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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Effects of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement: roles of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership

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Abstract

Emerging research in the idiosyncratic deals literature is to examine its negative effects. Thus far, much remains unknown about how and when idiosyncratic deals are associated with employee creative process engagement. Invoking fairness heuristic theory and trait activation theory, we propose and test a model that coworker's idiosyncratic deals have a negative association with witness's creative process engagement through psychological contract violation. Furthermore, we theorize and test the combination of the responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership as important boundary conditions, associate interact with coworker's idiosyncratic deals to strengthen the positive impact on psychological contract violation, thereby reducing witness's creative process engagement. We use two time-lagged studies to provide support for these mediation and moderation effects, and also discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Key words: Coworker's idiosyncratic deals; perceived exploitative leadership; psychological contract violation; responsibility for change; witness's creative process engagement

Introduction

With the rapid development of sharing economy and Gig economy, comprising independent freelance workers and providing flexible working arrangements for them (e.g., Grimshaw, Cooke, Grugulis, & Vincent, 2010; Holtgrewe, 2014; Lehdonvirta, 2018), as well as the emergence of public crisis events such as corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), enterprises are increasingly in the 'VUCA era' which is full of variability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Mack, Khare, Krämer, & Burgartz, 2016). To attract valuable employees and maintain substantial competitive or innovation advantage, more organizations individually negotiated non-standardized idiosyncratic deals arrangements unique to employees, examples include flexible work hours, training opportunities, and sponsored on-the-job activities (Anand, Hu, Vidyarthi, & Liden, 2018; Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013; Rousseau, 2005). Then, how employees are likely to respond to the idiosyncratic deals in the creative process? This question is particularly important for organizations to promote employee innovation. Prior research shows that idiosyncratic deals reduce the recipient's turnover intentions (Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Ng, 2017) and enhance their organizational citizenship behavior (Anand et al., 2018; Ho & Kong, 2015; Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), job satisfaction (Liao, Wayne, Liden, & Meuser, 2016), job performance (Anand et al., 2018; Heras, Rofcanin, Bal, & Stollberger, 2017; Liao et al., 2016), helping behavior (Liao et al., 2016), and voice behavior (Marescaux, Winne, & Sels, 2019; Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). However, various prior research studies acknowledge that idiosyncratic deals have negative

implications in the workplace. If employee received a higher level of idiosyncratic deals, their peers would feel envious and choose to resign (Ng, 2017). Marescaux et al. (2019) found that an employee who perceived a high level of coworker's idiosyncratic deals would complain and request compensation. These findings showed that peer's or coworker's idiosyncratic deals would trigger witness's negative psychological and behavioral, nevertheless, the empirical investigation remained limited on such perspective, how and when they are related remains little understood. In order to dig more deeply into the negative repercussions of coworker's idiosyncratic deals, other feasible mechanism investigations of the implications of perceived coworker's idiosyncratic deals for the witness's creative process engagement are necessary. In addition to this gap, prior researchers also omitted the boundary conditions of idiosyncratic deals' consequences. As Rousseau, Ho, and Greenberg (2006) noted, there were some conditions or scenarios (i.e., traits and working context) under which the coworker may perceive idiosyncratic deals as fair or unfair, and respond in different ways. Taken together, the question faced by organizations and the gap from previous literature provide inspiration for our present research, in which we integrate fairness heuristic theory with trait activation theory to explore a theoretical model that highlights how and when coworker's idiosyncratic deals impact witness's creative process engagement.

