

# Development and Validation of a Hospitality Idiosyncratic Deals Scale

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## **Development and validation of the hospitality idiosyncratic deals scale**

### **Highlights**

- The research contributes to the gap in the scale of the hospitality idiosyncratic deals.
- A four-step mixed method approach is used for the scale development.
- The scale consists of three dimensions: career and incentives, task, flexibility.

# Development and validation of the hospitality idiosyncratic deals scale

**Abstract:** This study explores the perceptions of middle and senior hotel managers regarding their own idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), and it develops a scale to measure the i-deals in the Chinese hospitality industry. The study applies a mixed research method, conducting a questionnaire survey of 675 middle and senior hotel managers and holding in-depth interviews with 20 knowledge worker participants in mainland China. The findings reveal three types of i-deals in the Chinese hospitality industry context: (1) career and incentives i-deals, (2) task i-deals, and (3) flexibility i-deals. Next, the study proposes and validates a three-dimensional scale of hotel managers' i-deals, thereby enriching the study of idiosyncratic terms of employment in the hospitality industry context.

**Keywords:** Idiosyncratic deals, Hospitality industry, Knowledge worker, China

## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of the knowledge economy has significantly influenced human resource management (HRM) strategies in many organizations. In the knowledge economy environment, an increasing number of employers are paying much more attention to the management of talent, knowledge, and human capital (C. G. Davidson et al., 2010). In considering this trend, Rousseau (2001) developed the concept of idiosyncratic deals (or i-deals), namely personalized employment arrangements that are negotiated between individual employees and their employers for the benefit of both parties (Rousseau, 2005). Due to the scarcity of organizational resources, i-deals are most likely to be granted to the highly valued knowledge workers (Rousseau et al., 2006) who master the use of symbols, concepts, knowledge, and information as their working tools (Drucker, 1959). Various other researchers have further investigated the measures, antecedents, and outcomes of i-deals. Generally, i-deals involve work with allowance for flexibility and personal development (Rousseau et al., 2006). In recent studies, “flexibility i-deals” have been differentiated in terms of schedule- and location-related flexibility. Developmental i-deals have been categorized according to specialized task and work responsibilities, and a variety of “financial incentives i-deals” have

been noted (Rosen et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2013). Hornung et al., 2014) suggested that developmental i-deals should be differentiated into task and career i-deals.

Although the measures or particular terms of i-deals vary considerably, most researchers have agreed that i-deals are commonly effective in motivating and retaining knowledge workers (Hornung et al., 2008; Hornung et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Rosen et al., 2013; Sun & Kong, 2016). According to Drucker (1959), knowledge workers are mainly the managers and engineers of their organizations. In the hospitality industry context, a recent study of knowledge workers selected managers/supervisors at the departmental level or above as its target population (Wu & Chen, 2015), as such employees were deemed most likely to play roles as knowledge workers in their industry. Therefore, middle and senior managers are generally regarded as the main types of knowledge workers who obtain i-deals in the hospitality industry. I-deals undoubtedly provide a new approach to managing talent, knowledge, and human capital.

The Chinese hospitality industry has grown rapidly, and has attracted a great deal of academic interest over the last three decades (Kong et al., 2011). At the same time, however, this hospitality industry is facing serious human resource challenges, such as high turnover rates and shortages of qualified operational or managerial employees (Gu et al., 2006; Kong et al., 2011; Very East, 2017). An early research stated that the major reasons causing these issues were the lower wages, lower social status, and greater difficulty gaining managerial training programs and job promotions for hotel employees (Qiu Zhang & Wu, 2004). The contents of i-deals involve task, career development, flexibility, and incentives, and these arrangements may help to solve the human resource challenges for the Chinese hospitality industry. Given that i-deals have been identified as an effective strategy to motivate and retain knowledge workers, it has become necessary to discuss and study i-deals in relation to the Chinese hospitality industry. To date, however, little research has been conducted on i-deals in this industry. Only one study has considered how managers and other employees in the hospitality industry relate to the option of creating i-deals (Dhiman et al., 2016). This study investigated i-deals on the basis of social exchange theory, and adopted a three-dimensional scale developed by Hornung et al. (2014). The findings indicated that i-deals related to task, career, and flexibility all had positive effects on employee motivation, commitment, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior. One limitation of Dhiman et al.'s (2016) study was that it focused on only two domains, namely *what* (task or

career specifications) and *when* (schedule flexibility), without considering alternatives for *where* people work (location flexibility) or *why* they work (financial and other incentives) (Rosen et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2013).

In addition, very little research on i-deals has focused on the particular context of the Chinese hospitality industry. Although many hotels in China have successfully developed innovative management practices that combine international and domestic styles of operation (Cai et al., 2000; Kong et al., 2011), the concept of i-deals is relatively new in the Chinese hospitality industry, and the applicability of this approach in Chinese hotels remains unexamined. Compare to developmental i-deals, flexibility i-deals may be more difficult to be applied in Chinese hotels. Because most eastern employees tend to perceive working long hours in the workplace as their job commitment and are less likely to negotiate schedule or location flexibility (Chanra, 2012). Besides, some different i-deals may exist in the Chinese hospitality industry. Therefore, this study aims to investigate what kinds of i-deals are being practiced by knowledge workers (i.e., middle and senior hotel managers) in the Chinese hospitality industry. Furthermore, the study develops a more comprehensive scale to measure i-deals in the hospitality industry context. The proposed scale includes consideration of a greater range of options in terms of the *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* dimensions of the job. This study has two major contributions. First, the measurement scale developed in this study may enrich the scope and content of potential hospitality i-deals. Second, the findings of this study may provide a foundation for the future research on the hospitality i-deals and a comprehensive view of personalized and flexible employment arrangements in the hospitality industry context.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Idiosyncratic deals: A new framework for the 21st century*

The term “i-deals” was first proposed by Rousseau (2001) to describe voluntary, individualized, nonstandard arrangements that are agreed between valued workers and their employers through a process of negotiation. In a further study, Rousseau (2005) defined i-deals as personalized employment agreements that are negotiated between workers and their employers regarding mutually beneficial conditions of employment. This definition has since been widely accepted by scholars, and i-deals are generally understood to have four main features. First, all i-deals are individually negotiated between an employee and an employer.

Second, i-deals make it possible to provide an employee with certain customized employment arrangements that differ from those of other workers. Third, i-deals are made to benefit both the employee and the employer, through satisfying the individual's needs and the organization's interests. Unlike other types of individualized employment arrangements such as those involving favoritism/cronyism or unauthorized arrangements, i-deals are formally negotiated between the employee and employer on the basis of mutual values and needs, instead of relational factors or rule breaking (Rousseau et al., 2006). Fourth, the scope of each i-deal varies from person to person (Rousseau, 2006).

