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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Balancing flexibility i-deals and job insecurity: How coordination flexibility i-deals affect employee well-being and burnout

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Abstract

This research introduces coordination flexibility idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), which allow employees to negotiate their current work tasks and pursue alternative job roles and work activities. This research examines when and how coordination flexibility i-deals affect employee well-being and burnout. Drawing on social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, we propose that coordination flexibility i-deals have a more positive effect on well-being and a more negative effect on burnout for employees who have lower job insecurity than those facing higher job insecurity. This is because coordination flexibility i-deals lead employees who have lower (relative to higher) job insecurity to less objectify themselves as if they are instrumental tools. The results of two experimental studies and two multi-wave surveys have provided support for these hypotheses. This research extends the existing literature on flexibility i-deals and adds to our understanding of the boundary conditions and mechanisms through which coordination flexibility i-deals affect well-being and burnout.

KEYWORDS

burnout, flexible working, idiosyncratic deals, job insecurity, self-objectification, well-being

INTRODUCTION

As organizations increasingly face volatile market conditions (Kwong et al., 2021), challenges arise for organizations to balance business needs with employee well-being. Likewise, employees face mounting challenges such as uncertainty about roles and career continuity in volatile conditions, making

Practitioner points

- Coordination flexibility i-deals allow employees to adjust work tasks and pursue alternative job roles and work activities.
- Coordination flexibility i-deals can enhance employee well-being and reduce burnout, especially when employees experience low (rather than high) job insecurity.
- Coordination flexibility i-deals lead employees who have less (relative to more) job insecurity to perceive themselves less as instrumental tools or objects.

personalized flexibility vital for both the employees and the organization. A promising approach is to introduce coordination flexibility idiosyncratic deals (CF i-deals), which refer to personalized work arrangements negotiated between employees and employers regarding what employees do on the job as well as pursue alternative jobs. CF i-deals can offer a powerful means to counteract persistent volatility and respond to the evolving nature of work, characterized by flexible human resource (HR) practices and increased virtualization (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Hornung et al., 2009; Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Steward, 2000). Additionally, CF i-deals enable employees to navigate the changing scenarios where responsibility for careers shifts from organizations to employees, recognizing that multiple parties can play a role in shaping career opportunities and employment relationships (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

CF i-deals differ from task i-deals in that they move beyond adjustments to specific duties and enable broader role reconfiguration or transformation. This role-transforming attribute advances the i-deals literature and renders CF i-deals especially valuable in volatile contexts. Negotiating CF i-deals can serve as a critical strategy for employees to sustain their jobs in times of job insecurity, as CF i-deals allow employees to change or transform work tasks, responsibilities, and roles in response to evolving organizational needs. Importantly, the relevance of CF i-deals is not limited to current market disruptions, as uncertainty is a recurring feature of work. CF i-deals represent a future-oriented approach to balance business demands with employee preferences.

Although i-deals, by definition, are intended to benefit both employees and employers (Rousseau et al., 2006), recent studies caution against viewing i-deals as inherently or universally beneficial (Bal, 2022; Perera & Li, 2022; Simosi et al., 2023; Su & Ng, 2025). For example, Perera and Li (2022) note that employees' gender, age and minority status can constrain their capacity to utilize i-deals and call for research examining i-deals from contextual and inclusion perspectives. These developments point to the importance of examining how contextual factors, such as job insecurity, can shape the effects of i-deals.

This research examines a crucial yet underexplored interplay of CF i-deals and job insecurity. We embrace a humanistic management perspective for protecting and promoting dignity (Pirson, 2017), by examining how CF i-deals and job insecurity interact in affecting employee subjective well-being (hereafter referred to as well-being) and burnout. Drawing on Conservation of Resources Theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and Social Exchange Theory (SET; Blau, 1964), we argue that CF i-deals enable employees to build resources and strengthen social exchange relationships with their employers, thereby enhancing well-being and reducing burnout. However, job insecurity weakens the beneficial effects of CF i-deals. Specifically, we propose that CF i-deals have a more positive effect on well-being and a more negative effect on burnout for employees who have lower job insecurity than those facing higher job insecurity. This is because CF i-deals lead employees who have lower job insecurity to objectify themselves less as if they are instrumental tools, compared to employees who face higher job insecurity.

This research makes three contributions. First, we add CF i-deals to the i-deals literature and show how CF i-deals affect employee well-being and burnout. As organizations are becoming more agile, it is of pivotal importance to explore CF i-deals, which allow employees to transform their roles and responsibilities to meet changing market demands as well as personal needs. I-deals are considered as resources

that are utilized to enhance employee dignity and well-being (Bakker & Ererdi, 2022; Bal, 2022). Prior studies found that task i-deals benefited employees by building their self-efficacy, creating high-quality relationships with their coworkers, and improving their welfare and performance (Rofcanin et al., 2016). Our research extends the i-deals literature by introducing CF i-deals and examining the impact of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout.

Second, we contribute to the i-deals and job insecurity literatures by testing how job insecurity moderates the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout. Prior studies have primarily investigated job insecurity as a direct stressor and demonstrated its negative impact on well-being (De Witte et al., 2016; Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Shoss, 2017). It remains underexplored how job insecurity can moderate the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout. As CF i-deals can offer employees opportunities to enhance employability and sustain their jobs, CF i-deals can be beneficial for individuals across varying levels of job insecurity. However, the beneficial effects tend to diminish when job insecurity becomes especially high. Employees who experience higher (relative to lower) job insecurity can find it more challenging to negotiate, leverage or benefit from CF i-deals. By considering the context in which CF i-deals are negotiated, this research advances our understanding of their implications for diverse employees. This research also challenges the monolithic view of i-deals as inherently positive resources and instead highlights the nuanced, context-dependent effects of i-deals.

Third, we investigate self-objectification as a novel mechanism through which CF i-deals affect well-being and burnout. Bal (2022) contends that organizations offer flexibility i-deals to enhance employee dignity. Self-objectification accentuates one's instrumental value and provides an important lens for understanding the humanistic ethos of flexibility i-deals. Our research bridges humanistic management with COR and SET by clarifying the role of self-objectification in managing CF i-deals. As having CF i-deals can lead employees to feel respected, valued and supported by their organization, having CF i-deals can reduce self-objectification, thereby enhancing well-being and reducing burnout. Our research identifies self-objectification as a critical lever in the process through which CF i-deals foster well-being and lower burnout. Yet, the indirect effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout via self-objectification can be moderated by job insecurity. That is, CF i-deals lead employees who have lower job insecurity to self-objectify less as if they are instrumental tools. In contrast, employees facing higher job insecurity can perceive CF i-deals more as a means of proving their instrumental value to the organization, making them more susceptible to self-objectification. As a result, CF i-deals increase well-being and decrease burnout to a greater extent among employees who have lower (relative to higher) job insecurity.

Conceptualization of CF i-deals

I-deals are defined as 'voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party' (Rousseau et al., 2006, p. 978). Employees typically negotiate i-deals to improve both their work and personal lives, while employers tend to grant arrangements that improve employee performance (Rousseau, 2005). Prior research has identified five distinct types of i-deals. They include (a) task i-deals which allow for the negotiation of what employees do on the job (Hornung et al., 2009); (b) developmental i-deals which relate to the opportunities to develop the employee's competencies and pursue career goals (Rousseau et al., 2009); (c) schedule i-deals which offer customized work schedules for employees (Rousseau et al., 2006); (d) location i-deals which allow for the negotiation of where employees do their work (Rosen et al., 2013); (e) financial i-deals which relate to financial rewards and compensation for employees (Marescaux et al., 2019).