Fairness heuristic theory holds that employee's general fairness judgments are inspired by the fairness-relevant information (i.e., procedural and distributive information in the normal social interaction) in the workplace, which makes individual create positive/negative emotions and cognition, motivating them to concern about self-interest subsequently (Lind, Kulik, & Ambrose, 1993, 2001). When an employee bears witness to coworker's idiosyncratic deals, the inequity might inspire unfairness impression and give rise to psychological contract violation on account of a lack of what coworkers have. To restore the gap between an employee's and his coworker's deals, this employee may reduce creative process engagement. That is to explore the mediating effect of psychological contract violation. Trait activation theory argues that personality trait plays an increasingly important role in the workplace (Byrne, Stoner, Thompson, & Hochwarter, 2005; Foo, Uy, & Baron, 2009; Greenbaum, Hill, Mawritz, & Quade, 2017; Hirst, Knippenberg, & Zhou, 2009; Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway, & Ferris, 2006; Hoogh, Hartog, & Koopman, 2005; Judge & Zapata, 2015; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010), traits and job characteristics jointly influence employee work outcomes (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013). So our model positions responsibility for change as an important boundary condition. Moreover, trait activation theory points out that some contextual factors can conceal the effects of traits (Mischel, 1973, 1977). Fairness heuristic theory also shows that fairness-relevant information can be supplemented and strengthened mutually (Den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997; Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 2001), so we concentrate on perceived exploitative leadership as another boundary condition, i.e., "*leader acting egoistically, overburdening and manipulating employee*" (Schmid, Pircher, & Peus, 2019, p. 1404), as the feelings of injustice are activated when the employee feel exploited by their supervisors. Therefore, our tested model position psychological contract violation as a mediating factor that explain how coworker's idiosyncratic deals impact witness's creative process engagement, it also position responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership as combined moderating factor that determine whether coworker's idiosyncratic deals break witness's psychological contract translates into decreasing creative process engagement.

The present research makes several notable contributions to current literature through rich data collection and two studies. First, our theoretical model explains how an employee's creative process engagement is affected by the psychological state (psychological contract violation) of witnessing coworker's idiosyncratic deals, that is our model focus on an outcome variable, i.e., witness's creative process engagement, which has not been explored in idiosyncratic deals research to date. Second, our research contributes to psychological contract literatures empirically investigates its mediating effects. Third, we explain when an employee reduces creative process

engagement to respond to the witnesses of coworker's idiosyncratic deals through frame responsibility for change and exploitative leadership as contingency factors, so we move research on the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's creative process engagement association toward a refined moderating mechanism. Finally, we contribute to the exploitative leadership literature by advancing the moderating role of it in the creative process, which has begun to receive the attention of scholars recently (Schmid et al., 2019; Syed, Akhtar, Saeed, & Husnain, 2019).

Hypothesis development

Coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement

Creative process engagement differs from non-creative task involvement, the former entails stronger affective commitment and cognitive, to identify problems, search and encode relevant information, generate creative ideas by spending more time and effort (Amabile, 1983; Gilson, Mathieu, Shalley, & Ruddy, 2005; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010a). These three processes (i.e., problem identification, information searching and encoding, and idea generation) of creative process engagement are essential activities to associate employee creativity in the workplace, as confirmed by extant studies (Cheung, Huang, Chang, & Wei, 2020; Huang, Krasikova, & Liu, 2016; Mumford, Mobley, Reiter-Palmon, Uhlman, & Doares, 1991; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). The major research of creative process engagement focuses on its outcomes, such as creativity (Cheung et al., 2020; Henker, Sonnentag, & Unger, 2015), creative performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Mace & Ward, 2002; Sapp, 1995), knowledge sharing intention (Piyathasanan, Mathies, Patterson, & De Ruyter, 2017), and job performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010b), but it does not account for the factors and mechanism that affect creative process engagement.

We propose that coworker's idiosyncratic deals may reduce witness's creative process engagement. A primary reason for the two constructs is that idiosyncratic deals signal the recognition of the dealer's competence and allow them to thrive, thereby enhancing the satisfaction of their competence need and organizational citizenship behavior (Ho & Kong, 2015). Anand and colleagues maintain that the negotiability and respect in idiosyncratic deals create and sustain a high-quality leader–follower relationship, motivating an employee to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Anand et al., 2018). Creative process engagement intends to identify workplace problems and generate relevant ideas, which is often considered a form of OCBs (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Additionally, the previous studies show that employee's idiosyncratic deals were positively related to their voice behavior, but perceptions of coworkers receiving idiosyncratic deals were the exact opposite (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). A positive association between the voice of the individual and their creativity is also established in extant research (Chen & Hou, 2016; Ng & Feldman, 2012; Zhou & George, 2001). Therefore, coworker's idiosyncratic deals may enhance coworker's creative process engagement, but decrease witness's creative process engagement.