I-deals can be classified in two main ways (see Table 1). The first way is based on the time of negotiation. On this basis, Rousseau and Kim (2006) divided i-deals into ex-ante and ex-post i-deals. Ex-ante i-deals are negotiated during the recruitment process, and ex-post i-deals are negotiated after the worker is employed. Another way to categorize i-deals is based on their contents. Rousseau and Kim (2006) proposed a three-dimensional scale of i-deals to incorporate the dimensions of work flexibility, developmental goals, and reduced workloads. Flexibility i-deals involve customized schedule arrangements that meet the employee's needs. Developmental i-deals refer to personalized opportunities that are given to employees to develop specific personal knowledge and skills toward future career goals. Reduced workload i-deals involve reduced demands in terms of time or responsibility. This scale of i-deal options has provided a theoretical foundation for further studies. Hornung et al. (2014) suggested that developmental i-deals could be differentiated into task- and career-related i-deals, and they proposed a three-dimensional scale including task, career, and flexibility i-deals. Rosen et al. (2008, 2013) proposed a four-dimensional scale that considered *when* (schedule flexibility), *where* (location flexibility), *why* (financial incentives), and *what* (task and work responsibilities) as the dimensions of employee roles in organizations. This four-dimensional scale expanded the range of flexibility in considering the options for maximized mutual benefit for employees and their organizations.

**Table 1**

**A review of the measurement scales for i-deals**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Method</b>
<b>The Time of Negotiation</b>	Rousseau & Kim (2006)	1) Ex-ante i-deals	Hospital staff in the U.S.A.	Grounded theory
		2) Ex-post i-deals	U.S.A.	
<b>Content</b>	Rousseau & Kim (2006)	1) Flexibility i-deals	Hospital staff in the U.S.A.	Grounded theory
		2) Developmental i-deals	U.S.A.	

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Rosen et al. (2008)	3) Reduced workload i-deals 1) Task and work responsibilities i-deals 2) Flexibility i-deals 3) Financial incentives i-deals 4) General i-deal propensity	University staff in the U.S.A.	Case study
Ng & Feldman (2010)	1) Level of pay 2) Advancement opportunities 3) Training 4) Career development 5) Job security 6) Support with personal problems	Enterprise managers in the U.S.A.	Case study
Rosen et al. (2013)	1) Task and work responsibilities i-deals 2) Schedule flexibility i-deals 3) Location flexibility i-deals 4) Financial incentives i-deals	University staff in the U.S.A.	Case study
Hornung et al. (2014)	1) Task i-deals 2) Career i-deals 3) Flexibility i-deals	Hospital staff in Germany	Case study
Norris (2015)	1) Task i-deals 2) Career i-deals 3) Flexibility i-deals 4) Financial incentives i-deals	Expert panel	Delphi method

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## 2.2. Idiosyncratic deals in the hospitality industry

Although the study of i-deals in the hospitality industry is still at an early stage, clearly i-deals have long existed as a human resources management practice in this industry. Previous studies have shown that most hotel employees have high expectations in terms of their opportunities for managerial training, growth, development, support, and compensation (Kong et al., 2011; Qiu Zhang & Wu, 2004; Walsh & Taylor, 2007). Other studies also showed that Chinese hotel employees born since the 1980s tend to pursue job autonomy, individual career development, and work-life balance via personal empowerment in managing their organizational careers (Kong et al., 2015, 2016; Morton, 2002). This kind of personal initiative places a high demand on hotel employers to consider making i-deals that can satisfy the individualized needs of their most valued managers. In addition, some hospitality employees such as chefs may also obtain developmental i-deals as a reward for

their innovative products and services. For example, some chefs in those Michelin-starred restaurants are rewarded with one or more stars for their cuisines or exceptional cooking methods and techniques, and this strategy not only helps the individuals to achieve professional and economic success, but also motivates them to satisfy their customers' high expectations for innovative and renewed recipes and thus to help the organization to increase customers and profits (Durand et al., 2007; Fauchart & von Hippel, 2008; Messeni Petruzzelli & Savino, T., 2015; Messeni Petruzzelli & Savino, 2014; Svejenova et al., 2007). As the operations of the food and beverage department are also critical for the success of a luxury hotel (Nebel et al., 1994), hotel employers should also consider making i-deals that can satisfy the individualized needs of their creative knowledge workers.

In terms of academic research, the only previous study concerning the effects of i-deals on senior managers, middle managers, and other employees was focused on Indian hotels (Dhiman et al., 2016). This study used the three-dimensional scale developed by Hornung et al. (2014) to measure i-deals. One limitation of this study was that it focused on only two domains: *what* (task and career i-deals) and *when* (schedule flexibility), without considering *where* (location flexibility i-deals) or *why* (financial incentives i-deals). An important factor in the high turnover rate in the Chinese hospitality industry (Very East, 2017) has been employees' dissatisfaction with compensation. This financial aspect of job satisfaction has been verified as being significantly related to financial incentive i-deals in the Chinese manufacturing and IT industries (Sun & Kong, 2016). Another study using the Delphi method also emphasized the importance of considering financial incentives in the study of i-deals (Norris, 2015). In terms of considering *where* alternatives, location flexibility i-deals may not be widely accepted in the Chinese hospitality industry, but it is still necessary to conduct systematic research on the applicability of such options for middle and senior managers. Clearly, it is important to develop a more comprehensive measurement scale for i-deals in the hospitality industry, and to verify the applicability, validity, and reliability of such a scale.

### **3. Methodology**

A mixed research method was adopted to answer the research question and to develop a more inclusive measurement scale. This study used a four-step procedure: 1) developing the initial measurement items, 2) refining the measures, 3) collecting data, and 4) evaluating the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement scale (Churchill, 1979; Netemeyer et al.,

2003). A pragmatic qualitative research was conducted to develop the initial measurement items and refine the measures. The quantitative research method applied in this case involved collecting data and evaluating the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement scale. As a survey instrument that must reflect the real experience of the participants, the developed scale needs to be validated with a large, representative sample of the population concerned (Creswell et al., 2017).

The target population for this study was the knowledge workers of the Chinese hotel industry. As noted in the introduction, senior and middle hotel managers are regarded as the most typical kinds of knowledge workers in this industry. Data for the study were collected from managers in four-star and five-star hotels in mainland China, because i-deals, as special and scarce organizational resources (Rousseau, 2006), are more likely to occur in the higher level of hotels that have enough organizational resources to implement advanced management concepts. Convenience sampling was used to select participants who met the criteria for being considered as senior or middle hotel managers. 20 middle and senior managers from Chinese four-star and five-star hotels were interviewed from August to October 2018. These participants included managers from both international and domestic hotels.