Building on existing forms of i-deals, we introduce CF i-deals that enable dynamic role and task transformation in response to evolving organizational needs. We define CF i-deals as *personalized, negotiated agreements between individual employees and their employers that allow employees to change their job roles and responsibilities*. While CF i-deals may overlap with aspects of task and developmental i-deals, CF i-deals

are conceptually broader and more dynamic in scope. Task i-deals allow employees to negotiate specific duties or tasks within the boundaries of their current job (Hornung et al., 2014). CF i-deals extend beyond adjusting existing tasks to enabling employees to shift between roles or take on entirely new jobs and responsibilities in response to organizational change. Similarly, developmental i-deals focus on supporting career growth by offering developmental opportunities to pursue career goals (Rousseau et al., 2009), but they do not inherently involve a redefinition or reallocation of current work roles. CF i-deals, by comparison, are grounded in organizational adaptability, allowing employees to change their jobs and responsibilities based on evolving strategic goals.

For instance, with the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in organizations, an HR employee can negotiate CF i-deals, similar to task i-deals, to change what they do on the job, such as developing and using AI tools to more effectively screen and assess job candidates. CF i-deals go beyond and further enable an HR employee to pursue alternative roles and responsibilities, such as creating a new job position of AI Ethics Officer and promoting fairness and inclusivity around AI use across departments.

CF i-deals differ from coordination flexibility and job crafting in purpose and process. Coordination flexibility refers to an employer's ability to reconfigure and redeploy its human and structural resources efficiently to meet evolving strategic objectives (Sanchez, 1995). Coordination flexibility is an employer-driven approach to flexibility (demanded of employees) and enables employers to adjust their workforce structures and deployment to maintain competitive advantages (Way et al., 2015; Wright & Snell, 1998). In contrast, CF i-deals are hybrid (not entirely driven by the employer or employee) and involve negotiated agreements between an employee and their employer.

Job crafting allows employees to modify certain aspects of their current job (e.g., crafting the cognitive, relational and task-related aspects of one's current job) often to enhance personal work engagement or well-being (Rofcanin et al., 2016). Job crafting involves self-initiated changes made by the employee without requiring managerial consent (Tims et al., 2012). In contrast, CF i-deals not only allow employees to negotiate their existing tasks, but also move beyond their current job and take on new roles that serve both personal and organizational interests.

In sum, CF i-deals allow employees to negotiate what they do on the job as well as pursue alternative jobs and responsibilities. Employees can acquire and deploy knowledge, skills, and behavioural scripts in a variety of job roles and work activities. As such, CF i-deals offer a promising approach to accommodating the diverse needs of the workforce while enhancing organizational adaptability in dynamic environments.

The effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout

A humanistic management perspective advocates for the protection and promotion of human dignity and embraces well-being creation as a central objective of management research, rather than performance or wealth creation (Pirson, 2017). Humanistic management emphasizes that employees are valued individuals rather than instrumental tools (Pirson, 2017). CF i-deals, by respecting employee agency in shaping work roles, responsibilities, and tasks, affirm employees' dignity and support principles central to humanistic management.

According to COR theory, individuals strive to retain, protect and build their resources, and 'what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources' (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Anything that an individual considers helpful in attaining a desired goal can serve as a resource (Halbesleben et al., 2014). From the COR perspective, i-deals can be considered as valuable resources that employees want to maintain and accumulate (Hobfoll, 1989; Las Heras et al., 2017). Indeed, i-deals can enhance employee performance, job satisfaction and retention by providing developmental opportunities, flexibility and autonomy to employees (Rousseau, 2005).

A successfully negotiated CF i-deal can serve as a key resource that is of value to employees, as it enables employees to change roles, tasks and work activities and manage their work in a manner suited to their skills, strengths and preferences. Furthermore, CF i-deals allow employees to conserve energy,

accumulate other resources and address work demands (Halbesleben et al., 2014; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), which can lead to enhanced well-being and reduced burnout.

SET provides additional support for how CF i-deals benefit employees. SET proposes that in social relationships, the action of two parties is based on the reciprocating principle (Blau, 1964). In a work context, social exchange evolves due to the mutual dependence between the organization and employees, with both parties contributing to the achievement of shared goals (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Prior research has shown that employees' perceptions of social exchange influenced their work attitudes and behaviours (Shore et al., 2009). CF i-deals, as mutually beneficial arrangements to the organization and employees, can generate positive employee outcomes by signalling a high-quality exchange relationship (Greenberg et al., 2004; Hornung et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006).

COR theory and SET offer complementary insights into how CF i-deals influence well-being and burnout. While COR theory emphasizes the role of CF i-deals as valuable resources, SET captures the social-relational process through which CF i-deals affect well-being and burnout. The act of granting or receiving a CF i-deal can be perceived as part of social exchange, as it provides employees with what they value. As noted by Tsui et al. (1997), 'in a social exchange relationship, the inducements an employer offers go beyond short-term monetary rewards' (p. 1092). Inducements can include an extended consideration of employee needs, well-being and an investment in employee careers. When employees receive flexible work arrangements, they can perceive the employer as respecting, supporting, valuing and investing in them, which can be associated with socioemotional outcomes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). That is, employees who have CF i-deals are likely to experience socioemotional need fulfillment, thereby enhancing their well-being and reducing burnout.

> **Hypothesis 1.** CF i-deals are positively associated with well-being (a) and negatively associated with burnout (b).

Moderating effect of job insecurity

Job insecurity, defined as the perceived threat of losing the current job in the near future (Vander Elst et al., 2016), can moderate how much employees benefit from CF i-deals. Negotiating CF i-deals can become a critical strategy for employees to navigate the changing circumstances and sustain their jobs in times of job insecurity. From a humanistic management perspective, CF i-deals can be considered a way for organizations to support employees during turbulent times. Yet employees who experience particularly high levels of job insecurity may struggle to negotiate or leverage CF i-deals, because job insecurity can reduce those employees' psychological resources and impair their relationship with the organization. Meta-analyses show that job insecurity is negatively associated with job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment and mental and physical health, while increasing burnout, absenteeism and turnover intentions (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Sverke et al., 2002). Furthermore, a review of longitudinal studies shows that job insecurity influences psychological well-being and somatic health over time (De Witte et al., 2016).

From the COR perspective, job insecurity reduces employees' sense of control over their work conditions, thereby fostering negative emotions and attitudes (Ashford et al., 1989; Shoss et al., 2018). Job insecurity indicates a potential loss of resources, prompting employees to focus on conserving their existing resources rather than investing in or benefiting from new ones (De Cuyper et al., 2019). However, this defensive strategy is paradoxically resource-draining, as the continuous effort to protect existing resources consumes energy and leads to further resource depletion. Prolonged high job insecurity can deplete psychological resources over time (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Ferrie et al., 1998), rendering it increasingly difficult for employees to leverage or derive benefits from CF i-deals.

SET posits that the actions of employees and the organization depend upon their reciprocating actions. Employees can interpret job insecurity as an organization failing to fulfill its obligations to them and violating the reciprocity norm (Banks et al., 2014; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This deterioration

in the exchange relationship can result in perceived breaches of the psychological contract held between employees and their organization (Callea et al., 2016; Piccoli & De Witte, 2015; Vander Elst et al., 2012, 2016; Vander Elst, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2014; Vander Elst, van den Broeck, et al., 2014). Job insecurity can reduce employees' use of flexible work arrangements through weakening the perceived reciprocity in the employment relationship (Probst et al., 2007). When employees feel insecure about their jobs, they may hesitate to fully utilize CF i-deals with a fear of negative consequences, such as job loss or career stagnation (Cheng & Chan, 2008).

From COR and SET perspectives, employees who have higher (relative to lower) job insecurity are less likely to leverage CF i-deals to enhance well-being and reduce burnout due to resource depletion and weakened exchange relationships. COR suggests that job insecurity signals impending resource loss, which can impair employees' capacity to utilize CF i-deals. SET indicates that job insecurity can weaken the social exchange relationship between employees and their organization, thereby reducing employees' tendency to leverage CF i-deals.

> **Hypothesis 2.** Job insecurity moderates the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout, such that when job insecurity is lower (relative to higher), CF i-deals have a more positive effect on well-being (a) and a more negative effect on burnout (b).

