

A Study on the Influence Mechanism of Idiosyncratic Deals on Employees' Bootlegging

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Abstract: In today's VUCA era, bootlegging can help organizations achieve breakthrough results and promote organizational development. Based on social cognitive theory, social exchange theory and social information processing theory, this study focuses on the dual perspectives of “innovation” efficacy and “willingness to transgress” in bootlegging, and explores the role of idiosyncratic deals in influencing employees' bootlegging from the perspective of leadership feedback. It also explores the boundary conditions of the idiosyncratic deals affecting employees' bootlegging from the perspective of leadership feedback. By analyzing the data from 424 samples, the results show that: idiosyncratic deals positively affects employees' bootlegging; creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility mediate the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and employees' bootlegging; supervisor developmental feedback positively moderates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility; supervisor developmental feedback positively moderates the mediating role of creative self-efficacy, perception of constructive responsibility between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

1. Introduction

In today's VUCA era, the competitive environment is becoming increasingly fierce with the digital transformation of organizations and the widespread use of artificial intelligence technologies. As Iacocca said, “Innovate or die”, a famous saying that is best visualized in the rapidly evolving economy and society. In this context, organizations can only adapt to the development trend of the economic structure and the dynamic changes of the external environment to achieve long-term development if they have the courage to break the routine and insist on innovation. Organizational innovation comes from the innovation of each employee, and employees are the main force of organizational innovation. However, the reality of organizational management is often limited by formal processes or rules, which makes it difficult for employees to put innovative ideas into practice and achieve breakthrough innovations. In this scenario, employees, in order to achieve organizational goals in order to maximize the benefits of the organization, privately implement the behaviors of innovative ideas that are expected to be rejected without the permission of the organization [1], i.e., “Bootlegging”. Compared to general innovation behavior, bootlegging is different because it is not

permitted by the organization, so employees need to face greater risks and uncertainties. However, once successful, bootlegging can help organizations achieve breakthrough results in cold fields, bring great benefits, and promote the development of the organization, or even change the industry pattern. It can be seen that the universality and value of bootlegging is becoming more and more prominent, which requires more in-depth attention and research in management practice and academia.

At the same time, innovation puts new demands on current organizational human resource management practices. Traditional standardized organizational human resource management practices put organizational goals first, ignoring the individual needs of employees and making it difficult to truly activate and empower employees to innovate. As a new type of non-standardized organizational HRM practice, idiosyncratic deals is a non-standard work arrangement that can meet the needs of both parties and benefit both parties through negotiation between employees and employers [2]. By providing employees with working arrangements such as training opportunities, and flexible working hours, it not only meets the individual needs of employees, but also helps organizations to attract, motivate, and retain valuable employees, achieving a win-win situation [3]. The current research on the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging is still insufficient, so it is necessary to explore the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging. Research has shown that idiosyncratic deals can enhance individual creativity [4], which provides an important breakthrough to stimulate employees' bootlegging.

The research has only explored the intrinsic mechanism of idiosyncratic deals on bootlegging from a single perspective [5]. Bootlegging, as a behavioral manifestation, combines both “innovation” and “transgression” [6], it is incomplete to explore the formation mechanism of bootlegging only from a single perspective, so it is necessary to explore the intrinsic mechanism of idiosyncratic deals on bootlegging from a more systematic perspective. Bootlegging is an extra-role organizational behavior with risk and uncertainty. Employees implementing bootlegging need to have a sense of efficacy for “innovation” and willingness to “transgress”, i.e., the belief of whether employees can achieve innovative results beneficial to the organization and the willingness to take the risk of transgression for the benefit of the organization. Creative self-efficacy is an employee's confidence in demonstrating creative thinking in the workplace and the belief that he or she will overcome adversity, triumph over difficulties, and ultimately achieve creative results [7], with an emphasis on the “I can” cognition [8]. Perception of constructive responsibility is a strong belief that individuals believe they have an obligation to bring about constructive change in the organization [9], reflecting employees' willingness to take risks and challenges to move the organization in a positive direction, and emphasizing the “I wish” cognition [8]. Meanwhile, as an informative environment [10], idiosyncratic deals promotes the improvement of employees' domain skills through the provision of tasks in line with employees' abilities and expectations, thus enhancing their creative self-efficacy [5], which fits the research model of the social cognitive theory of “environment→cognition→behavior” research model [11]; Idiosyncratic deals provide employees with customized career development support and work schedules [12], and according to the social exchange theory, when an employee receives support from an organization, he or she will generate, based on the principle of reciprocity, a “sense of indebtedness” and obligation to reciprocate based on the principle of reciprocity [13], and this psychology is transformed into a willingness to take the initiative to assume the responsibility of the organization [14].