Concerning the survey portion of the study, as physically accessing a large sample of managers from hotels of differing star levels was difficult, the questionnaire survey data were collected with the help of a data collection company. The main survey was conducted in February 2019, with 712 structured questionnaires distributed to middle and senior managers who had worked more than one year in a four-star or five-star hotel in mainland China. In the questionnaire, all of the items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale, with the options ranging between 1 for “strongly disagree” and 7 for “strongly agree”. The collected data were analyzed, and the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement scale were tested using the SPSS and AMOS software packages.

## **4. Results**

### *4.1 Developing initial measurement items*

The development of the initial measurement items involved two steps. The first step was to identify relevant i-deal-related practices by reviewing the literature. As little previous

research had been conducted on i-deals in the hospitality industry, we expanded our review to the more extensive literature on i-deals in other professions (Hornung et al., 2014; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Norris, 2015; Rousseau & Kim, 2006; Rosen et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2013). We selected 19 items, which were mainly based on the findings of studies by Hornung et al. (2014) and Rosen et al. (2013) (see Table 2). We found that a combination of the two scales proposed in these studies covered a comprehensive range of four domains in the workplace: *what* (task and career i-deals), *when* (schedule flexibility i-deals), *where* (location flexibility i-deals), and *why* (financial incentives i-deals).

**Table 2**

**List of i-deals items generalized from the literature**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Task i-deals</b>	1. Job tasks that fit personal strengths and talents (Hornung et al., 2014)
	2. Job tasks that fit personal interests (Hornung et al., 2014)
	3. Personally motivating job tasks (Hornung et al., 2014)
	4. More flexibility in how I complete my job (Rosen et al., 2013)
<b>Career i-deals</b>	5. Career options that suit my personal goals (Hornung et al., 2014)
	6. Personal career development opportunities (Hornung et al., 2014)
	7. Ways to secure my professional advancement (Hornung et al., 2014)
	8. A desirable position that makes use of my unique abilities after initial appointment (Rosen et al., 2013)
<b>Schedule flexibility i-deals</b>	9. A work schedule suited to me personally (Hornung et al., 2014)
	10. Extra flexibility in starting and ending my work day (Hornung et al., 2014)
	11. A work schedule customized to my personal needs (Hornung et al., 2014)
	12. Freedom to take time off for handling non-work-related issues outside of formal leave and sick time (Rosen et al., 2013)
<b>Location flexibility i-deals</b>	13. A unique arrangement to complete a portion of my work outside of the office, because of my individual needs (Rosen et al., 2013)
	14. The option to do work from somewhere other than the main office, because of my particular circumstances (Rosen et al., 2013)
<b>Financial incentives i-deals</b>	15. A compensation arrangement that is tailored to fit me (Rosen et al., 2013)
	16. A compensation arrangement that meets my individual needs (Rosen et al., 2013)
	17. Due to my unique skills and contributions, my supervisor has been willing to negotiate my compensation (Rosen et al., 2013)

18. My supervisor has raised my pay beyond the formal standards, because of the exceptional contributions that I make to the organization (Rosen et al., 2013)

19. A compensation plan that rewards my unique contributions after initial appointment (Rosen et al., 2013)

The second step was conducting in-depth interviews with senior and middle hotel managers. The interview participants consisted of 5 general managers (GMs), 5 department directors, and 10 department managers from 9 international and 4 domestic high-star hotels. Baseline information on all of the participants is presented in Table 3. Based on the participants' suggestions, the GMs, deputy GMs, and department directors were regarded as senior managers, and the department managers were regarded as middle managers. All of the interviews were conducted with reference to a semi-structured questionnaire in Chinese.

The GMs and HR directors were first asked to describe the personalized employment arrangements practiced in their hotels, and the extent to which the i-deals described in the 19-item list (Table 2) were practiced in their hotels. Next, they were asked to answer two questions with a more general focus: "What other kinds of effective personalized employment arrangements are practiced among the senior and middle managers in your hotel?" and "According to your own experience, what other kinds of effective personalized employment arrangements can you think of?" The managers were also asked whether they had ever negotiated their own employment arrangements with their supervisors or employers, and to describe any personalized employment arrangements they had obtained in their hotels.

**Table 3**

**The characteristics of the respondents**

Participant	Gender	Hotel brand	Hotel ID	Star level of the hotel	Work experience in the current hotel	Hotel operation type	Position
<b>Senior Managers</b>							
1	Male	International	A	Five-star	10 years	Chain hotel	GM
2	Male	International	B	Five-star	4 years	Chain hotel	GM
3	Male	International	C	Five-star	5 years	Chain hotel	HR director
4	Female	International	D	Five-star	2 years	Chain hotel	Sales and marketing director
5	Female	International	E	Five-star	10 years	Chain hotel	HR director
6	Female	Domestic	F	Five-star	11 years	Chain hotel	GM
7	Male	Domestic	G	Four-star	20 years	Independent hotel	GM

8	Male	Domestic	H	Five-star	13 years	Chain hotel	GM
9	Female	Domestic	F	Five-star	12 years	Chain hotel	HR director
10	Female	Domestic	F	Five-star	10 years	Chain hotel	Sales & Marketing director
<b>Middle Managers</b>							
11	Female	International	E	Five-star	10 years	Chain hotel	HR manager
12	Male	International	I	Five-star	5 years	Chain hotel	Front office manager
13	Male	International	J	Five-star	5 years	Chain hotel	Food and beverages manager
14	Male	International	K	Four-star	5 years	Chain hotel	Front office manager
15	Female	International	L	Five-star	8 years	Chain hotel	Sales and marketing manager
16	Female	Domestic	F	Five-star	3 years	Chain hotel	HR manager
17	Female	Domestic	F	Five-star	7 years	Chain hotel	Financial manager
18	Male	Domestic	F	Five-star	1.5 years	Chain hotel	Engineering manager
19	Male	Domestic	M	Five-star	5 years	Independent hotel	HR manager
20	Male	Domestic	H	Five-star	7 years	Chain hotel	Housekeeping manager

After reviewing the notes from our interviews, we identified four key categories of i-deals desired by our participants: task i-deals, career i-deals, flexibility i-deals, and incentive i-deals (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Typical sentiments of the respondents regarding i-deals**