Mediating effect of self-objectification

Self-objectification is defined as the treatment of oneself as an object to be looked at and evaluated (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Incorporating self-objectification as a process variable can bridge humanistic management with COR and SET to clarify how the resource-enhancing and relational benefits of CF i-deals translate into employee well-being and reduced burnout. Self-objectification accentuates one's instrumental value to others with the denial of one's own humanity (Wang et al., 2022). Self-objectification can manifest in one's feelings of invisibility (Talmon & Ginzburg, 2016). People tend to feel objectified when their fundamental needs for autonomy and control are thwarted (Zhang et al., 2025).

From a humanistic management perspective, organizations need to promote employees' dignity and recognize employees not merely as resources but as human beings with unique needs and aspirations (Pirson, 2017). CF i-deals align with this humanistic management perspective through enhancing employees' agency and enabling employees to ask for and negotiate personalized work arrangements with their employer. This capacity to negotiate CF i-deals can contribute to the employee experience of being valued and respected rather than being instrumentalized. That is, employees who have CF i-deals are less likely to self-objectify than those who do not. Reductions in self-objectification reflect CF i-deals as a form of humanistic management practice.

Yet, this negative effect of CF i-deals on self-objectification can be weakened by job insecurity. From a COR perspective, job insecurity can signal impending resource loss and deprive employees of psychological control over their work. From a SET perspective, job insecurity can undermine trust, perceived reciprocity and social exchange relationships between employees and their organization. When employees experience higher job insecurity, they may perceive CF i-deals less as organizationally supportive gestures and more as transactional efforts to extract value from them. That is, under a higher job insecurity condition, employees can feel CF i-deals more as a means of proving their instrumental value to the organization and therefore become more susceptible to self-objectification. Under a lower job insecurity condition, CF i-deals can be perceived more as an acknowledgement of employees' needs and interests and as such lead employees to perceive themselves less as instrumental tools.

Furthermore, when job insecurity is low, employees can leverage CF i-deals to enhance well-being and reduce burnout because they experience less self-objectification. In contrast, when job insecurity is high, employees are more likely to perceive themselves as mere tools for the organization's interests (Baldissarri et al., 2017, 2023), contributing to reduced well-being and increased burnout. Empirical

evidence supports the undermining effects of self-objectification on well-being (Baldissarri et al., 2017, 2023), job satisfaction (Sainz et al., 2023; Sainz & Baldissarri, 2021) and dignity at work (Sainz et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 3. The effect of CF i-deals on self-objectification is moderated by job insecurity, such that when job insecurity is lower (relative to higher), CF i-deals have a more negative effect on self-objectification.

Hypothesis 4. The indirect effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout via self-objectification are moderated by job insecurity, such that when job insecurity is lower (relative to higher), the indirect effects are more positive on well-being (a) and more negative on burnout (b).

Overview of the studies

We adopt a multi-study, multi-method approach to test the hypotheses. Study 1 examines the construct validity of CF i-deals in relation to task, developmental and other types of i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Study 1 also examines the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout after controlling for these different types of i-deals, coordination flexibility, job crafting and demographic variables. Studies 2 and 3 use an experimental design to examine the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout and the moderating effect of job insecurity respectively. Study 4 uses a three-wave survey to examine our moderated mediation model in which self-objectification mediates the interactive effects of CF i-deals and job insecurity on well-being and burnout (see Figure 1). We collected data from employees in China (Studies 1, 2 and 4) and the United Kingdom (Study 3), as it was opportune to examine how employees in both countries could leverage CF i-deals to enhance well-being and reduce burnout in times of rising job insecurity (Florisson, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). University ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary and confidential in all four studies.

STUDY 1 METHOD

Procedure and respondents

We used CFA to examine the construct validity of CF i-deals in relation to other types of i-deals (especially task and developmental i-deals), coordination flexibility and job crafting. We would expect an eight-factor model (Model 1), consisting of CF i-deals, task i-deals, developmental i-deals, schedule i-deals, location i-deals, financial i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting, to fit the data best in comparison with seven alternative models in which CF i-deals load onto one factor along with each of the other seven variables. We would also expect CF i-deals to be positively related to other types

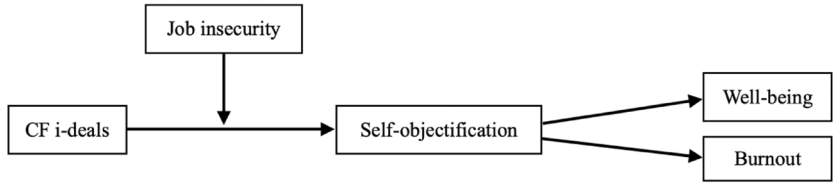

FIGURE 1 Moderated mediation model.

of i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting to establish convergent validity. Furthermore, we examined the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout after controlling for demographic and these relevant variables. To reduce common method bias, we temporally separated the measurements of predictor and criterion variables (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In the first survey, we measured all types of i-deals, coordination flexibility, job crafting and demographic variables; 3 months later, we measured well-being and burnout in the second survey.

We recruited 400 full-time employees in China through the platform Credamo. Respondents received CN¥3 for completing the initial survey and CN¥5 for completing the second survey. Three respondents failed in an instructed response item ('Please select "Strongly disagree" for this item'), and therefore their responses were removed to ensure data quality (Meade & Craig, 2012). A total of 300 respondents completed all the measures and required items. The final sample had 164 women and 136 men with a mean age of 32.05 ($SD = 5.58$). The respondents typically had an undergraduate degree (70.0%) and an annual salary ranging from CN¥72,001 to CN¥144,000 (43.3%). Most respondents worked in the information technology industry (59.3%), were employed in a private enterprise (70.7%), worked at an organization that had 101–500 employees (45.3%) and had a tenure of more than 3 years (85.3%).

Measures

CF i-deals were measured by adapting a 4-item measure of coordination flexibility in employee skills and behaviours (Way et al., 2015; $\alpha = .74$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, including 'Your organization can quickly assign new work activities to you', 'Your organization can quickly reassign you to a different job that requires different skills', 'You can ask for extra responsibilities to make use of your skills' and 'Your organization can reassign you to a different job within the organization'. All the measures in Study 1 used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), unless stated otherwise.

Task i-deals were measured by Hornung et al.'s (2010) 4-item task i-deals scale ($a = .81$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'I have asked for and negotiated on-the-job activities especially suited to me'.

Developmental i-deals were measured by Hornung et al.'s (2008) 4-item version of Rousseau and Kim's (2006) developmental i-deals scale ($a = .79$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'I have asked for and negotiated career development'.

Schedule i-deals were measured by Rosen et al.'s (2013) 3-item schedule flexibility i-deals scale ($a = .74$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'My supervisor considers my personal needs when making my work schedule'.

Location i-deals were measured by Rosen et al.'s (2013) 2-item location flexibility i-deals scale ($a = .86$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'Because of my individual needs, I have negotiated a unique arrangement with my supervisor that allows me to complete a portion of my work outside of the office'.

Financial i-deals were measured by Rosen et al.'s (2013) 5-item financial incentives i-deals scale ($a = .92$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'My supervisor has ensured that my compensation arrangement (e.g., hourly vs. salaried) meets my individual needs'.

Coordination flexibility was measured by Way et al.'s (2015) 4-item coordination flexibility in HR practices scale ($a = .80$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'Your firm can quickly and effectively implement different staffing procedures'.

Job crafting was measured by Vanbelle et al.'s (2017) 4-item overarching job crafting scale ($a = .78$). Respondents indicated how much they crafted their job on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). An example item was 'I make changes in my job to feel better'.

Well-being was measured by 6-item workplace well-being scale (Zheng et al., 2015; $a = .88$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'I find real enjoyment in my work'.

Burnout was measured by the 9-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; $a = .95$). Respondents indicated the extent to which the descriptions reflected their work state, such as 'I feel emotionally drained from my work', on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so).

Demographic control variables included sex (0 = female; 1 = male), age, annual salary (1 = no more than CN¥36,000; 9 = more than CN¥700,000) and job position (1 = employee; 4 = senior manager), because these factors could potentially influence people's capacity to negotiate CF i-deals or how much people could leverage CF i-deals to enhance well-being or reduce burnout.