The link between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement is best explained by the fairness heuristic theory. This theory suggests that people use fairness-relevant information, including diminished identity treatment (Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992) and unequal distribution (Van den Bos, 1996; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996, 1997) across coworkers, to engage in the fairness heuristic processes, and to derive a general fairness impression subsequently (Lind et al., 2001; Tyler & DeGoey, 1995). This impression will be used to guide personal decisions and restore equity, including altering work outputs or inputs (Folger, 1977; Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979; Marescaux et al., 2019; Skiba & Rosenberg, 2011; Walker, LaTour, Lind, & Thibaut, 1974). According to fairness heuristic theory, the unique coworker's idiosyncratic deals have the potential to distort the general unfair impression of witnesses, and hence lead to reduce

his/her creative process engagement. To summarize, these arguments suggest that coworker's idiosyncratic deals are negatively related to witness's creative process engagement, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 Coworker's idiosyncratic deals are negatively related to witness's creative process engagement.

The mediating role of psychological contract violation

Psychological contract violation is an emotional and affective state, which refers to the feelings of betrayal when an employee perceives that the organization has failed to fulfill reciprocal obligations (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1965). Employees are more likely to feel contract violation if they were treated unfairly (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). The different forms of coworker's idiosyncratic deal arrangements, such as workload reductions and flexible work hours, have the potential to break the fairness, lead to perceptions of psychological contract violation for the witnesses. Because the witnesses of coworker's idiosyncratic deals feel worse treated than their colleague, examples could be depriving training opportunities or valuable resources. Furthermore, psychological contract violation has been described as the experiences of frustration, anger, resentment, and unfairness perceptions (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1965), these components will be witness's reaction towards the organization that granted the idiosyncratic deals for a coworker. On the other hand, psychological contract violation can lead to behavioral responses (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Pavlou & Gefen, 2005; Robinson, 1996; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989), as Robinson and Rousseau (1994) found, psychological contract violation will decrease employee's obligation and contribution to the organization. Thus, we expect psychological contract violation to mediate the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's creative process engagement relationship. This hypothesis is consistent with the results obtained by Garg and Fulmer (2017), who validated the mediating role of employee emotion (i.e., resentment, anger, and indifference) between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's behavioral reaction (i.e., display withdrawal and disengagement).

The mediation we suggest is in accordance with fairness heuristic theory, such that individual will use fairness-relevant information, including diminished identity treatment and the unfair distribution of outcomes across team members, to judge how fairly he/she is being treated (Den Bos et al., 1997). If the person derives a general unfair impression, he or she will feel excluded and exploited. To reduce psychological distress, individuals will invest less psychological or material resources for the organization (Lind et al., 2001). According to the theory, coworker's idiosyncratic deals result in witnesses perceiving distributively unfair and psychological contract violation, which trigger behavioral restoration, increasing the odds that employee minimize their creative process engagement to restore the balance of the psychological contract. The following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 2 Psychological contract violation mediates the negative relationship between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement.

The combined moderating role of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership

The coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's psychological contract violation link involves cognitive activities, which are affected by traits (Kong, Ho, & Garg, 2020). Responsibility for change (Lee, Pak, Kim, & Li, 2019; Morrison & Phelps, 1999) is the belief that an individual is obligated to bring about change in the workplace, Morrison and Phelps (1999) stated further that such a

sense of responsibility can predict the willingness to take charge. Previous literature also proposed that employees with high responsibility for change display more proactive behaviors (Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996; Graham, 1986) and continuous improvement (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006), because they tend to have a more positive valence to taking these behaviors (Lee et al., 2019). When employees with high levels of responsibility for change witness coworker's idiosyncratic deals, they may motivate or improve themselves rather than blame the organization which has not fulfilled its obligations or commitments, and feel less betrayed. The above reasoning shows high perceived responsibility for change weakens the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's psychological contract violation association. In contrast, employees felt low responsibility for change may attach more negative valence to psychological contracts when they witness coworker's idiosyncratic deals, strengthens the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation.

