15 years.

- Age range: 28 to 60 years old
- Industries: technology, law, education, finance, human resources, art, consulting, manufacturing
- Position: 40% mid-level managers, 35% senior managers, and 25% consultants
- Average experience: 6-12 years

4.2 KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

Theme 1: Strategic Negotiation Approach

1.1 View Development as an Organisational Value

Successful negotiators consistently link their requests to measurable business outcomes. Participants found it effective to submit structured proposals that emphasized both individual and organisational returns.

“I didn’t just ask for training; I tied it to the expansion of our talent pool. I showed how I could lead the next phase more effectively.” (Interviewee 2, Art Consultant)

“When I asked for a software upgrade, I tied it to the time saved each week. I even showed them the numbers.” (Interviewee 5 – Legal Assistant)

“I tailored the request for additional training based on the inefficiencies of the current team.” (Interviewee 1 – Senior Project Manager)

1.2 Timing and Leverage

Strategically make requests after major deliverables or key achievements. In addition, most of the time it was supervisors and managers who proposed the negotiation and participants who initiated the negotiation. For example, a senior project manager said:

"I chose to make the request after managing our largest trade fair. This proved my ability and enhanced my influence." (Interviewee 1, senior project manager)

"I knew our team had just achieved its quarterly goal, so I took the opportunity to make my request." (Interviewee 7 - recruitment consultant)

1.3 Building informal alliances

Multiple participants shuttled through multiple levels of hierarchy, involving not only direct managers but also stakeholders such as HR, IT and even shareholders.

Many participants relied on mentorship or informal channels before formal negotiations:

"My teammates helped me validate my negotiation case before I presented it to my manager." (Interviewee 4 - legal consultant)

"I communicated with the principal, shareholders and kindergarten director before contacting HR, which made my proposal more powerful." (Interviewee 3 - art consultant)

Theme 2: Structural and cultural barriers

2.1 Gender bias in assessment motivations

Implicit gender norms affect people's perception of women's ambitions.

"They implied I wouldn't stay long because I'm a mother. That was more painful than the actual rejection." (Interviewee #5)

2.2 Hierarchy and Power Distance

Interviewees expressed discomfort negotiating in a hierarchical system that discouraged challenge or upward influence.

“They told me to wait. I don’t know when, but bringing it up again seemed a little aggressive.” (Interviewees #4 and #11, legal contractors)

2.3 Resource-Driven Rejections Classified as Neutral

Although many managers cited budget constraints, participants felt that the selective approval of requests depended more on who made the request than on the content of the request.

“Another male colleague received external training funding. I was told I would have to wait until the next fiscal year.” (Interviewee #6)

Theme 3: Critical Success Factors

3.1 Confidence + Clarity

The most persuasive negotiators combine structured logic with interpersonal confidence.

“I gave them a proposal with KPIs, timelines, and budget. I think they respected my approach.” (Interviewee #9)

*“I shared the key performance indicators (KPIs) and upcoming projects and showed how the course would help me handle them. I think that convinced them.”
(Interviewee 10 - Project Coordinator)*

3.2 Management Support and Coaching

Supportive managers go beyond approval, they coach. One participant described:

“He didn’t approve right away. But he worked with me to make it more relevant to our team’s OKRs.” (Interviewee #7)

3.3 Alignment with Strategic Plans

Some I-deals are successful because they are closely tied to macro-level plans, such as digital transformation or regional expansion.

“Once I proved that my request was in line with how they were going to advance the Chinese market, they had no choice but to support my request.” (Interviewee #1)

Theme 4: Outcomes and Emotional Impact

4.1 Positive: Promotion and Development

Many successful I-deal negotiators reported that they experienced career acceleration within 3-6 months.

“I was promoted two levels in a year. That course helped me to lead a multinational team with confidence.” (Interviewee #8)

4.2 Enhanced Organisational Commitment

Perceived support increased loyalty and discretionary effort.

“After they invested in me, I took the initiative, rather than being asked. That changed my mindset.” (Interviewee #10)

4.3 Negative Factors: Employee Turnover and Staff Turnover

In contrast, rejection, especially when expressed in an insensitive way, can lead to psychological withdrawal.

*“They ignored my email and did not reply. I mentally wanted to quit that day.”
(Interviewee #11, consultant)*

Some people left the company completely within a few months after failed negotiations:

“I felt undervalued. I joined a competitor who offered an immediate promotion.”