In addition, previous studies have mainly explored the boundary conditions of bootlegging in terms of employee aspects and organizational aspects, such as critical thinking [15], organizational innovation climate [16], etc., and there is a lack of exploring the leadership feedback aspect of the boundary conditions for bootlegging. According to the social information processing theory, individuals will select information about people who are more important to them from the external environment to analyze and interpret, and the results of information interpretation will affect

individual cognition, thus deciding what attitudes or behaviors to adopt [17]. Supervisors, as “organizational agents”, usually represent the values and norms of the organization to a large extent [18]. Supervisor developmental feedback serves as a key source of social information by providing employees with bootlegging with valuable information to help them improve their work, and development [19], employees will interpret the information as their superiors' trust in their ability to innovate as well as their concern for their future development [20], resulting in a greater sense of conviction in achieving innovative outcomes and leading constructive change for the organization, and consequently a greater tendency to implement bootlegging that bring organizational benefits.

In summary, based on social cognitive theory, social exchange theory and social information processing theory, We focus on the dual perspectives of “innovation” efficacy and “willingness to transgress” from the perspective of bootlegging, introduce the sense of creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility to explore the mechanism of idiosyncratic deals affecting bootlegging, and introduce the superior developmental feedback from the aspect of leadership feedback to explore the boundary conditions of the idiosyncratic deals affecting bootlegging, so as to enrich the related research on idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging and provide a new perspective for the management of bootlegging of the employees and the enhancement of the ability of organization to adapt to the external environment, and to achieve the common development of the organization and employees.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Idiosyncratic Deals and Bootlegging

Idiosyncratic deals refers to the voluntary, personalized and non-standard nature of work arrangements that can meet the needs of both parties and benefit both parties, which are agreed upon by employees and employers through negotiation [2]. Bootlegging is the behavior of employees who privately implement innovative ideas that are expected to be rejected for the benefit of the organization [1]. Research has shown that such non-standardized work contracts can enhance individual creativity [4], which provides an important breakthrough to stimulate employee bootlegging. Specifically, on the one hand, the idiosyncratic deals increase the possibility of employees acquiring external knowledge by providing training and skill development opportunities, enabling them to apply the new knowledge to their work, generating creative ideas and solutions, and facilitating the occurrence of bootlegging [5]. On the other hand, idiosyncratic deals belong to a form of flexible work system, which gives employees the advantage of adaptability and helps to stimulate their creative thinking and initiative, which is an important driving force for bootlegging [21]. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Idiosyncratic deals positively affect bootlegging.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Creative Self-Efficacy