	<b>Senior managers</b>	<b>Middle managers</b>
<b>Task i-deals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More job autonomy: manage tasks, employees or customers independently (Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 9)</li> <li>- Extra authority or empowerment (Participants 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9)</li> <li>- Independence in accounting and deciding customer discounts (Participants 4, 7)</li> <li>- Job tasks that fit personal strengths, talents, or interests (Participants 5, 9)</li> <li>- Motivating tasks, such as sales of moon cakes or festival dinners (Participants 5, 9)</li> <li>- Amoeba management: employees with exceptional abilities and potential being empowered to act as amoeba leaders who manage their own teams (Participants 6, 9)</li> <li>- Breaking through routines to handle customer disputes (Participant 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More job autonomy and flexibility (Participants 11, 12, 13, 14, 20)</li> <li>- Job tasks that fit personal strengths, talents, and interests (Participants 11, 12, 13, 18, 20)</li> <li>- Motivating tasks (Participants 11, 20)</li> <li>- More personalized job tasks (Participants 17, 18)</li> <li>- Amoeba management (Participants 17, 18)</li> </ul>
<b>Career i-deals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fast-track route to promotion (Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training courses and programs (Participants 11, 12, 14, 19, 20)</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personalized ways to secure professional advancement (Participant 1)</li> <li>- Internal exchange: support another hotel in the same hotel group (Participants 2, 3, 4)</li> <li>- Training courses and programs (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10)</li> <li>- Time support for continuing education (i.e., vocational and academic training) (Participants 2, 4, 5, 8)</li> <li>- Financial support for continuing education (Participants 2, 8)</li> <li>- Job rotation (Participants 2, 4)</li> <li>- Internal or external meetings and conferences (Participant 2)</li> <li>- GM training project (Participant 3)</li> <li>- External study and visits (Participants 2, 3, 9, 10)</li> <li>- Personal career development plans (Participants 2, 3)</li> <li>- Career options (Participants 4, 9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personalized ways to secure professional advancement (Participants 11, 12, 20)</li> <li>- Personal career development opportunities (Participants 11, 12, 20)</li> <li>- Time support for continuing education (Participants 11, 12, 13, 20)</li> <li>- Financial support for continuing education (Participant 12)</li> <li>- Internal exchange: support another hotel in the same hotel group (Participants 16, 19, 20)</li> <li>- External study and visits (Participants 17, 19, 20)</li> <li>- Career options (Participants 11, 20)</li> </ul>
<b>Flexibility i-deals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible schedules (Participants 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9)</li> <li>- Extra flexibility in starting and ending work days (Participants 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9)</li> <li>- No requirement for senior managers to punch in (Participants 1, 8)</li> <li>- Flexible arrangements on taking working days off (Participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9)</li> <li>- Do a portion of work outside the main office (Participants 1, 7, 9, 10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do a portion of work outside the main office (Participant 15)</li> <li>- Flexible arrangements on taking working days off (Participants 16, 17, 20)</li> <li>- Flexible schedules (Participant 20)</li> <li>- Extra flexibility in starting and ending work days (Participant 20)</li> </ul>
<b>Incentives i-deals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bonuses (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)</li> <li>- Performance-related pay (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10)</li> <li>- Flexible compensation adjustment, based on individual contribution (Participants 1, 2, 8, 9)</li> <li>- Gym access (Participants 1, 5)</li> <li>- Birthday parties with customized cakes and gifts (Participants 1, 5, 6, 8)</li> <li>- Tourism deals (Participant 1, 5, 6, 8)</li> <li>- Personalized compensation arrangements based on abilities, seniority, and experience (Participants 2, 10)</li> <li>- Stock-based incentives (Participants 2, 8)</li> <li>- Allowances (Participants 2, 6, 9, 10)</li> <li>- Inviting family members to enjoy the hotel's services or activities (Participants 6, 8, 9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A compensation arrangement that meets individual needs (Participant 12)</li> <li>- Personalized compensation arrangements based on abilities, seniority, and experience (Participants 12, 15)</li> <li>- Additional pay because of special contributions (Participant 15)</li> <li>- Allowances (Participants 16, 17, 19)</li> <li>- Performance-related pay (Participant 17)</li> <li>- Use of hotel products during unused annual leaves (Participant 19)</li> <li>- Inviting family members to enjoy the hotel's services and activities (Participant 19)</li> <li>- Gym access (Participant 20)</li> <li>- Birthday parties with customized cakes and gifts (Participant 20)</li> <li>- Tourism deals (Participant 20)</li> </ul>

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The key recommendations listed in Table 4 are further explained below.

First, both the senior and middle managers agreed that because of their personal levels of responsibility, job types, or experience, they were more likely than other employees to obtain

additional job autonomy (10 participants), job tasks that fit their strengths, talents, or interests (seven participants), extra authority or empowerment (6 participants), and motivating tasks (4 participants). These kinds of personalized employment arrangements were forms of task-related i-deals. According to Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9, some middle and senior managers had relatively high levels of professional experience, responsibility, and need to manage their assigned tasks, staff, or customers in ways suited to their personal work patterns. For example, these managers felt that they should be granted more autonomy to develop work plans, assign tasks, offer discounts to customers, and solve tricky issues such as disharmony among colleagues or customer complaints. Participants 4 and 7 even claimed that their sales and marketing directors had been granted independence in setting accounting practices and deciding customer discounts.

One interesting case of employee empowerment and job autonomy was reported in Hotel F, a domestic hotel in Shandong Province. According to Participants 6, 9, 17, and 18, this hotel had engaged more of its employees in management roles by introducing an Amoeba management program, starting in 2018. Amoeba management was first proposed and practiced by Kyocera, a Japanese company. This practice helps to ensure that more employees with exceptional abilities and potential are empowered to become amoeba leaders, who manage their own teams. Each team, or amoeba, is composed of several employees, and has the goal of making a profit for itself (Ishida, 1994). Each amoeba leader in Hotel F was empowered with more responsibilities, and motivated by receiving a higher salary than his/her colleagues at the same position or level.

A second group of recommendations or observations concerned the wide range of career i-deals practiced in the participating managers' hotels. The most commonly mentioned career i-deals involved special arrangements for training courses or programs (12 participants), time support for continuing education (i.e., vocational or academic training) (8 participants), external study and visits (7 participants), personal career development plans/opportunities (6 participants), fast-track routes to promotion (5 participants), personalized ways to secure professional advancement (4 participants), more career options (4 participants), and internal exchange (i.e., supporting another hotel in the same hotel group) (4 participants).

Interestingly, the results showed that some hotels allocated both time and financial support for their middle and senior managers to continue their education (vocational or

academic training), thereby satisfying these managers' personal aspirations for career development. Participant 6, a female GM who had 11 years of experience in the hospitality industry, explained that "compared with the 1990s, the current average education level of hotel employees is relatively low. Previously, there were more young Chinese graduates with good educational backgrounds looking for positions in the hospitality industry, because of its higher wages and better working environment. However, the current reality is that the social status and wages of the hospitality industry are becoming lower than those of other industries. In addition, young graduates with good educational backgrounds find it easier and faster to be promoted in other industries (such as IT and finance) than in the hospitality industry. Thus, they tend to choose the more competitive industries."