The effect of idiosyncratic deals are subject to the influence of the leader–follower context (Liao et al., 2016), so the relationship between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation also involves interpersonal interaction with leaders which leadership often play a vital role in. Employees often consider their immediate leader as a representative of the organization, a recent study has shown that abusive supervision negative impact on psychological contract violation and the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964), since employees will feel unfair and disrespectful when perceiving them to be abusive (Pradhan, Srivastava, & Mishra, 2019). Likewise, exploitative leadership also belongs to destructive leadership, refers to leaders who are very selfish and exploitative of others, they often exert pressure on, place inappropriately job demands on, and manipulate (e.g., play followers off against each other) employees, and hinder employees' career development (May, Peus, & Frey, 2010; Schilling, 2009; Stouten & Tripp, 2009; Williams, 2014). Schmid et al. (2019) have argued that exploitative leadership is likely to evoke broader negative emotions, negative cognitions, and perceptions of unequal treatment. Along the lines of argumentation and fairness heuristic theory (Den Bos et al., 1997), employees perceived exploitative behavior will defy the leader–follower equitable exchange relationships, and trigger a strong sense of inequity and violation (Kernan, Racicot, & Fisher, 2016). Hence, it is plausible that the positive relationship between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation to be stronger in a workplace with high rather than low perceived exploitative leadership.

Employee's cognition and behavior are multiply determined (Ahadi & Diener, 1989), trait activation theory assumes that understanding the behavioral expression of personality traits calls for consideration of relevant situational cues (Tett & Guterman, 2000), because situational effects (e.g., the effects of supervisors' behavior) can wash out trait effects (Tett & Burnett, 2003). So we turn our attention to explain how the combination of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership moderate the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation. Our primary aim here is to assess whether the trait of responsibility for change may be underused in the context of exploitative leadership.

Earlier, we assumed an indirect association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement via psychological contract violation (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Integrating our theorization for the combined moderating role of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership in the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's psychological contract violation association, we propose that the combinations of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership moderate the indirect association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement (via psychological contract violation). For the combination of low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership, the conditional indirect effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement via psychological contract violation was significant and strongest because both low responsibility and high exploitative situational will strengthen the relationship between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation, but for other

combinations, including low responsibility and low exploitative leadership, high responsibility and high exploitative leadership, and high responsibility and low exploitative leadership, the conditional indirect effects were nonsignificant because the exploitative situation cannot activate the effect of responsibility among these three combinations. In summary, we suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 The combinations of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership moderates the indirect association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement via psychological contract violation, such that the indirect association is significant and strongest when employees with low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership.

Overview of the studies

To increase confidence in our results (Lykken, 1968), two separate studies were conducted to test our theoretically grounded hypotheses and conceptual models. In study 1, we tested the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement and psychological contract violation as a mechanism linking coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement. In study 2, we replicated the results of study 1 and tested the combined moderating role of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership. To minimize common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) and enhance the generalizability of our findings, we used a 1-month time lag and 3-wave design in study 1, and a 2-month interval and 3-wave design in study 2. Empirically, a 1-month time lag has been shown to be long enough for average correlations to be lower than in concurrent conditions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Yet, because creative engagement likely require several weeks to be executed (Madrid, Patterson, Birdi, Leiva, & Kausel, 2014), a 2-month time lag was adopted in study 2. This replication logic followed across the studies is consistent with recent recommendations from method experts to test theoretical models via improved and independent empirical studies (Cortina, Aguinis, & DeShon, 2017). The samples of the two studies were employees working in different organizations in China. To ensure equivalency of meaning, all of the measures were translated from English to Chinese following Brislin (1986) translation and back-translation procedure.

Study 1: Methods

Sample and procedure

This research does n't involve sensitive information, respondents were informed that individual responses would be strictly confidential and only for academic research. Time-lagged dates were surveyed with part-time MBA students (i.e., communication and technology, finance, real estate, engineering) through an experiment and investigation class at a large public university in Sichuan Province, China. Performance on this survey directly contributed (20%) to parties' course grades, so they were motivated to participate in survey tasks, and received RMB 20 (approximately USD 3) for each wave survey. 351 participants should complete three wave surveys according to the roster, a QR code of the questionnaires was provided to them and directed them to report coworker's idiosyncratic deals, control variable and demographic information in the Time 1 survey, we received 344 usable questionnaires (98%). One month later, followers rated their psychological contract violation, we received 332 usable questionnaires (94%). Creative process engagement was reported in the Time 3 survey, we received 321 usable questionnaires (91%). The final sample consisted of 321 matched responses, the average age of whom was 27, about 63.6% were female, 64.2% were at least Bachelor's degree holders, 60.1% had non-management positions, their average working tenure was 6 years.