Social cognitive theory states that the external environment influences individuals' behavior by affecting their subjective cognition [11]. Creative self-efficacy is the confidence of employees to demonstrate creative thinking in the workplace and the belief that they can overcome adversity, triumph over difficulties and ultimately achieve creative results at work [7]. According to social cognitive theory, idiosyncratic deals, as an informational environment [10], affects employees' subjective cognition - creative self-efficacy, which in turn prompts them to engage in bootlegging that are consistent with their subjective cognition. On the one hand, idiosyncratic deals enable employees to observe the successful performance of their mentors or colleagues in the innovation process through mentorship and peer learning to gain alternative experiences, feel the feasibility of

innovation, and reduce the fear and uncertainty of innovation [12]. On the other hand, employees with high creative self-efficacy will show stronger persistence and motivation when encountering obstacles to innovation such as organizational regulatory restrictions and lack of organizational support, maintain strong motivation to innovate, be willing to take risks, and take the initiative in acquiring resources by transgressing the boundaries, and continue to push for the realization of the idea [22] and bring benefits to the organization. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Perception of Constructive Responsibility

Social exchange theory states that the essence of social interaction is the exchange of resources, either material or immaterial, and that the core principle is reciprocity, i.e., when one party in a social interaction provides a resource, the other party creates an obligation to reciprocate in order to maintain the equilibrium of the relationship [23]. Perception of constructive responsibility is a strong belief that an individual feels obligated to bring about constructive change in an organization [9]. According to the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory, when employees receive idiosyncratic deals as an organizational support, they will have a reciprocal obligation based on the reciprocity principle [13], which enhances their perception of constructive responsibility, and employees with high perception of constructive responsibility are willing to implement bootlegging that can bring benefits to the organization. On the one hand, idiosyncratic deals provide employees with customized career development support, such as education and training, and promotion opportunities [12], based on the principle of reciprocity, they develop a sense of indebtedness and an obligation to reciprocate, and transform this psychological obligation to reciprocate into a willingness to bring constructive change to the organization [14]. On the other hand, employees with high perception of constructive responsibility, tend to view challenging tasks such as risk and uncertainty as opportunities for organizational growth and development, and then willingly take on the uncertainty and risk associated with bootlegging. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perception of constructive responsibility mediates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

2.4 The Moderating Role of Supervisor Developmental Feedback

Social information processing theory states that individuals will select information about people who are more important to them from the external environment to analyze and interpret, and the results of information interpretation will affect individual cognition, thus deciding what attitudes or behaviors to adopt [17]. Supervisors, as “organizational agents”, usually represent the values and norms of the organization to a large extent [18] and are a key source of information for employees. Supervisor developmental feedback is to their direct reports that provides valuable information to help them improve their work and future learning and development [19]. Research has shown that superior developmental feedback has a moderating effect on employees' cognitive activities [24].

The moderating role of superior developmental feedback between bootlegging and creative self-efficacy. high-level superior developmental feedback conveys valuable information related to work improvement, future learning and development to employees who have obtained idiosyncratic deals in the form of information-based communication, and the employees will interpret the feedback from their superiors as their superiors' trust and support for their innovation ability, alleviate employees' uncertainty anxiety, and actively engage in innovation practices to accumulate more successful experiences in innovation [25]. when the level of feedback from superiors is low, employees who receive idiosyncratic deals will interpret the feedback from superiors negatively, which leads to the loss of their enthusiasm and confidence in innovation [25]. Based on this, the following hypothesis is

proposed:

H4: Superior developmental feedback positively moderates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and creative self-efficacy.

The moderating role of superior developmental feedback between bootlegging and perception of constructive responsibility. When the level of superiors' developmental feedback is high, supervisory developmental feedback sends positive signals to employees that their supervisors are concerned about their future development and that they are valued [20], which makes employees psychologically identify more with the organization [27], and this sense of identification with the organization will motivate employees to respond to the organization's goals more positively [28], and be more willing to take responsibility for bringing constructive change to the organization [29]. when the level of developmental feedback from superiors is low, employees who receive personalized work contracts misinterpret the information delivered by superiors due to the lack of valuable information from superiors, and view personalized work contracts as a tool for the organization to obtain short-term organizational benefits at the expense of employees' long-term interests, leading to employees' unwillingness to take the initiative to assume constructive organizational responsibilities [26]. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Superior developmental feedback positively moderates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and perception of constructive responsibility.