STUDY 1 RESULTS

Construct validity

To examine the construct validity of CF i-deals, we conducted CFA using lavaan 0.6-19 in R 4.4.2 with the maximum likelihood estimator. As shown in Table 1, the eight-factor model (Model 1) yielded a better fit than did any of the alternative models in which CF i-deals loaded onto one latent factor together with each of the i-deals scales, coordination flexibility scale or job crafting scale. The factor loadings of the four items of CF i-deals were significant and ranged from .61 to .72, which exceeded the recommended .40 (Hinkin, 1995).

Table 2 reported descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables. Establishing the convergent validity, CF i-deals were positively correlated with task, developmental and other types of i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting. These results suggest that CF i-deals are related to but distinct from task, developmental and other types of i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting.

Well-being and burnout

As shown in Table 2, CF i-deals were positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with burnout, providing support for Hypothesis 1. We further tested the robustness of these effects in

TABLE 1 CFA results in Study 1.

Model	χ^2 (*df*)	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR
Model 1: Eight factors (each variable as one factor)	727.44*** (377)	.95	.05 [.04, .05]	.04
Model 2: Seven factors (CF i-deals and task i-deals as one factor)	821.73*** (384)	.94	.05 [.05, .06]	.04
Model 3: Seven factors (CF i-deals and developmental i-deals as one factor)	823.66*** (384)	.94	.05 [.05, .06]	.04
Model 4: Seven factors (CF i-deals and schedule i-deals as one factor)	862.20*** (384)	.93	.06 [.05, .06]	.04
Model 5: Seven factors (CF i-deals and location i-deals as one factor)	967.95*** (384)	.92	.06 [.06, .07]	.04
Model 6: Seven factors (CF i-deals and financial i-deals as one factor)	941.25*** (384)	.92	.06 [.06, .07]	.05
Model 7: Seven factors (CF i-deals and coordination flexibility as one factor)	749.03*** (384)	.95	.05 [.04, .05]	.04
Model 8: Seven factors (CF i-deals and job crafting as one factor)	852.01*** (384)	.93	.06 [.05, .06]	.04

***$p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Correlations among Study 1 variables.

	M (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CF i-deals	5.50 (.85)									
2. Task i-deals	5.53 (.90)	.65***								
3. Developmental i-deals	5.67 (.88)	.61***	.76***							
4. Schedule i-deals	5.32 (1.04)	.50***	.67***	.64***						
5. Location i-deals	5.21 (1.33)	.49***	.54***	.60***	.61***					
6. Financial i-deals	5.06 (1.32)	.61***	.66***	.70***	.66***	.63***				
7. Coordination flexibility	5.58 (.89)	.72***	.71***	.69***	.61***	.55***	.73***			
8. Job crafting	5.61 (.86)	.55***	.68***	.65***	.56***	.53***	.69***	.64***		
9. Well-being	5.72 (.91)	.44***	.54***	.61***	.51***	.50***	.66***	.58***	.51***	
10. Burnout	2.55 (1.22)	−.37***	−.45***	−.47***	−.35***	−.38***	−.51***	−.43***	−.38***	−.71***

***$p < .001$.

TABLE 3 Model coefficients for the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout in Study 1.

	Well-being					Burnout				
Control	***b***	***SE***	**95% CI**	**ΔR^2**	**ΔF**	***b***	***SE***	**95% CI**	**ΔR^2**	**ΔF**
Demographic variables	.46***	.06	[.35, .57]	.17	65.39***	−.51***	.08	[−.67, −.36]	.12	42.89***
Demographic variables + Task i-deals	.17*	.07	[.04, .31]	.02	6.31*	−.21*	.10	[−.40, −.02]	.01	4.64*
Demographic variables + Developmental i-deals	.13*	.06	[.001, .25]	.01	3.96*	−.20*	.09	[−.38, −.02]	.01	4.79*
Demographic variables + Schedule i-deals	.27***	.06	[.15, .38]	.05	20.25***	−.36***	.09	[−.53, −.19]	.05	17.56***
Demographic variables + Location i-deals	.29***	.06	[.18, .41]	.06	24.85***	−.36***	.08	[−.52, −.19]	.05	18.05***
Demographic variables + Financial i-deals	.08	.06	[−.04, .19]	.003	1.70	−.16†	.09	[−.33, .02]	.01	3.01†
Demographic variables + Coordination flexibility	.05	.07	[−.10, .19]	.001	.43	−.18	.11	[−.39, .04]	.01	2.67
Demographic variables + Job crafting	.24***	.06	[.12, .36]	.03	14.75***	−.32***	.09	[−.50, −.15]	.03	12.95***
All controls	−.07	.07	[−.21, .06]	.002	1.19	−.03	.11	[−.24, 19]	.00	.05

Note: Demographic variables include sex, age, annual salary, and job position. †< .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

regression models by entering demographic variables (sex, age, annual salary and job position) in the first step, different types of i-deals, coordination flexibility and/or job crafting in the second step and CF i-deals in the third step (see Table 3). Our results remained robust after controlling for these variables, except for financial i-deals and coordination flexibility. When controlling for financial i-deals, coordination flexibility or all the variables simultaneously, we did not find evidence that CF i-deals were related to well-being or burnout. This pattern may be in part explained by multicollinearity, as indicated in Table 2 where these predictors were highly correlated.

The results of Study 1 showed that employees who had more CF i-deals experienced more well-being and less burnout. CF i-deals remained a significant predictor of well-being and burnout and explained incremental variance in both well-being and burnout after accounting for other i-deals (task, developmental, schedule and location i-deals) or job crafting.

STUDY 2 METHOD

Study design and participants

We used a one-factor (CF i-deals: high vs. low) between-subjects experimental design to examine the impact of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout (Hypothesis 1). We recruited 100 full-time employees in China who participated in the experiment online through the platform Credamo. Participants received CN¥3 as compensation. All participants correctly answered the instructed response items (e.g., 'Please select "Disagree" for this item') and were therefore included in this study. This sample consisted of 69 women and 31 men with a mean age of 33.18 ($SD = .46$). The majority of participants had an undergraduate degree (65.0%) and a personal annual income ranging from CN¥72,001 to CN¥144,000 (41.0%). The most typical industries in which participants worked were manufacturing (27.0%), education (13.0%) and information (11.0%).

Procedure and materials

After answering demographic questions, participants were randomly assigned to a high-level ($n = 50$) or low-level ($n = 50$) CF i-deals condition. All participants then completed the CF i-deals manipulation check, well-being measure and burnout measure.

CF i-deals were manipulated with the scenarios that either allowed participants to negotiate CF i-deals or prohibited participants from doing so. The scenarios were developed based on our conceptualization of CF i-deals and prior empirical studies on i-deals (Rosen et al., 2013), highlighting key features of CF i-deals, that is, individual negotiation, mutual benefits, and flexibility in changing work activities, tasks, jobs, and responsibilities. To strengthen the effectiveness of our manipulation, we employed prompting with information, active reflection through writing, and visualization, drawing on prior experimental designs (Lambert et al., 2022; Walton & Wilson, 2018). In both conditions, participants first wrote responses to reflection questions about their primary work tasks, which enhanced the relevance of this experimental study to their actual work experiences. Participants then read about CF i-deals (including the definition, key features, and examples) or a lack of CF i-deals and visualized themselves capable of negotiating CF i-deals or not. In the high CF i-deals condition, participants were asked to write about what changes they would like to make to their own work and how this negotiation of CF i-deals could affect them. In the low CF i-deals condition, participants were asked to write about how the lack of CF i-deals could affect them.

Participants completed a 4-item CF i-deals manipulation check ($a = .95$) that was adapted from the measure of coordination flexibility in employee skills and behaviours (Way et al., 2015) and validated in Study 1. They indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'I can ask for extra responsibilities to make use of my skills', and 'My organization can quickly assign new work activities to me'.

Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Well-being was measured by the 5-item WHO-5 Well-Being Index (Bech, 2004; $a = .96$). Participants were asked to indicate their feelings right now. Example items included 'I feel cheerful and in good spirits', and 'I feel calm and relaxed'. Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Burnout was measured by the 5-item depletion sale (Twenge et al., 2004; as validated by Lin & Johnson, 2015; $a = .95$). Example items included 'I feel drained' and 'My mind feels unfocused right now'. Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

STUDY 2 RESULTS

Manipulation check

An independent-samples *t*-test revealed that participants in the high CF i-deals condition ($M = 5.48$, $SD = .80$) showed a greater tendency to negotiate CF i-deals than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.54$), $t\,(73.55) = 11.01$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.20$.

Well-being

Participants in the high CF i-deals condition ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.01$) reported more well-being than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.62$), $t\,(82.19) = 8.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.70$, providing support for Hypothesis 1a.

Burnout

Participants in the high CF i-deals condition ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.25$) reported less burnout than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.57$), $t\,(93.15) = -7.10$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.42$, providing support for Hypothesis 1b.

STUDY 3 METHOD

Study design and participants

We used a 2 (CF i-deals: high vs. low) × 2 (job insecurity: high vs. low) between-subjects experimental design to examine the interactive effects of CF i-deals and job insecurity on well-being and burnout (Hypothesis 2). We recruited 400 full-time employees in the United Kingdom from Prolific using the screeners, and in this study, 387 (96.8%) selected 'working full-time' as the option that best described their employment status over the past 3 months. Participants received £1.6 as compensation. Nine participants failed the instructed response items (e.g., 'Please select "Disagree"'), but including or excluding their data did not affect the pattern of results. All participants were therefore retained in the final analyses. This sample consisted of 209 women and 188 men, and 3 participants chose not to disclose their sex. The average age of the participants was 37.95 ($SD = 9.74$). Among these participants, 329 (82.3%) were Caucasian, 32 (8.0%) were African and 27 (6.8%) were Asian. The majority of participants had a Bachelor's degree (40.3%) and a personal annual income ranging from £20,000 to £39,999 (57.8%).

The most typical industries in which participants worked were health care or social assistance (15.3%), professional, scientific or technical services (13.5%) and educational services (11.5%).

Procedure and materials

Participants were asked to imagine that they were hired at a rapidly growing mid-sized tech company 'TechQ'. Participants read a scenario in which TechQ either embraced CF i-deals or did not allow any CF i-deals. The CF i-deals manipulation was followed by the same manipulation check as used in Study 2. After the CF i-deals manipulation, participants were informed of either job insecurity or security, followed by a job insecurity manipulation check. All participants then completed the same measures of well-being and burnout as in Study 2 and answered demographic questions.

CF i-deals were manipulated with scenarios and writing tasks. As in Study 2, the scenarios were developed based on our conceptualization of CF i-deals and prior empirical studies on i-deals (Rosen et al., 2013), highlighting key features of CF i-deals, that is, individual negotiation, mutual benefits, and flexibility in changing work activities, tasks, jobs, and responsibilities. Participants in the high CF i-deals condition read a scenario in which they could negotiate CF i-deals and wrote about how they would like to negotiate what they could do at TechQ and how this negotiation could have an impact on them. In the low CF i-deals condition, participants read a scenario in which they could not negotiate CF i-deals and wrote about how this lack of negotiation could have an impact on them. All participants then completed a 4-item CF i-deals manipulation check ($a = .96$) adapted from the measure of coordination flexibility in employee skills and behaviours (Way et al., 2015) and validated in Study 1. Participants indicated how much they agreed with the statements, such as 'TechQ can quickly assign new work activities to you'. They responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Job insecurity was manipulated with the scenarios adapted from Baldissarri et al. (2023). In the high job insecurity condition, participants were informed that TechQ was hit by a major economic crisis and as a result that their contract was at risk. In the low job insecurity condition, participants were informed that their permanent contract had been confirmed. Participants also wrote about how they were feeling and thinking in the situation described. All participants then completed a 4-item job insecurity manipulation check ($a = .94$), adapted from the job insecurity measure (De Witte, 2000; validated by Vander Elst, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2014). Participants responded to the items, such as 'Chances are, I will soon lose my job at TechQ', on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Well-being was measured by the 5-item WHO-5 Well-Being Index (Bech, 2004; $a = .95$). Participants were asked to indicate their feelings on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item was 'I feel cheerful and in good spirits'.

Burnout was measured by the 5-item depletion scale (Twenge et al., 2004; as validated by Lin & Johnson, 2015; $a = .96$). Participants responded to the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item was 'I feel drained'.

STUDY 3 RESULTS

Manipulation checks

An independent-samples *t*-test revealed that participants in the high CF i-deals condition ($M = 5.96$, $SD = .77$) showed a greater tendency to negotiate CF i-deals than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.46$), $t\ (349.06) = 33.29$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.15$. A 2 (CF i-deals: high vs. low) × 2 (job insecurity: high vs. low) ANOVA revealed that participants in the high job insecurity condition ($M = 5.59$, $SD = .91$) felt more insecure about their job than did participants in the low job insecurity condition ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.40$), $F\ (1, 396) = 620.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .61$.

TABLE 4 Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for well-being and burnout in Study 3.

		Well-being	Burnout
Low CF i-deals	Low job insecurity ($n = 113$)	3.24 (1.36)	4.19 (1.52)
	High job insecurity ($n = 109$)	2.69 (1.43)	4.86 (1.53)
High CF i-deals	Low job insecurity ($n = 88$)	5.42 (.95)	2.55 (1.14)
	High job insecurity ($n = 90$)	4.04 (1.37)	4.02 (1.60)

Well-being

To test the interaction effect of CF i-deals and job insecurity on well-being (Hypothesis 2a), a 2 × 2 ANOVA was conducted. The main effect of CF i-deals indicated that participants in the high CF i-deals condition reported more well-being than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition, F (1, 396) = 179.76, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$. The main effect of job insecurity indicated that participants in the high job insecurity condition had less well-being than participants in the low job insecurity condition, F (1, 396) = 54.29, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Importantly, these main effects were qualified by the hypothesized interaction effect, F (1, 396) = 9.99, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. As shown in Table 4, participants who had CF i-deals reported more well-being than those who did not across low ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$) and high job insecurity conditions ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$), but this positive effect of CF i-deals on well-being was stronger when participants were less (vs. more) insecure about their job. The results were visualized in Figure 2.

Burnout

A 2 × 2 ANOVA was conducted to test the interaction effect of CF i-deals and job insecurity on burnout (Hypothesis 2b). The main effect of CF i-deals indicated that participants in the high CF i-deals condition reported less burnout than did participants in the low CF i-deals condition, F (1, 396) = 70.86, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. The main effect of job insecurity indicated that participants in the high job insecurity condition reported more burnout than participants in the low job insecurity condition, F (1, 396) = 52.70, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Importantly, these main effects were qualified by the hypothesized interaction effect, F (1, 396) = 7.45, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 3, participants who had CF i-deals reported less burnout than those who did not across low ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$) and high job insecurity conditions ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), but this negative effect of CF i-deals on burnout was stronger when participants were less (vs. more) insecure about their job.

Study 3 found that CF i-deals interacted with job insecurity in affecting well-being and burnout, providing support for Hypothesis 2. People who could negotiate CF i-deals reported more well-being and less burnout than those who could not, and these effects were stronger when people had less (vs. more) job insecurity.

STUDY 4 METHOD

Procedure and respondents

We conducted a three-wave survey to test our moderated mediation model. To reduce common method bias, we temporally separated the measurements of predictor and criterion variables (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Each wave of data was separated by 1 week. At Time 1, we asked respondents to report CF i-deals and job insecurity; at Time 2, we measured their self-objectification; at Time 3, we measured well-being and burnout.