Participant 4, a female sales and marketing director who had 15 years' experience of working in the hospitality industry, strongly emphasized the importance of continuing education. She argued that "outside of internal vocational training, external training and continuing education are also becoming ever more necessary for hotel managers. The higher the position you reach, the more you will value your own knowledge and academic qualifications. Compared with managers in other industries, the average education level of hotel managers is lower. Therefore, hotel managers should be encouraged to participate in external training and part-time continuing education by getting scholarships or reimbursements of tuition fees."

In addition to the managers' own individual needs for pursuing knowledge and gaining academic qualifications, some participants argued that their organizations also had a great need for more highly educated managers. These participants stressed that their organizations could greatly benefit by promoting career training and making continuing education i-deals with employees. The 10 senior managers involved in our interviews all confirmed that in the future, their hotels would increasingly require highly educated talent (with Bachelor's degrees or higher) to fill the roles of deputy GMs and directors or managers of the front offices, HR, finance, food and beverage, revenue management, and accounting departments. A recent survey by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) also showed that more than 50% of its travel and tourism company members reported facing shortages of higher skilled and more professional employees, such as engineers, chefs, accountants, or food and beverage managers (WTTC, 2015). Therefore, the hospitality industry is clearly facing a big challenge to overcome the imbalance between the supply and demand of talent. Chinese hotel

employers should therefore consider granting career training and continuing education i-deals to their existing middle and senior managers. Of the 13 hotels involved in this study, 6 of them provided time support for their managers' continuing education. However, only 3 of these hotels provided both time and financial support for such training.

A third group of observations from the interview participants was that schedule and location flexibility i-deals seemed to be more applicable to the senior managers (e.g., GMs, deputy GMs, department directors) or sales and marketing managers. In terms of schedule flexibility i-deals, 6 of the senior managers confirmed the applicability of flexible schedules for senior managers, such as flexibility in starting and ending workdays or taking days off work. However, only 3 middle managers indicated that they had obtained flexible arrangements on taking working days off. In terms of location flexibility i-deals, most of the participants stated that home-based jobs or other personalized arrangements for working outside the hotel all of the time were not applicable to the hospitality industry. However, 4 of the senior managers agreed that it was not always necessary for senior managers to do all of their work in the hotel, because their jobs may require external study, visits, or travelling. Nevertheless, the senior managers agreed that they were still required to keep in touch at all times by checking their phones and e-mails whenever they were outside of the hotel. Some middle managers were allowed to do portions of their work (e.g., business negotiations, external recruitment, revenue management, or online reimbursement) from outside the hotel, if particular circumstances required it. However, the participants endorsed only one type of location flexibility i-deal, which basically involved a kind of schedule flexibility.

A fourth area of proposals from the participants involved incentive-related i-deals, which mainly concerned financial incentive or employee benefit i-deals. The most commonly mentioned kind of personalized financial incentives were performance-related pay (9 participants), bonuses (8 participants), allowances (7 participants), flexible compensation adjustments based on individual contributions (4 participants), and personalized compensation arrangements based on abilities, seniority, or experience (4 participants). Interestingly, many of the senior managers suggested the option of stock-based incentives, but this was only practiced in two of hotels involved in this study.

In addition to compensation i-deals, many of the participants referred to personalized non-monetary employee benefit packages, such as birthday parties with customized cakes and

gifts (5 participants), tourism packages (5 participants), options to invite family members to enjoy the hotel's services or activities (4 participants), or gym facility use (3 participants). Although work-life balance seemed to be a serious issue in most hotels, due to the heavy work pressure (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hsieh et al., 2004; Wong & Ko, 2009), the hospitality industry has some advantages for offering employees options for balancing their work and life domains via the non-monetary employee benefit packages that may be provided by their own hospitality services, such as accommodations, restaurants, birthday cakes, swimming pools, and gyms. Some of the bigger hotel groups even organize family or group activities in their own facilities, or cooperate with other tourist attractions to offer their employees deals at lower expense. Prior research has also indicated that some non-monetary employee benefit programs have been practiced in the hospitality industry, such as providing employees with more spaces for relaxation, rest, and relief (Dickson & Huyton, 2008). The findings from our research indicated that two main types of personalized employee benefit packages were being offered: monetary employee benefits (e.g., bonuses, allowances) and non-monetary employee benefits (e.g., travel, gym, or birthday party options).

Our in-depth interviews indicated that four main types of i-deals have been applied in the Chinese hospitality industry: (1) task i-deals (Items 1-4), (2) career i-deals (Items 5-13), (3) flexibility i-deals (Items 14-18), and (4) incentives i-deals (Items 19-25). The initial scale items and our updated items that specifically apply to the hospitality industry context are summarized in Table 5. Through our interviews and analysis, the phrasing of items in the initial proposed measurement scales was clarified and updated. Among these changes, the two items regarding location flexibility i-deals were merged into one item: "Options to do part of the work from somewhere other than the main workplace." This limitation on location flexibility is understandable, as the hotel business is a kind of service industry, and such businesses require that employees, including managers, stay in their hotels as their main workplaces.

After composing the initial scale, our interview results generated seven new items. Items 9-13 were career training and continuing education i-deals. In addition to offering career development opportunities, career options, and ways to secure professional advancement, opportunities for training and continuing education were also deemed important for hotel employees seeking to manage their careers (Kong et al., 2011). This observation was supported by the findings of an earlier study on the Chinese hospitality industry by Qiu

Zhang and Wu (2004). Career training and continuing education i-deals were shown to provide a new approach to solving the problems of imbalance between the supply and the demand for talent. The participants in this study emphasized the need for career training and continuing education i-deals. Furthermore, monetary benefits have been found to play vital roles in most hotels' management practices. Both previous studies (Chandra, 2012; Cooke, 2009) and our in-depth interviews verified that such i-deal practices are efficient ways of enhancing Chinese employees' work-life balance, levels of commitment, and overall productivity. In addition, the non-monetary benefit, which is a kind of i-deal that was seldom mentioned in previous studies, was found helpful for employees in terms of relaxation, rest, and relief (Dickson & Huyton, 2008).