The mediating role of being moderated by superior developmental feedback. Individual cognition is altered by external feedback, which then transmits this effect to individual behavior. Based on hypotheses H2 and H4, this study suggests that the strength of the mediating role played by creative self-efficacy between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging is moderated by superior developmental feedback. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Superiors' developmental feedback positively moderates the mediating role of creative self-efficacy between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

Based on hypotheses H3 and H5, this study argues that the strength of the mediating role played by perception of constructive responsibility between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging is moderated by supervisor developmental feedback. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Superiors' developmental feedback positively moderates the mediating role of perception of constructive responsibility between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

In summary, the theoretical model of this study is shown in Figure 1.

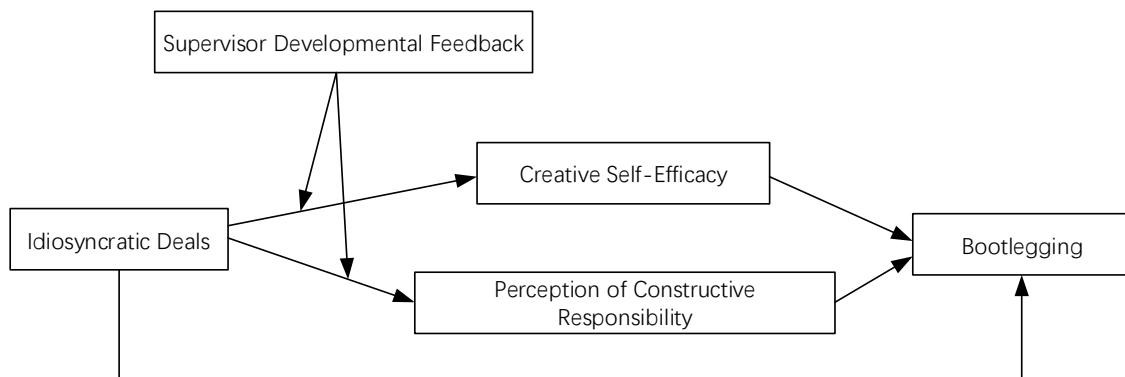


Figure 1 Theoretical Model

3. Research Design

3.1 Data Collection

This study adopts online questionnaire research to collect data, and the respondents are mainly distributed in high-tech industries such as electronic information, biology and new medicine, aerospace, new materials, new energy and energy saving, resources and environment, advanced manufacturing and automation. All variables involved in this study were measured using self-assessment, and in order to minimize common method bias, data were collected in two time periods with a half-month interval. In the first stage, 500 questionnaires were distributed to employees to collect information on demographic variables, idiosyncratic deals, creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility; in the second stage, the valid questionnaires returned in the first stage were matched to collect information on bootlegging and supervisor developmental feedback, and after eliminating invalid questionnaires, the final sample was collected 424, with a recovery rate of 84.8%.

3.2 Measurement of Variables

The measurement scales selected for this study were taken from top international journals and all variables except control variables were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Fairly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree).

Idiosyncratic deals. A 6-item item scale developed by Hornung et al. (2008) [12] that includes both flexible and developmental dimensions was used, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.832.

Creative self-efficacy. The 4-item scale developed by Tierney & Farmer (2002) [7] was used, and the Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.866.

Perception of constructive responsibility. A 5-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012) [30] was used, and the Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.867.

Bootlegging. The 5-item scale developed by Criscuolo et al. (2014) [1] was used, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.87.

Superior developmental feedback. The 3-item scale developed by Zhou(2003) [19] was used, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.792.

Control variables. Gender, age, education level, years of work experience, and marital status.