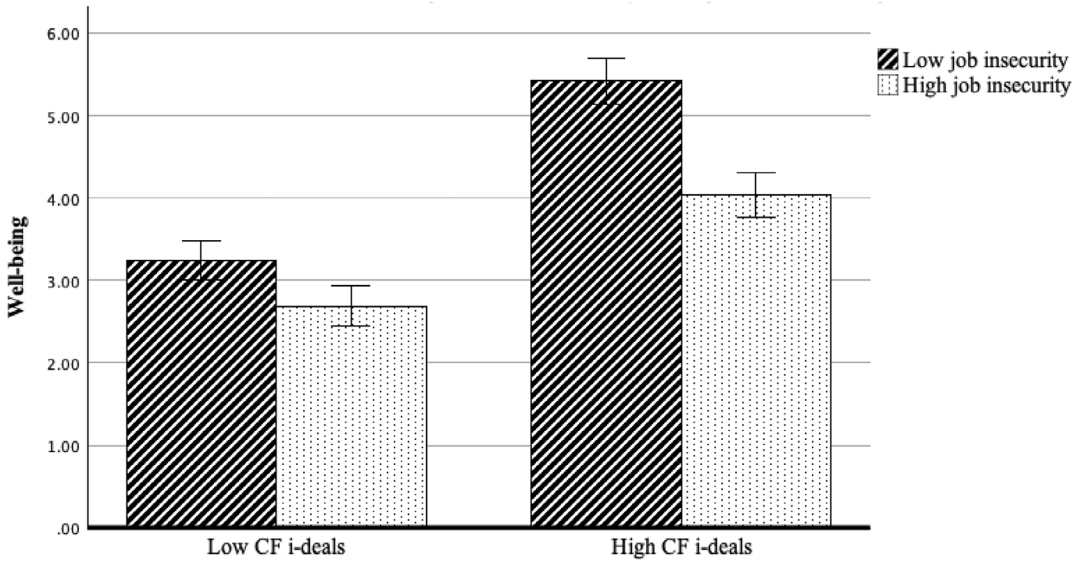

FIGURE 2 Interaction effect of CF i-deals and job insecurity on well-being in Study 3.

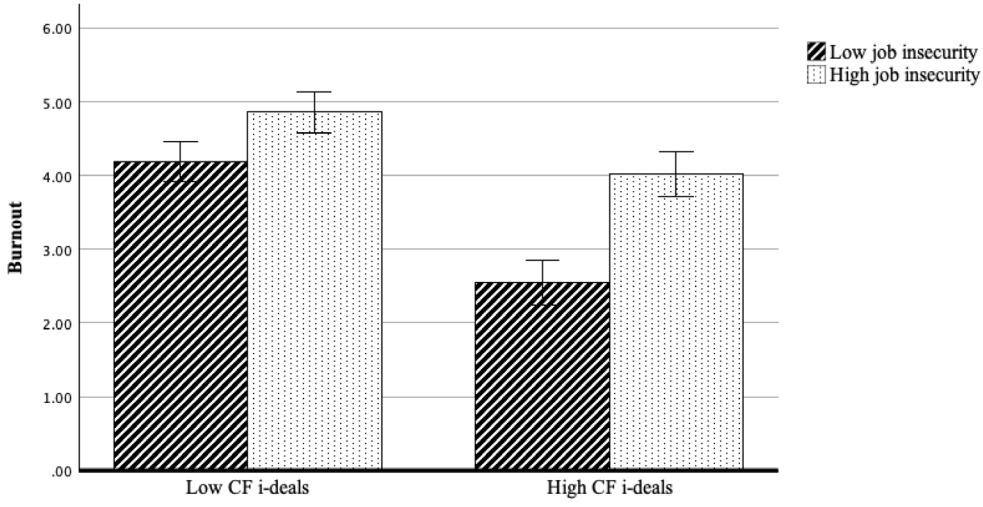

FIGURE 3 Interaction effect of CF i-deals and job insecurity on burnout in Study 3.

We recruited 400 full-time employees in China through the platform Credamo. Respondents received CN¥3 for completing each wave survey. A total of 288 respondents completed all three-wave surveys and required items (72.0% response rate). One respondent failed one of the instructed response items ('Please select "Strong agree" for this item'), but excluding their data did not alter the pattern of results. Therefore, all responses were retained. The final sample consisted of 175 women and 113 men. This sample had a mean age of 33.40 ($SD = 5.52$). Most respondents had an undergraduate degree (61.1%) and an annual salary ranging from CN¥72,001 to CN¥144,000 (46.9%). Although we asked for full-time employees using the screeners, 287 respondents indicated that they were full-time employed,

and one person reported part-time in our survey. The majority of respondents participated in teamwork (96.9%), had a tenure of more than 3 years (90.6%), worked at an organization with over 100 employees (75.7%), and were employed in private enterprises (58.7%).

Measures

CF i-deals were measured with a 4-item adapted measure of coordination flexibility in employee skills and behaviours (Way et al., 2015; $\alpha = .67$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'Your organization can quickly assign new work activities to you'. This measure used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the CF i-deals measure in Study 4 was lower than in the previous studies, suggesting the need for further refinement and validation of the measure.

Job insecurity was measured by a 4-item job insecurity scale (De Witte, 2000; validated by Vander Elst, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2014; $a = .84$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'Chances are, I will soon lose my job', on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Self-objectification was measured by an 8-item self-objectification scale (Wang et al., 2022; $a = .88$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'At work, how I can help others achieve their goals is more important than how I think or feel'. This measure used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Well-being was measured by the 6-item workplace well-being scale (Zheng et al., 2015; $a = .87$). Respondents indicated how much they agreed with statements, such as 'I find real enjoyment in my work', on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Burnout was measured by the 9-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; $a = .95$). Respondents indicated the extent to which the descriptions reflected their work state, such as 'I feel emotionally drained from my work', on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so).

Control variables included sex (0 = female; 1 = male), age, annual salary (1 = no more than CN¥36,000; 7 = more than CN¥216,000) and job position (1 = employee; 4 = senior manager), as these factors could potentially influence people's capacity to negotiate CF i-deals and how much they could leverage CF i-deals to enhance well-being or reduce burnout.

STUDY 4 RESULTS

Three confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with full information maximum likelihood. The five-factor solution (one factor for each variable: $\chi^2(424) = 1188.40$, CFI = .88, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .09) was superior to three-factor (one factor for each wave: $\chi^2(431) = 1535.60$, CFI = .82, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .10) and one-factor ($\chi^2(434) = 2803.73$, CFI = .62, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .12) solutions.

Table 5 reported descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. As expected, CF i-deals were positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with burnout. CF i-deals were also negatively correlated with self-objectification.

PROCESS Model 7 for SPSS (Hayes, 2018) was used to test our moderated mediation model with 95% CI and 5000 bootstrap iterations. As shown in Table 6, CF i-deals (mean-centred) interacted with job insecurity (mean-centred) in affecting self-objectification. When job insecurity was low (one standard deviation below the mean), CF i-deals reduced self-objectification, $b = -.32$, $t(280) = -2.36$, $p = .019$. In contrast, when job insecurity was high (one standard deviation above the mean), CF i-deals did not affect self-objectification, $b = .05$, $t(280) = .47$, $p = .640$. The interaction was visualized in Figure 4. Johnson-Neyman analyses indicated that the relationship between CF i-deals and self-objectification was significantly negative when job insecurity was below −.38, which was observed in 43.8% of the respondents;

when job insecurity exceeded this value, the relationship was not significant. Self-objectification in turn was negatively associated with well-being and positively associated with burnout.

As can be seen in Table 6, CF i-deals exerted a positive direct effect on well-being. As predicted, the indirect effect of CF i-deals on well-being via self-objectification was more positive when job insecurity was lower (vs. higher), index = −.04, bootstrap *SE* = .02, bootstrap CI [−.09, −.01]. More specifically, CF

TABLE 5 Correlations among Study 4 variables.

	M (*SD*)	1	2	3	4
1. CF i-deals	5.44 (.77)				
2. Job insecurity	2.22 (.96)	−.34**			
3. Self-objectification	3.95 (1.26)	−.14*	.25**		
4. Well-being	5.65 (.90)	.38**	−.53**	−.20**	
5. Burnout	2.73 (1.30)	−.28**	.56**	.33**	−.79**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 6 Model coefficients for the effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout through self-objectification as a function of job insecurity in Study 4.