**Table 5**

**The items of i-deals generated from the literature review and the in-depth interviews**

<b>Initial scale item</b>	<b>Updated scale item</b>
1. Job tasks that fit personal strengths and talents	1. Job tasks that fit personal strengths and talents
2. Job tasks that fit personal interests	2. Job tasks that fit my personal interests
3. Personally motivating job tasks	3. Personally motivating job tasks
4. More flexibility in how I complete my job	4. More flexibility in how I complete my job
5. Career options that suit my personal goals	5. Career options that suit my personal goals
6. Personal career development opportunities	6. Personal career development opportunities
7. Ways to secure my professional advancement	7. Ways to secure my professional advancement
8. A desirable position that makes use of my unique abilities after initial appointment	8. A desirable position that makes use of my unique abilities after initial appointment
9. A work schedule suited to me personally	9. A time arrangement for career training that meets my individual needs*
10. Extra flexibility in starting and ending my work day	10. An arrangement for career training that meets my individual needs*
11. A work schedule customized to my personal needs	11. Flexibility in how I arrange my continuing education*
12. Options to take time off to handle non-work-related issues outside of formal leave and sick time	12. Time support for personal continuing education*
13. A unique arrangement to complete a portion of my work outside of the office, because of my individual needs	13. Financial support for personal continuing education*
14. Options to do work from somewhere other than the main office, because of my particular circumstances	14. A work schedule suited to me personally
15. A compensation arrangement that is tailored to fit me	15. Extra flexibility in starting and ending my work day
16. A compensation arrangement that meets my individual needs	16. A work schedule customized to my personal needs
17. Due to my unique skills and contributions, my supervisor has been willing to negotiate my compensation	17. Options to take time off to handle non-work-related issues outside of formal leave and sick time
18. My supervisor has raised my pay beyond the formal standards because of the exceptional contributions that I make to the organization	18. Options to do a portion of my work from somewhere other than the main workplace
19. A compensation plan that rewards my unique contributions after initial appointment	19. A compensation arrangement that is tailored to fit me
	20. A compensation arrangement that meets my individual needs
	21. Due to my unique skills and contributions, my superior/employer has been willing to negotiate my compensation
	22. My superior/employer has raised my pay beyond the formal standards because of the exceptional

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contributions that I make to the organization  
23. A compensation plan that rewards my unique  
contributions after initial appointment  
24. Monetary employee benefits that meet my  
individual needs\*  
25. Non-monetary employee benefits that meet my  
individual needs\*

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Note: \* represents items developed in this study.

#### *4.2 Refining the measures*

To confirm the content validity of the measurement scale, we invited both industry and academic professionals to assess the extent to which the items of the scale represented the targeted construct (Haynes et al., 1995). First, the developed item list was sent to 7 senior hotel managers separately. These managers were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the 25 identified i-deals were practiced in their own hotels, and to assess the content validity of the items. If four or more managers agreed that a particular item represented the construct in question, then that item was retained. These managers were also invited to edit and comment on the remaining items, to enhance their clarity and readability in Chinese. In addition, an academic panel of 12 researchers (3 professors, 2 associate professors, 1 assistant professor, 2 research fellows, and 4 Ph.D. candidates), who possessed relevant knowledge or work experience in Chinese hotels, were invited to assess the degree to which each remaining item represented the construct in question. The panel made this assessment using a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly unrepresentative) to 7 (strongly representative) (Zaichkowsky, 1985). The criterion adopted to retain an item was a score above 4. On the basis of the assessments and suggestions from the industry and academic experts, the content validity of the measurement scale was deemed acceptable.

#### *4.3 Collecting data*

The generated items for measuring i-deals were then developed into statements in a questionnaire for a pilot test and the main survey. In the pilot test, the questionnaires were distributed to 190 hotel managers. This survey examined the respondents' perceptions of their own i-deals, as measured by a series of 7-point Likert-type scales (ranging between 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree"). The online questionnaires were then distributed to 712 hotel managers with the help of a data collection company. After conducting the respondent analysis, 37 outliers were removed and 675 valid questionnaires

were captured by the researchers. The target respondents were middle and senior managers working in four-star (45.2%) and five-star (54.8%) hotels in most of the first-tier and second-tier cities of mainland China. Of the 675 respondents in the main survey, 54.4% were male and 45.6% were female. The majority of the respondents were aged between 25 and 44. Most of the respondents were department managers/associate managers (51.1%), with the remaining respondents being GMs/deputy GMs (25.5%) or department directors/associate directors (23.4%). The respondents served in a range of departments, including housekeeping (24.7%), human resources (21.9%), administration office (17.5%), sales and marketing (16.9%), food and beverage (9.6%), front office (3.6%), finance (3.0%), and engineering (2.8%).

#### *4.4 Evaluating the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement scale*

The collected data were randomly split into two subsamples. Subsample A ( $N = 338$ ) was used for an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and subsample B ( $N = 337$ ) was used for a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The EFA was conducted first, using principle axis factoring with oblique rotation to refine the measurement scale. After a series of EFAs, three factors were extracted, as given in Table 6. The results of the EFAs showed slight differences from the results of in-depth interviews. On the basis of those differences, the career i-deals and incentives i-deals were merged into one composite dimension, and the resulting three dimensions were identified as follows:

- (1) career and incentives: personalized career development opportunities and incentives that meet the employee's needs;
- (2) task: personalized arrangements regarding job tasks that meet the employee's needs;
- (3) flexibility: customized schedule and workplace arrangements that meet the employee's needs.

The results of the EFA exercise were as follows: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.96, Bartlett's test of sphericity: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 5005.41, degrees of freedom (df) = 300,  $p < 0.001$ . Bartlett's test of sphericity showed significant results, which indicated that the correlation patterns were relatively compact, and that the identified factors were distinct and reliable. The three factors for measuring i-deals explained 55.35% of the overall variance.

The Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the total construct was 0.96, and the measures of scale reliability for the three dimensions of i-deals were 0.94, 0.84, and 0.85, respectively. All of these results indicated that the constructs were both reliable and stable (see Table 6) (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 6**

**Results of the exploratory factor analysis ( $N = 338$ )**

Attribute	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Mean
<b>Factor 1: Career and Incentives</b>				
C1. Career options that suit my personal goals	0.63			5.54
C2. Personal career development opportunities	0.65			5.71
C3. Ways to secure my professional advancement	0.68			5.64
C4. A desirable position that makes use of my individual unique abilities after initial appointment	0.75			5.54
C5. Time arrangements for career training that meet my individual needs*	0.84			5.61
C6. Content arrangements for career training that meet my individual needs*	0.79			5.51
C7. Flexibility in how I arrange my continuing education*	0.53			5.51
C8. Time support for personal continuing education*	0.63			5.57
C9. Financial support for personal continuing education*	0.66			5.43
I1. A compensation arrangement that is tailored to fit me	0.59			5.45
I2. A compensation arrangement that meets my individual needs	0.62			5.57
I3. Due to my unique skills and contributions, my superior/employer has been willing to negotiate my compensation	0.52			5.65
I4. My superior/employer has raised my pay beyond formal standards, because of the exceptional contributions that I make to the organization	0.56			5.62
I5. A compensation plan that rewards my personal unique contributions after initial appointment	0.41			5.43
I6. Monetary employee benefits that meet my individual needs*	0.53			5.44
I7. Non-monetary employee benefits that meet my individual needs*	0.53			5.39
<b>Factor 2: Task</b>				
T1. Job tasks that fit my personal strengths and talents		0.61		5.78
T2. Job tasks that fit my personal interests		0.55		5.55
T3. Personally motivating job tasks		0.52		5.69
T4. More flexibility in how I complete my job		0.67		5.73
<b>Factor 3: Flexibility</b>				
F1. A work schedule suited to me personally			0.61	5.45
F2. Flexibility in starting and ending my work day			0.56	5.40
F3. A work schedule customized to my personal needs			0.65	5.42
F4. Flexibility to take working days off to handle non-work-related issues outside of formal leave and sick time			0.60	5.29
F5. Flexibility to do a portion of my work from somewhere other than the main workplace			0.57	5.33
Initial eigenvalue	12.06	1.38	1.31	
Variance explained (%)	46.37	5.60	3.38	
Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	0.94	0.84	0.85	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.96			
Bartlett's test of sphericity (significance level)	< 0.001			

Note: \* represents items developed in this study.