4. Research Analysis and Results

4.1 Distinguishing between Validity and Common Method Bias Tests

The results of the validated factor analysis showed that the fit of the five-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 2.714$, CFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.913, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.069) was significantly better than the other factor models. In this study, the common method bias test was conducted using Harman's one-factor test, which showed that the first factor explained 34.939% of the total variance. Therefore, there is no serious problem of common method bias in this study.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The means and standard deviations of the variables and the correlation coefficients between the variables are shown in Table 1. Idiosyncratic deals was significantly and positively correlated with creative self-efficacy ($r=0.536$, $p<0.01$), perception of constructive responsibility ($r=0.511$, $p<0.01$),

and bootlegging ($r=0.538$, $p<0.01$); creative self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with bootlegging ($r=0.498$, $p<0.01$); perception of constructive responsibility was significantly and positively correlated with bootlegging ($r=0.468$, $p<0.01$) were significantly positively correlated.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients of the Variables

| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1 | 3.549 | 0.868 | 1 | | | | |
| 2 | 3.673 | 1.011 | 0.536** | 1 | | | |
| 3 | 3.719 | 0.969 | 0.511** | 0.312** | 1 | | |
| 4 | 3.81 | 0.806 | 0.538** | 0.498** | 0.468** | 1 | |
| 5 | 3.373 | 0.928 | 0.226** | 0.279** | 0.198** | 0.213** | 1 |

Note: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 represent idiosyncratic deals, creative self-efficacy, perception of constructive responsibility, bootlegging, and supervisor developmental feedback, respectively; * indicates $p<0.05$, ** indicates $p<0.01$, and *** indicates $p<0.001$.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 2, idiosyncratic deals significantly and positively affects bootlegging ($\beta=0.526$, $p<0.001$), creative self-efficacy ($\beta=0.539$, $p<0.001$), perception of constructive responsibility ($\beta=0.508$, $p<0.001$); Creative self-efficacy ($\beta=0.493$, $p<0.001$), perception of constructive responsibility ($\beta=0.456$, $p<0.001$) significantly and positively affects bootlegging; Idiosyncratic deals still significantly and positively affects bootlegging after adding creative self-efficacy ($\beta=0.366$, $p<0.001$) and perception of constructive responsibility ($\beta=0.396$, $p<0.001$); The interaction term between idiosyncratic deals and supervisor developmental feedback significantly and positively affects creative self-efficacy ($\beta=0.189$, $p<0.001$) and perception of constructive responsibility ($\beta=0.213$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are verified.

The results of the Bootstrap test for the moderated mediation effect are shown in Table 3, in the I-deals→CSE→B path, the 95% confidence interval is [0.049, 0.126] when the superior developmental feedback is low, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.123, 0.247] when the superior developmental feedback is high. In the I-deals→PCR→B path, the 95% confidence interval is [0.032, 0.098], when the superior developmental feedback is low; and the 95% confidence interval is [0.092, 0.223], when the superior developmental feedback is high. Therefore, hypothesis H6 and H7 was validated.

Table 2 Regression Analysis Results

| Variables | CSE | | | PCR | | | B | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | M 1 | M 2 | M 3 | M 4 | M 5 | M 6 | M 7 | M 8 | M 9 | M 10 | M 11 |
| I-deals | 0.539*** | 0.501*** | 0.509*** | 0.508*** | 0.487*** | 0.495*** | 0.526*** | | 0.366*** | | 0.396*** |
| CSE | | | | | | | | 0.493*** | 0.298*** | | |
| PCR | | | | | | | | | | 0.456*** | 0.255*** |
| SDF | | 0.167*** | 0.174*** | | 0.094* | 0.102* | | | | | |
| I-deals ×SDF | | | 0.189*** | | | 0.213*** | | | | | |
| R ² | 0.301 | 0.327 | 0.362 | 0.275 | 0.283 | 0.328 | 0.306 | 0.275 | 0.368 | 0.239 | 0.353 |
| F | 29.972*** | 28.923*** | 29.496*** | 26.378*** | 23.503*** | 25.343*** | 30.597*** | 26.340*** | 34.534*** | 21.822*** | 32.383*** |

Note: I-deals, CSE, PCR, B, and SDF stand for idiosyncratic deals, creative self-efficacy, perception of constructive responsibility, bootlegging, and supervisor developmental feedback, respectively; * indicates $p<0.05$, ** indicates $p<0.01$, and *** indicates $p<0.001$.