	Self-objectification		Well-being		Burnout	
Predictor	***b* (*SE*)**	**95% CI**	***b* (*SE*)**	**95% CI**	***b* (*SE*)**	**95% CI**
CF i-deals	−.13 (.10)	[−.32, .05]	.41*** (.06)	[.29, .53]	−.41*** (.09)	[−.59, −.24]
Job insecurity	.35*** (.08)	[.19, .51]				
CF i-deals × Job insecurity	.20* (.09)	[.02, .37]				
Self-objectification			−.11** (.04)	[−.19, −.03]	.33*** (.06)	[.22, .44]
Sex	.43** (.14)	[.16, .71]	−.04 (.10)	[−.24, .15]	.16 (.14)	[−.12, .43]
Age	.03* (.01)	[.001, .05]	.01 (.01)	[−.01, .03]	−.04** (.01)	[−.06, −.01]
Annual salary	−.19*** (.05)	[−.28, −.09]	.01 (.03)	[−.05, .08]	−.01 (.05)	[−.11, .09]
Job position	.23** (.09)	[.06, .41]	.21*** (.06)	[.09, .33]	−.30*** (.09)	[−.46, −.13]
Constant	3.25*** (.48)	[2.32, 4.19]	5.33*** (.36)	[4.63, 6.03]	3.31*** (.50)	[2.32, 4.30]
R^2	.19		.23		.26	
F	9.39***		13.64***		16.32***	

The conditional indirect effects of CF i-deals via self-objectification

	Well-being			Burnout		
Moderator: Job insecurity	Effect	Bootstrap SE	95% Bootstrap CI	Effect	Bootstrap SE	95% Bootstrap CI
High (+*SD*)	−.01	.01	[−.03, 01]	.02	.03	[−.03, .08]
Mean	.01	.01	[−.004, .04]	−.04	.03	[−.11, .02]
Low (−*SD*)	.04	.02	[.01, .08]	−.11	.05	[−.21, −.02]

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

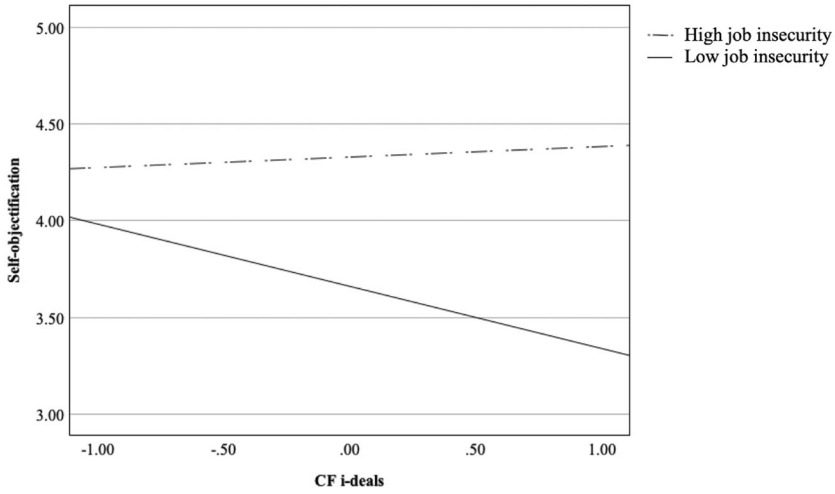

FIGURE 4 Interaction effect of CF i-deals and job insecurity on self-objectification in Study 4.

i-deals had a positive indirect effect on well-being through self-objectification for people who had low job insecurity, but not for those who had a moderate or high level of job insecurity.

Likewise, CF i-deals had a negative direct effect on burnout. As expected, the indirect effect of CF i-deals on burnout via self-objectification was more negative when job insecurity was lower (vs. higher), index = .12, bootstrap *SE* = .06, bootstrap CI [.03, .24]. CF i-deals had a negative indirect effect on burnout through self-objectification for individuals who had low job insecurity, but not for those who had a moderate or high level of job insecurity (see Table 6).

Furthermore, we tested four alternative models in which well-being or burnout predicted CF i-deals through self-objectification, either with or without job insecurity as a first-stage moderator (see Supplementary Material). None of these alternative models produced significant mediation or moderated mediation effects. The results showed that our proposed model was better supported by the data.

To summarize, CF i-deals increased well-being and decreased burnout for people who were less (relative to more) insecure about their job. This was because CF i-deals reduced self-objectification for people who had less job insecurity. Study 3 provided support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we examined when and how CF i-deals could affect employee well-being and burnout. In Study 1, we demonstrated the construct validity of CF i-deals and showed that CF i-deals were related to but distinct from task, developmental and other types of i-deals, coordination flexibility and job crafting. We also found that CF i-deals enhanced well-being and reduced burnout. These results were robust to a variety of controls, such as task i-deals, developmental i-deals and job crafting. The experiment of Study 2 provided evidence for the causal effects of CF i-deals on well-being and burnout. Study 3 replicated and extended these relationships, showing that when job insecurity was lower (relative to higher), CF i-deals had a more positive effect on well-being and a more negative effect on burnout. Study 4 added self-objectification as the mediator to explain how CF i-deals interacted with job insecurity in influencing well-being and burnout. Study 4 found that when people felt less (relative to more) insecure about their jobs, CF i-deals led people to less objectify themselves, which further enhanced their well-being and reduced burnout.

Implications for theory and research

Our research has important implications for understanding CF i-deals and for advancing COR and SET by highlighting the role of self-objectification. First, although prior research has examined various types of i-deals (Hornung et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2006), we add CF i-deals as a novel category to the i-deals literature, thereby extending our understanding of what employees can negotiate with employers. CF i-deals enable employees to negotiate job content, similar to task i-deals, but go further by allowing employees to negotiate, switch and transform job roles and responsibilities. That is, employees can not only adjust tasks within their current job, but they can also take on new job roles and engage in alternative work activities.

Second, our research bridges humanistic management with COR and SET to clarify how i-deals function. COR and SET indicate that employees tend to negotiate i-deals as they accumulate resources and build their relationship with their employers (Liao et al., 2016). Our research reveals self-objectification as the explanatory mechanism underlying the functioning of CF i-deals and suggests that employees are more likely to utilize CF i-deals to gain resources and strengthen social exchange relationships when they feel more valued as human beings rather than as instrumental tools. When employees perceive i-deals as supportive gestures rather than transactional attempts to extract value, the benefits of i-deals can be optimized. That is, reducing self-objectification can increase the resource-enhancing and relational benefits of i-deals. Likewise, lowering self-objectification can strengthen social exchange relationships and enhance the value of the resources exchanged. The findings extend both SET and COR by underscoring the role of self-objectification in shaping social exchange relationships and the value of exchanged resources.

Self-objectification is a neglected psychological mechanism in social exchanges. SET emphasizes that resources are exchanged through a process of reciprocity (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Most studies on i-deals have focused on the reciprocity norm of SET to explain how i-deals affect employees (Wu et al., 2022). However, i-deals can be much more than employer inducements for employee outcomes predicated on employees' willingness to reciprocate (Liu et al., 2013). Our research illuminates self-objectification as an alternative mechanism in social exchange processes. Identifying self-objectification shows how i-deals function beyond employer inducements for employee contributions and instead promote employee dignity. I-deals can signal that employers recognize employees' needs and aspirations, therefore reducing employees' tendencies to perceive themselves as merely instrumental tools. Furthermore, identifying self-objectification brings conceptual and operational precision to SET, thereby addressing a key criticism that SET is an overly broad theoretical framework that lacks conceptual clarity (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Third, we contribute to HR flexibility research by proposing a more hybrid approach to flexibility that is not entirely top-down or bottom-up. Existing studies tend to take a binary approach to flexibility, considering it either employer-oriented or employee-oriented (Cañibano, 2019), and focus on formal flexibility policies and practices (Avgoustaki, 2016). HR flexibility research often looks at how employers can acquire and deploy employees to increase their adaptability to changing market conditions and improve performance (Way et al., 2015; Wright & Snell, 1998). Such studies overlook that employees can play an active role in shaping flexibility and negotiating flexible work arrangements with employers, which can benefit both employees and employers. Our research moves beyond this either-or view of flexibility and sheds light on a more balanced approach to flexibility that can accommodate the diverse needs of employees and employers and be beneficial to both parties.