Measures

Respondents were asked to rate their coworkers or themselves on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Coworker's idiosyncratic deals was assessed using the 5-item scale from Anand et al. (2018), sample items include 'Some coworker have more opportunities to participate in on-the-job activities than me' and 'Some coworker have more opportunities to participate in training than me' ($\alpha = .942$) (p. 702).

Psychological contract violation was assessed by the 5-item scale developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000), sample items include 'Almost all the promises made by my employer during recruitment have been kept so far (reversed)' and 'My employer has broken many of its promises to me even though I' ve upheld myside of the deal' ($\alpha = .921$) (p. 539).

Creative process engagement was measured with 11-item scale introduced by Zhang and Bartol (2010a, b), sample items are 'I spend considerable time trying to understand the nature of the problem' and 'I think about the problem from multiple perspectives' ($\alpha = .963$)(p. 128).

Further, based on the previous literatures (Cheung et al., 2020), we included four demographic variables (working tenure, education, post category, and organizational level) as control variables. Over qualified employees have the ability to carry out divergent thinking, associational and analogical abilities, so as to promote the creative process (Livingstone, Nelson, & Barr, 1997), other scholars also argued that employees with over-qualification will use their surplus qualification constructively by engaging in creative process (Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016), so we included participants' perceived over-qualification as a control variable. It was measured with 9-item scale introduced by Maynard, Joseph, and Maynard (2006), sample items are 'My job requires less education than I have' and 'The work experience that I have is not necessary to be successful on this job' ($\alpha = .86$) (p. 536).

Results

Reliability and validity analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we first evaluated Cronbach's α or C.R. to test the overall or composite reliability and evaluated AVE to test the convergent validity of three variables (coworker's idiosyncratic deals, psychological contract violation, and creative process engagement) by using SPSS 24 software, these results in Table 1 showed that three scales' reliability and convergent validity met the statistical standard (all Cronbach's $\alpha > .8$, C.R. >.7, and AVE >.5).

Confirmatory factor analyses

We conducted a CFA using MPLUS software of the three variables in our model: Coworker's idiosyncratic deals (5 items), psychological contract violation (5 items), and creative process engagement (11 items), Table 2 indicated an acceptable three-factor measurement model fitted the data well (χ^2/df <3, RMSEA <.08, IFI, TLI, CFI >.9). Importantly, the three-factor model also revealed a better fit than the alternative models, including two- and one-factor models. Taken together, these results support the distinctiveness of our hypothesized constructs.

Descriptive statistics

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and correlations) among all variables, The findings presented that coworker's idiosyncratic deals had a statistically significantly positively association with witness's psychological contract violation ($B = .437$, $p < .01$) and a negative association with witness's creative process engagement ($B = -.152$, $p < .01$). Psychological contract violation was negatively associated with creative process engagement ($B = -.176$, $p < .01$).

Table 1. Reliability and validity of study 1

Variable	Cronbach's α	C.R.	AVE
Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	.942	.944	.771
Psychological contract violation	.921	.927	.722
Witness's creative process engagement	.963	.964	.707

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analyses of study 1

Model	Factors	χ^2/df	*RMSEA*	*IFI*	*TLI*	*CFI*
Three-factor model	C_{id}, P_{cv}, C_{pe}	2.35	.065	.965	.959	.965
Two-factor model 1	$C_{id} + P_{cv}$, C_{pe}	10.33	.171	.745	.714	.744
Two-factor model 2	C_{id}, $P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	11.91	.185	.701	.665	.701
One-factor model	$C_{id} + P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	19.62	.241	.488	.429	.486

Note. C_{id} = coworker's idiosyncratic deals; P_{cv} = psychological contract violation; C_{pe} = witness's creative process engagement.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study 1

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Working tenure	6.20	6.270							
2. Education	2.77	.934	−.135*						
3. Post category	3.75	2.048	−.108	−.243**					
4. Organizational level	1.70	.958	.174**	.016	−.273**				
5. Perceived over-qualification	3.97	1.038	−.102	.099	.203**	−.239**			
6. Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	2.94	1.449	−.100	−.072	.017	−.218**	.337**		
7. Psychological contract violation	3.61	1.438	.036	.067	.092	−.075	.421**	.437**	
8. Witness's creative process engagement	5.30	1.085	.116*	.148**	−.057	.069	.180**	−.152**	−.176**