The results of the Bootstrap test for the moderated mediation effect are shown in Table 3, in the I-deals→CSE→B path, the 95% confidence interval is [0.049, 0.126] when the superior developmental

feedback is low, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.123, 0.247] when the superior developmental feedback is high. In the I-deals→PCR→B path, the 95% confidence interval is [0.032, 0.098], when the superior developmental feedback is low; and the 95% confidence interval is [0.092, 0.223], when the superior developmental feedback is high. Therefore, hypothesis H6 and H7 was validated.

Table 3 Bootstrap Test Results for Moderated Mediation Effect

| Pathways | SDF | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|---------------|-------|----------|----------|
| I-deals→CSE→B | M-1SD | 0.049 | 0.126 |
| | M+1SD | 0.123 | 0.247 |
| I-deals→PCR→B | M-1SD | 0.032 | 0.098 |
| | M+1SD | 0.092 | 0.223 |

5. Conclusions and Discussion of the Study

5.1 Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are as follows: Idiosyncratic deals positively affects employees' bootlegging; Creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility mediate the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and employees' bootlegging; Supervisor developmental feedback positively moderates the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility; Supervisor developmental feedback positively moderates the mediating role of creative self-efficacy, perception of constructive responsibility between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, this study verifies that idiosyncratic deals is an important factor in stimulating employees' bootlegging, which enriches the antecedent research on employees' bootlegging in the Chinese context. Secondly, this study explores the role of idiosyncratic deals in employee bootlegging from the dual perspectives of innovation efficacy and transgression willingness in bootlegging, addressing the limitation of prior single - perspective studies on bootlegging formation mechanisms. Finally, this study explores the boundary conditions under which idiosyncratic deals affect the process of employee bootlegging in terms of leadership feedback, broadening the study of boundary conditions for the formation mechanism of employee bootlegging.

5.3 Management Insights

Firstly, in today's VUCA era, enterprises can only adapt to the dynamic changes in the external environment if they have the courage to break the rules and insist on innovation. Therefore, enterprises should establish an innovation-oriented personalized human resource management model to fully stimulate the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of employees in order to achieve breakthrough innovation results. Secondly, companies should emphasize and enhance employees' creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility. On the one hand, enterprises should give employees a certain degree of work autonomy, enhance their sense of ownership and cultivate their sense of responsibility. On the other hand, enterprises should pay special attention to those employees who have strong confidence in achieving innovative results when selecting talents. Thirdly, managers should improve their own level of developmental feedback. When providing feedback to employees, managers should not only provide performance feedback on work performance, but also provide valuable information to help them improve their work, future learning

and development, enhance their confidence in innovation, and increase their sense of responsibility to bring constructive change to the organization.

5.4 Research Limitations and Prospects

First of all, although this study used a two-stage approach in the time of data collection to avoid homology bias, it used employees' self-assessment in the source of data collection, which may be homology biased to a certain extent, and slightly insufficient for the study of longitudinal causality among variables. Futural research can collect data through other assessment or experimental research method to carry out more precise research. Second, this study regarded idiosyncratic deals as a whole variable and did not separately explore the relationship between different types of idiosyncratic deals on employees' bootlegging. Due to the difference in focus, different types of idiosyncratic deals may have differentiated impacts on employee bootlegging. Futural research can classify idiosyncratic deals into different types for more in-depth exploration. Finally, the results of this study showed that creative self-efficacy and perception of constructive responsibility partially mediated the relationship between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging, suggesting that there are other mediating paths between idiosyncratic deals and bootlegging. Futural research can further explore other possible mediating pathways, so as to reveal more systematically and comprehensively the role pathways through which idiosyncratic deals influence employees' bootlegging.

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