Next, a CFA was conducted to check the validity of the proposed scale. The fit indices of measurement suggested that the model represented an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 489.48$ ,  $df = 268$ ,  $GFI = 0.90$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $TLI = 0.96$ ,  $NFI = 0.92$ ,  $SRMR = 0.03$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ). The critical ratio values for i-deals ranged from 12.15 to 17.01, and all of these values were higher than 1.96. The standardized loading estimates ranged from 0.67 to 0.84 (exceeded 0.5), which indicated that it was statistically significant (Byrne, 2001). In addition, The results of competing models showed that the theorized three-factor model was superior in fit to all the alternative models (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

**Results of Competing Models (N = 337)**

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	GFI	CFI	TLI	NFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Model 0: CI, T, F	489.48	268			0.90	0.96	0.96	0.92	0.03	0.05
Model 1: CI + T, F	783.44	274	293.96	6	0.83	0.91	0.91	0.87	0.04	0.07
Model 2: CI + F, T	879.50	274	390.02	6	0.80	0.90	0.89	0.86	0.05	0.08
Model 3: CI, T + F	854.35	274	364.87	6	0.80	0.90	0.89	0.86	0.05	0.08
Model 4: CI + FI + F	1079.43	275	589.95	7	0.77	0.86	0.85	0.82	0.06	0.06

Notes: \*\*: Significant at the 0.01 level. CI = careers and incentives, T = task, F = flexibility.

As shown in Table 8, all of the paired correlations between every two dimensions were smaller than 0.80 (Kline, 1998). The AVE values of the three dimensions were 0.57, 0.65, and 0.60, respectively. All the AVE values exceeded 0.50 and were greater than the squared correlation coefficients for the corresponding inter-constructs, thereby indicating satisfactory convergent validity and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The reliabilities of the three dimensions were 0.95, 0.88, and 0.88, respectively (exceeded 0.70), which were regarded as satisfactory. All these results verified that the measurement scale showed in Fig. 1. was valid and reliable.

**Table 8**

**Correlations (squared correlations), reliability, AVE, and mean (N = 337)**

	Career and Incentives	Task	Flexibility
Career and Incentives	1.00		
Task	0.75** (0.56)	1.00	
Flexibility	0.70** (0.49)	0.62** (0.38)	1.00
Reliability	0.95	0.88	0.88
AVE	0.57	0.65	0.60
Mean	5.57	5.60	5.34
Std. Dev.	0.89	0.98	1.01

Notes: \*\*: Significant at the 0.01 level.

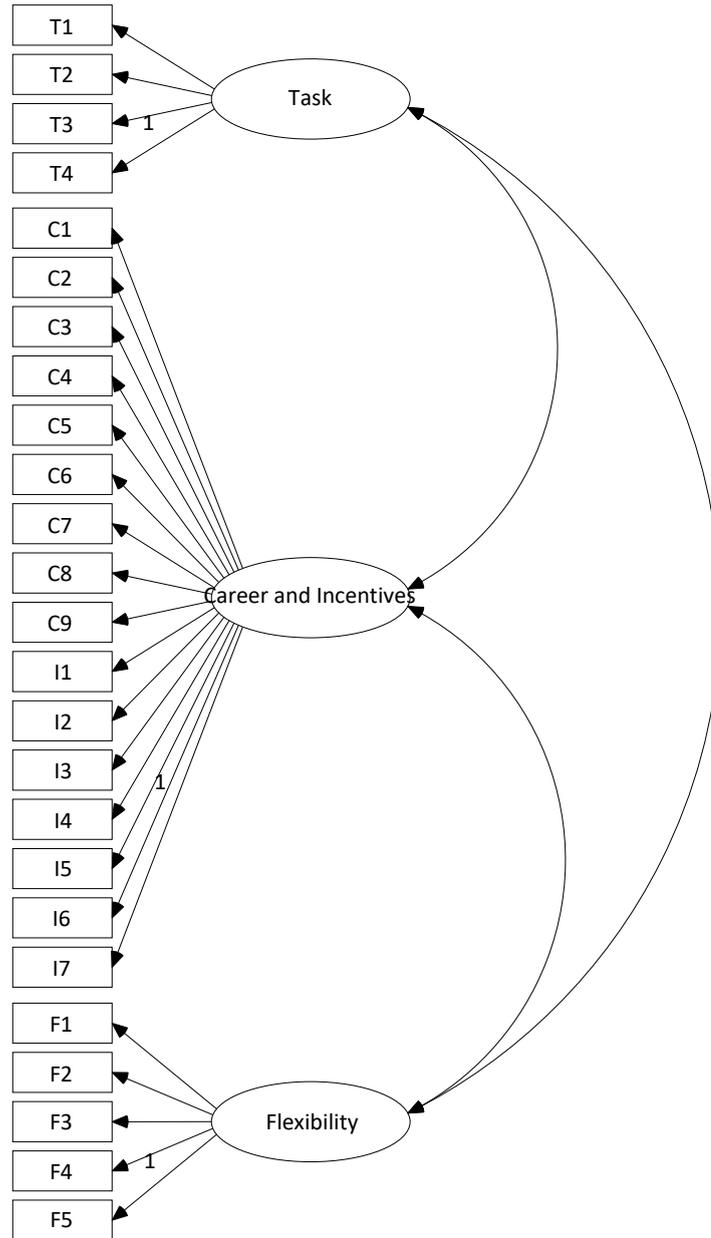


Fig. 1. Final scale for i-deals

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Theoretical contribution

In terms of theory, this investigation is the first exploratory study of i-deals in the Chinese hospitality industry context. The study proposes a more comprehensive model of i-deals that includes the *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* domains of job parameters.