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

Hypothesis tests

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, we used Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro to test the direct and indirect effects of our full model. Coworker's idiosyncratic deals was negatively related to witness's creative process engagement ($B = -.209$, SE = .056, $p < .01$) and positively related to witness's psychological contract violation ($B = .371$, SE = .051, $p < .001$), witness's psychological contract violation was negatively related to his/her creative process engagement ($B = -.211$, SE = .061, $p < .01$), so the mediating effect of psychological contract violation was significant ($B = .371 \times .211 = .078$, $p < .01$). We also used a bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples) and set the confidence intervals at .95, the results revealed that the indirect effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement through psychological contract violation equals .078 (Boot SE = .027, 95% CI [.031, .136]), thereby provided evidence for a significant mediation effect. These results supported Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Table 4. Mediation analyses of study 1

	Witness's creative process engagement		Psychological contract violation		Witness's creative process engagement	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Control variables						
Working tenure	.019**	.008	.018*	.007	.015	.008
Education	.115*	.060	.107	.055	.092	.060
Post category	−.027	.028	.041	.026	−.036	.028
Organizational level	.052	.060	.084	.054	.034	.059
Perceived over-qualification	.272***	.058	.300***	.052	.208**	.060
Independent variable						
Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	−.209**	.056	.371***	.051	−.288***	.060
Mediator						
Psychological contract violation					−.211**	.061
F	7.061***		22.489***		7.971***	
R^2	.118***		.300***		.151***	

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

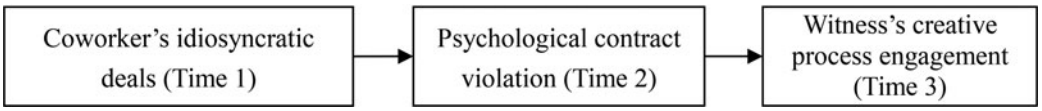

Figure 1. Study 1 tested model.

Discussion

Study 1 provided evidence coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's creative process engagement association occurs via psychological contract violation. Higher levels of coworker's idiosyncratic deals would result in higher levels of witness's psychological contract violation, which would result in lower levels of creative process engagement.

To rule out the specificity of the sample or measure (Cortina et al., 2017), in the following section, we designed another independent study (study 2) to constructively replicate the results of study 1 and test the combined moderating role of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership.

Study 2: Methods

Sample and procedure

As a part of a large consulting project, through alumni and other social networks, we surveyed time-lagged data from employees working at six large privately owned firms in the High-tech Zone located in Chengdu and Shenzhen, China. These full-time employees worked in different industries, involving computer technicians, finance and accounting, and manufacturing, among others. Specifically, we entrust the HRM department to invite the employee to complete three waves of questionnaires at two-month intervals and count the list of volunteers, participants were paid RMB 20 (approximately USD 3) for each wave survey. According to the list, we sent

prospective participants an email with a link to the online questionnaire and explained the purpose and confidentiality of this study to them. Since creative behaviors likely require several weeks to generate and execute (Madrid et al., 2014), we conducted a 2-month interval in this study rather than a 1-month interval in study 1. After removed careless responders, 485 participants reported demographic information, control variable, coworker's idiosyncratic deals, responsibility for change, and perceived exploitative leadership at time 1, 462 of the time 1 participant reported their psychological contract violation at time 2 (95.2%). Finally, 403 of the time 2 participants reported their creative process engagement at time 3 (83%). Of these 403 matched respondents, the average age was 28, average organizational tenure was 5 years, 61.5% were female, 63.1% had at least a bachelor's degree, and about 57.3% had non-management positions.

Measures

As in study 1, we used the same items and 7-point scale anchors to rate coworker's idiosyncratic deals ($\alpha = .931$), psychological contract violation ($\alpha = .921$), and creative process engagement ($\alpha = .96$).

The employees also rated their responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), responsibility for change was measured with 3-item developed by Morrison and Phelps (1999), a sample item is 'I feel a personal sense of responsibility to bring about change at work' ($\alpha = .898$) (p. 411).

Perceived exploitative leadership was assessed using Schmid et al. (2019) 14-item scale, a sample item is 'My leader takes it for granted that my work can be used for his or her benefit' ($\alpha = .963$) (p. 1407).

As in study 1, we also controlled for working tenure, education, post category, organizational level, and perceived over-qualification.