Fourth, we contribute to both i-deals and job insecurity literatures by investigating how CF i-deals interact with job insecurity in influencing employee well-being and burnout. Although prior studies have examined the positive effects of i-deals and the negative effects of job insecurity on employee outcomes respectively (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Rofcanin et al., 2016; Shoss, 2017), limited attention has been devoted to their interaction. Without considering this interaction, research would risk overstating the universal benefits of i-deals. Notably, the access and value of i-deals can depend on employee status, such that individuals in a more privileged position are more likely to obtain and benefit from i-deals

(Bal, 2022). Employees from diverse backgrounds or underrepresented groups can find it challenging to negotiate i-deals (Perera & Li, 2022). People tend to assume that they need to earn 'credit' (e.g., high performance and social capital) to be granted i-deals (Rousseau et al., 2006). Employees with higher job insecurity may find it harder to prove that they are 'worthy' of i-deals and therefore are less likely to negotiate or utilize i-deals. Examining the interplay between CF i-deals and job insecurity is crucial for understanding when and for whom CF i-deals are beneficial.

From a humanistic management perspective, CF i-deals offer a promising approach to enhancing well-being and reducing burnout by enabling employees to shape their work tasks, roles, and responsibilities. Based on COR and SET perspectives, our research shows that CF i-deals can be utilized more as resources to enhance well-being and reduce burnout, when employees experience lower (relative to higher) job insecurity. This is because CF i-deals lead employees who are less (relative to more) insecure about their jobs to perceive themselves less as instrumental tools or objects. Self-objectification functions as a critical lever that clarifies how CF i-deals translate into enhanced well-being and reduced burnout. That is, CF i-deals can produce beneficial outcomes by lowering self-objectification. Our research highlights that job insecurity weakens the positive impact of CF i-deals on well-being and their negative impact on burnout and illuminates self-objectification as a novel mechanism to explain these effects. It is worth noting that the effect sizes for the interaction and moderated mediation are relatively modest. These findings therefore provide preliminary evidence regarding the conditions under which the benefits of i-deals may be constrained.

Our research raises a question about the possibility that resources can be universally valuable. In COR theory, 'resources' are conceptualized as things that people value (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). Our research suggests that the value of a certain thing can vary among individuals and depend on the context. The value of CF i-deals as resources can depend on the extent to which a person feels secure about job continuity. Employees who have low job insecurity are better positioned for negotiating and leveraging CF i-deals to achieve desired outcomes than people facing high job insecurity. That is, while CF i-deals can serve as valuable resources for employees who have low job insecurity, CF i-deals may hold less value for people facing high job insecurity. This contributes to a refined evaluation of 'resources' within COR theory. Our research highlights the importance of assessing the value of resources such as i-deals from a contingent perspective.

As a contextual contribution, we conducted this research in China and the United Kingdom. While China is characterized by high power distance and low individualism, the United Kingdom is characterized by low power distance and high individualism (Hofstede et al., 2010). Such cultural differences may shape how much employees can ask for and negotiate CF i-deals with employers and how much employees can benefit from CF i-deals. It is plausible that employees in countries characterized by lower power distance and higher individualism are more likely to engage in CF i-deal negotiation and use CF i-deals to meet their own needs, because they tend to feel more empowered to negotiate work arrangements and place greater value on autonomy and self-enhancement. Consequently, these employees may be less prone to self-objectification and derive more benefits from CF i-deals. Nevertheless, our research demonstrates that CF i-deals can serve as potential resources for enhancing well-being and reducing burnout across diverse cultural contexts.

Practical implications

Our research offers practical implications for organizations and employees. Flexible work arrangements can be more complex than what is included in HR policies and practices (Cañibano, 2019). It is important to know how individual employees interpret and construct flexibility. Employees need to be empowered to negotiate flexibility i-deals that are beneficial to both employees and the organization. Flexibility i-deals enable organizations to be adaptive in dynamic environments, while responding to diverse needs of employees. CF i-deals allow employees to adjust their tasks within their current job, but can also enable employees to take on new job roles and work activities.

Our findings suggest that CF i-deals enhance employee well-being and reduce burnout. Employees can negotiate these personalized arrangements and leverage them to boost well-being and buffer against stress. As a happier workforce tends to be more productive (Taris, 2006; Tenney et al., 2016), CF i-deals have the potential to contribute to organizational performance. Organizations may implement CF i-deals as interventions that address both business demands and individual employee needs, thereby fostering workplace well-being and organizational sustainability. Such interventions can emphasize individual negotiation, mutual benefits, and flexibility in shaping work tasks and jobs, using techniques such as information prompting, active reflection through writing, and visualization.

Furthermore, organizations and managers may need to reduce employees' job insecurity to enable employees to engage in and benefit from CF i-deals. When employees experience less job insecurity, they are more likely to utilize CF i-deals as resources to enhance well-being and reduce burnout. Flexibility i-deals provide organizations an opportunity to support diverse employees and promote inclusivity by addressing the unique needs of diverse employees that standard HR policies and practices often overlook (Perera & Li, 2022). Organizations may need to build a high-quality exchange relationship with employees and provide support and resources (e.g., job security) to employees to optimize the benefits of flexibility i-deals.

Limitations and future research

Our research has a number of limitations. First, although we conducted two experimental studies to examine the causal relationships between CF i-deals and two well-being outcomes (well-being and burnout), we used a scenario experimental design in which participants visualized themselves capable of negotiating CF i-deals. Future research can increase ecological validity by conducting field experiments or interventions on CF i-deals. Our manipulation of CF i-deals in Study 2, including modalities of prompting with information, active reflection through writing, and visualization, could serve as a useful reference point for future intervention studies.

Second, we adapted the CF subscale of HR flexibility to measure CF i-deals. Although our measure of CF i-deals demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability in Studies 1, 2 and 3, the psychometric properties were less satisfactory in Study 4. This indicates the need to further refine and validate the measure of CF i-deals. Future research could revise and develop the measure to improve its reliability and validity across different contexts and samples.

Third, the responses were self-reported in Studies 1 and 4, which could inflate the correlations and effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). It is advantageous to collect multi-source data to explore the impact of CF i-deals. Although we collected three-wave data separating the measurements of independent, mediating and dependent variables in Study 4, this approach could not capture the dynamic nature of the variables and their relationships (Chan, 1998). From a COR perspective, CF i-deals imply resource gain, while job insecurity signifies potential resource loss (Jiang et al., 2023). Such changes may predict changes in well-being outcomes. Future research can consider collecting repeated measures over time to investigate how changes in CF i-deals and job insecurity are related to changes in well-being and burnout. Future research may also explore change-related reciprocal relationships between CF i-deals and job insecurity.

Finally, we collected data from employees in China and the United Kingdom. Future research could examine how CF i-deals affect employees in more diverse cultural and industry contexts. It would also be advantageous to measure these contextual factors to explicate their roles in the functioning of CF i-deals.

CONCLUSION

CF i-deals offer a promising means for organizations to be adaptive in dynamic environments, while responding to the diverse needs of employees. CF i-deals enable employees to adjust tasks within their current job as well as pursue alternative jobs, roles and work activities. This research has focused on

when and how CF i-deals could affect employee well-being and burnout. We found that CF i-deals enhanced well-being and reduced burnout, especially when people experienced low (rather than high) job insecurity. This was because CF i-deals could lead people who were less (relative to more) insecure about their jobs to perceive themselves less as instrumental tools or objects.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Bibi Zhang: Conceptualization; methodology; data curation; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; visualization; project administration; funding acquisition. **Mariya Mathai:** Funding acquisition; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Jia Li:** Funding acquisition.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Data S1.

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