Compared with past studies on i-deals in the contexts of other industries, the major contribution of this study is that career training, continuing education, and employee benefit i-deals are identified as relevant in the Chinese hospitality industry context. Career training and continuing education i-deals reflect individual and organizational needs for greater knowledge and expertise in this industry (Kong et al., 2011; Qiu Zhang & Wu, 2004). Employee benefit i-deals reflect Chinese hotel employees' needs with regard to living standards, additional incentives, relaxation, rest, relief, and work-life balance (Chandra, 2012; Cooke, 2009). These new i-deals identified can also be applied in the world-wide hospitality industry. As a kind of people-oriented industry, the general hospitality industry not only needs a climate of service, but also needs a climate for innovation, human resources, and employee welfare. This is because all of these attributes are important contributors of its high-quality service (Davidson, 2003). Given the shortage of higher skilled and more professional employees is a worldwide problem for the current tourism and hospitality industry (WTTC, 2015), career training and continuing education i-deals may reflect the world-wide hospitality's needs for greater knowledge and expertise as well. Employee benefit i-deals may have occurred in the western hospitality industry for a long time, because some scholars have stated that the western tourism and hospitality industry also provided various employee welfare programs to satisfy their employees' individual needs on space for rest and relaxation (Dickson & Huyton, 2008). Therefore, the new i-deals identified (i.e. career training, continuing education, and employee benefit i-deals) enrich the scope and content of potential i-deals.

Although the current study is conducted in the Chinese hospitality context, the scale developed may also be applied in the western hospitality industry. An Australian report suggests that as the shortage of qualified and skilled employees still plagues the tourism and hospitality industry, a series of strategies related to flexible employment arrangements, job design, career development opportunities, managerial skill development programs, job promotions, and work-life balance programs are expected to be considered in the future workforce development strategy plan in this industry (Service skills Australia, 2013). A conceptual model proposed by Davidson (2003) also indicates the contribution of a positive organizational culture of empowerment, training, and operating procedures and resources to the service quality of the hospitality industry. The hospitality i-deals scale proposed consists of career and incentives, task, and flexibility, which are regarded as innovations applied in

both theories and practices of psychological empowerment, psychological contract, job demands and resources model (JD-R model), job design, job crafting, and work-life balance (Hornung et al., 2009; Hornung et al., 2010; Hornung et al., 2011; Hornung et al., 2014; Rousseau, 2001). Thus, another contribution is the hospitality i-deals scale proposed provides a theoretical basis and a comprehensive measurement tool to further research on i-deals in the world-wide hospitality industry context.

### *5.2 Practical implications*

The study also provides several practical recommendations. First, hotel employers are expected to consider and respect knowledge workers' differences and personalized needs by granting them i-deals. The application of the proposed scale in the Chinese hospitality industry can provide hotel employers with detailed references to help them meet their knowledge workers' expectations and needs through a wide variety of personalized employment arrangements. In particular, career and incentives i-deals may become prioritized in the HRM practices of Chinese hotels, because the EFA results indicate that the "career and incentives" factor has the strongest capacity to explain the variance (46.37%).

A second recommendation concerns how to deal with the increasing difficulty faced by most Chinese hotels in attracting highly educated graduates from universities, due to the lower wages, lower social status, and greater difficulty gaining managerial training programs and job promotions for hotel employees (Qiu Zhang & Wu, 2004). This study indicates that offering career training and continuing education i-deals, along with other career-enhancing i-deals, can contribute to personal career success and fulfillment for Chinese hotel employees. The findings of the study's interviews show that the average education level of hotel managers does not match their individual needs for professional development, or their organizations' needs for highly educated and professional managers. A study on organizational career management in the Chinese hospitality industry has also shown that hotel employees have high expectations that further education and training can empower them to reach higher personal and career goals (Kong et al., 2011).

A third recommendation from this study's findings concerns the difficulty in extending flexibility i-deals to all of the employees in the Chinese hospitality industry. Due to differences in cultural traditions, family structures and societal institutions, eastern and western countries' employees have different opinions in work-life balance (Hassan 2010).

Unlike western employees who prefer to negotiate for flexible work practices such as shorter or more flexible working hours to satisfy their personal work-life balance, most eastern employees regard this kind of timing negotiation as a sign of weakness because they perceive working long hours as their job commitment to the organization (Chanra, 2012). This may help to explain why the “flexibility” factor has the weakest capacity to explain the variance (3.38%) in this study. Instead, eastern employees tend to pursue various employee benefit programs to their satisfy personal work-life balance (Chanra, 2012). Therefore, to find more options and possibilities for solving the issue of work-life conflicts, hotel employers may consider monetary and non-monetary employee benefit i-deals. Monetary employee benefits have been verified as capable of satisfying most Chinese employees’ needs concerning living standards and additional incentives (Chandra, 2012; Cooke, 2009). Non-monetary employee benefit programs have been verified as effective for satisfying hotel employees’ needs in terms of more space for relaxation, rest, and relief (Dickson & Huyton, 2008).

### *5.3 Conclusion*

This study attempts to discern the applicability of different types of i-deals among knowledge workers, and to develop a comprehensive scale for measuring i-deals in the Chinese hospitality industry. The proposed scale considers *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* domains of the job in i-deal agreements. This investigation is the first exploratory study of i-deals in the hospitality industry context, and the results verify the applicability of three main types of i-deals (career and incentives, task, and flexibility i-deals) in the Chinese hospitality industry. Career and incentives i-deals involve job flexibility in terms of the *what* and *why* domains. Task i-deals involve flexibility in the *what* domain, and flexibility i-deals involve variability in the *when* and *where* domains. Following a four-step process of scale development, this study develops a three-dimensional measurement scale for i-deals in the Chinese hospitality industry context. The reliability and validity of the scale are found to be satisfactory. This study discovers and develops career training, continuing education, and employee benefit i-deals, which helps to enrich the scope and content of potential i-deals and contributes to the future research on the hospitality i-deals.

### *5.4 Limitation and future research*

The major limitation of this study is that the data were collected through convenience sampling, which means that the participants were selected according to the data collection

company's convenience of accessibility. In addition to introducing bias into the sample, convenience sampling also makes it difficult to identify differences in the practices regarding i-deals among different departments and firms in the hospitality industry. Nevertheless, the hotels and respondents involved represented a wide range of districts across mainland China, and therefore the sample has a reasonable chance of being broadly representative. Another limitation is that the data collected is limited to the four-star and five-star hotels. Although the high star-rated hotels are a better setting which have enough organizational resources to implement more advanced management concepts such as i-deals, the applications of i-deals scale could also be explored in other types of the hotels or in the hospitality and catering industry more generally in the future studies. For example, some chefs from the premium and upscale restaurants may also obtain i-deals because of their unique skills and innovative products from employers (Presenza & Messeni Petruzzelli, 2019; Presenza et al., 2019). In addition, whether the scale developed in the current study can be generalized into world-wide hospitality field is also suggested be discussed in the future.

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