Results

Reliability and validity analyses

As the same strategies in study 1, we conducted reliability and validity analyses, the results showed that five scales' overall reliability, composite reliability, and convergent validity met the statistical standard (all Cronbach' s $\alpha > .8$, C.R. >.7, and AVE >.5) (Table 5).

Confirmatory factor analyses

We subjected the five variables in Figure 2 to a series of CFAs to compare our hypothesized five-factor model with alternative constructs. As shown in Table 6, an acceptable five-factor measurement model fitted the data well (χ^2/df <3, RMSEA <.08, IFI, TLI, CFI >.9), this baseline model also revealed a better fit than the alternative models, supporting the distinctiveness of our hypothesized model.

Descriptive statistics

Table 7 reported the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study' s key variables, the conclusion of study 1 was confirmed again, and responsibility for change was significantly positively associated with creative process engagement ($B = .756$, $p < .01$), perceived exploitative leadership was negatively associated with creative process engagement ($B = -.111$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis tests

We also used PROCESS macro to test the mediation and moderation effect shown in Figure 2, the results are presented in Table 8. Coworker's idiosyncratic deals were negatively associated with witness's creative process engagement ($B = -.282$, SE = .056, $p < .001$) and positively associated

Table 5. Reliability and validity of study 2

Variable	Cronbach's α	C.R.	AVE
Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	.931	.933	.735
Psychological contract violation	.921	.926	.718
Responsibility for change	.898	.899	.747
Perceived exploitative leadership	.959	.960	.631
Witness's creative process engagement	.963	.963	.703

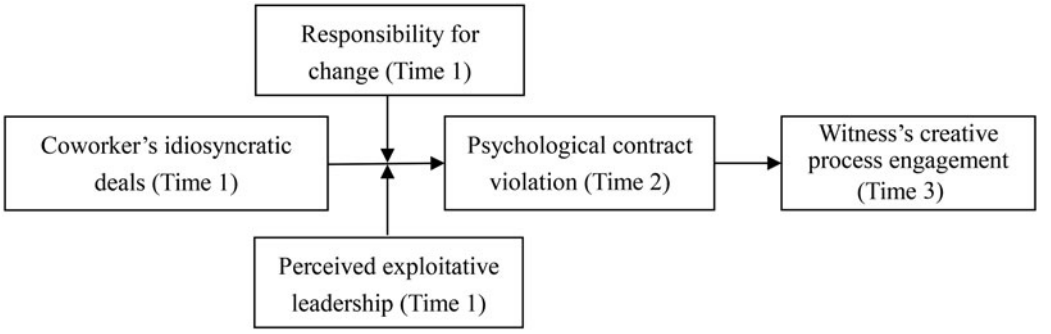

Figure 2. Study 2 tested model.

Table 6. Confirmatory factor analyses of study 2

Model	Factors	χ^2/df	*RMSEA*	*IFI*	*TLI*	*CFI*
Five-factor model	C_{id}, P_{cv}, R_c, P_{el}, C_{pe}	2.24	.062	.940	.932	.939
Four-factor model 1	$C_{id} + P_{cv}$, R_c, P_{el}, C_{pe}	5.54	.106	.801	.787	.800
Four-factor model 2	C_{id}, R_c, P_{el}, $P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	6.43	.116	.764	.747	.763
Three-factor model 1	$C_{id} + P_{el} + P_{cv}$, R_c, C_{pe}	6.57	.118	.755	.739	.754
Three-factor model 2	$C_{id} + P_{el}$, R_c, $P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	7.62	.128	.708	.689	.707
Two-factor model 1	$C_{id} + P_{el}$, $R_c + P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	8.01	.132	.691	.672	.690
Two-factor model 2	$C_{id} + P_{el} + R_c$, $P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	9.18	.143	.639	.616	.638
One-factor model	$C_{id} + P_{el} + R_c + P_{cv} + C_{pe}$	14.17	.181	.417	.382	.416

Note. C_{id} = coworker's idiosyncratic deals; P_{cv} = psychological contract violation; R_c = responsibility for change; P_{el} = perceived exploitative leadership; C_{pe} = witness's creative process engagement.

with witness's psychological contract violation ($B = .117$, SE = .057, $p < .05$), witness's psychological contract violation was negatively associated with his/her creative process engagement ($B = -.140$, SE = .057, $p < .05$), the mediating effect of psychological contract violation was significant ($B = .117 \times .140 = .016$, $p < .05$), thereby provided support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 again.