(Interviewee #2)

4.3 Cross-case Patterns

Using the NVivo query function, several high-frequency patterns were observed:

Across all records, the most mentioned barrier was “management bias,” followed by “resource denial” and “fear of retaliation.”

Success was highly correlated with cases involving multi-level lobbying and early alignment with KPIs or departmental goals. Disappointment is the most common emotional outcome of failed negotiations, while empowerment frequently occurs in successful negotiations.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 COMPARISON OF FINDINGS WITH EXISTING LITERATURE

The research confirms and extends several themes found in previous research on developmental idiosyncratic deals (I-deals), especially in terms of negotiation strategies, structural barriers, and outcomes.

Negotiation strategies

In line with previous research by Hornung et al. (2008) and Anand et al. (2010), this research emphasizes that successful developmental I-deals require the construction of a strategic framework and alignment with organisational goals. Participants emphasized making proposals that are consistent with business logic, which echoes Rousseau's (2005) argument that effective I-deals must create value for both employees and employers. However, a novel insight from this study is the role of coalition building, leveraging internal allies or mentors and has been less emphasized in earlier Western research. This finding is consistent with Hong Kong's relational and hierarchical workplace culture, in which support from respected figures can influence decisions.

Challenges in Negotiation

While gender bias and power dynamics have been addressed in the broader organisational behavior literature (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kulik & Olekalns, 2012), research offers new insights by situating these barriers within Hong Kong's unique sociocultural framework. Many participants reported difficulty negotiating with authoritarian managers, reflecting Confucian-influenced hierarchical norms that are not prevalent in Western societies. In addition, it shows that motherhood often leads to lower expectations of employees' own ambitions, which reproduces traditional gender roles that have not been mentioned in previous I-deals research.

Success Factors

The research confirms the findings of Anand et al. (2010) that managerial support and clear communication are key to successful negotiations. However, unlike existing research that focuses primarily on employee autonomy, it adds depth by identifying that managerial framing and feedback are not only supportive factors, but also co-

constructors of I-deals itself. This shifts some autonomy from employees to relationship dynamics, especially in a collectivist culture like Hong Kong.

Consequences and Implications

Previous research has mostly concentrated on the positive impacts of I-deals on outcomes like individual job satisfaction, and performance (Rousseau et al., 2006).

Failed negotiations can lead to turnover (or intention thereof) and decreased motivation. These responses reflect that I-deals is a high-risk negotiation strategy that can be counterproductive, resulting in employee intent to leave, decreased motivation, and other affective consequences if perceived as an unfair rejection.

5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Social Exchange Theory

Research evidence indicates reciprocity is worthy of consideration for positive outcomes. If organisations are willing to invest in their employees using I-deals, the participants would likely reciprocate by increasing their loyalty and performance. On the other hand, if their expectations are not met, disengagement and mistrust may arise.

Negotiation Theory

The analysis emphasized the value of preparation, framing and relationship building as key components for negotiation theory. The effective use of negotiation strategy depends on the context of the cultural and organisational norms that each negotiator would explore through the various strategic means of negotiation and how effective each negotiator was in adapting to circumstance.

5.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

The situation where Hong Kong was a British colony influenced by an entrepreneurial culture shows how Eastern hierarchical orientations and Western meritocratic assumptions create distinctive negotiation processes that existing models based in Western contexts are unable to adequately explain.

One particularly overlooked role is the role of interpersonal influence. In this context, “ideas” can be strategic. Alliances, mentors, and informal networks quietly shape negotiation outcomes, reflecting the deeper relational structures that drive decisions behind the scenes.

What makes this study different is that it looks beyond the usual “win/fail” outcomes of negotiations. It delves into what happens after a negotiation ends, how people stay engaged, and what motivates them after a deal is done. This post-negotiation perspective reveals that “ideas” not only influence decisions, but also people’s mindsets.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

This research examines the negotiation of development agreements pertaining specifically to female employees in multinational corporations based in China. By looking at both successful and unsuccessful examples, it describes how good preparation, objective, well-defined strategies and a supportive organisational culture can improve outcomes. Concurrently, the study identifies persistent constraints on development for women in the workplace, such as gendered stereotypes and rigid hierarchies. The findings advocate the adoption of transparent policies, appropriate and regular training to mitigate bias, and more of an inclusive workplace culture to support women's progress and overall organisational effectiveness.

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