We found the interaction effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's responsibility for change on witness's psychological contract violation is negative and significant ($B = -.125$, SE = .038, $p < .01$, see Table 8), results of simple slopes analysis showed the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation was positive and significant ($B = .242$, SE = .067, 95% CI [.110, .375]) when responsibility for change was low (M-1SD), it

Table 7. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Working tenure	6.14	6.117									
2. Education	2.73	.873	−.044								
3. Post category	3.64	2.075	−.134**	−.258**							
4. Organizational level	1.73	.954	.191**	.008	−.235**						
5. Perceived over-qualification	3.96	1.022	−.090	.101*	.149**	−.214**					
6. Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	3.02	1.425	−.087	−.082	−.017	−.163**	.333**				
7. Psychological contract violation	3.55	1.411	.041	.070	.055	−.063	.423**	.477**			
8. Responsibility for change	5.12	1.276	.101*	.140**	−.027	.099*	.141**	−.221**	.017		
9. Perceived exploitative leadership	3.29	1.362	.021	.081	−.020	−.088	.313**	.679**	.542**	−.174**	
10. Witness's creative process engagement	5.26	1.086	.111*	.140**	−.030	.063	.180**	−.161**	−.107*	.756**	−.111*

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

Table 8. Moderation analyses of study 2

	Psychological contract violation		Witness's creative process engagement	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Control variables				
Working tenure	.009	.006	.015	.008
Education	.024	.047	.090	.057
Post category	.025	.020	−.015	.024
Organizational level	.036	.042	.051	.052
Perceived over-qualification	.218***	.043	.229***	.054
Independent variable				
Coworker's idiosyncratic deals	.117*	.057	−.282***	.056
Mediator				
Psychological contract violation			−.140*	.057
Moderator				
Responsibility for change	.049	.041		
Perceived exploitative leadership	.372**	.054		
Interaction				
$C_{id} \times d_c$	−.125**	.038		
$C_{id} \times P_{el}$	.133**	.033		
F	29.647***		8.215***	
R^2	.430***		.127***	

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

became nonsignificant ($B = -.007$, SE = .071, 95% CI [−.148, .133]) when responsibility for change was high. As the same analysis strategies, the interaction effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's perceived exploitative leadership on witness's psychological contract violation equals .133 (SE = .033, $p < .01$, see Table 8), simple slopes analysis showed the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's psychological contract violation was positive and significant ($B = .250$, SE = .058, 95% CI [.135, .365]) when witness's perceived exploitative leadership was high (M + 1SD), it became nonsignificant ($B = -.015$, SE = .073, 95% CI [−.160, .129]) when perceived exploitative leadership was low.

We tested the conditional indirect effects of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement at plus and minus one SD on witness's responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership, these results were shown in Table 9 and Figure 3. For the combination of low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership, the indirect effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement through psychological contract violation was significant ($B = .052$, BootSE = .024, 95% CI [.011, .106]), but for all other combination of witness's responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership, the conditional indirect effects were nonsignificant. The indirect effect associated with low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership was stronger than the indirect effect for the association of low responsibility for change and low perceived exploitative leadership ($B_{\text{difference}} = .037$, BootSE = .016, 95% CI [.008, .073]), high responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership ($B_{\text{difference}} = -.035$, BootSE = .016, 95% CI [−.072, −.007]), and

Table 9. Combined moderation of R_c and P_{el} of study 2

Dependent variable	Moderators	C_{id}→P_{cv}	C_{id}→P_{cv}→C_{pe}
C_{pe}	Low R_c, high P_{el}	.375 [.243, .507]	.052 [.011, .106]
	Low R_c, low P_{el}	.109 [−.052, .272]	.015 [−.005, .049]
	High R_c, high P_{el}	.125 [−.019, .269]	.017 [−.002, .050]
	High R_c, low P_{el}	−.140 [−.306, .024]	−.019 [−.051, .004]

Note. C_{id} = coworker's idiosyncratic deals; P_{cv} = psychological contract violation; R_c = responsibility for change; P_{el} = perceived exploitative leadership; C_{pe} = witness's creative process engagement.

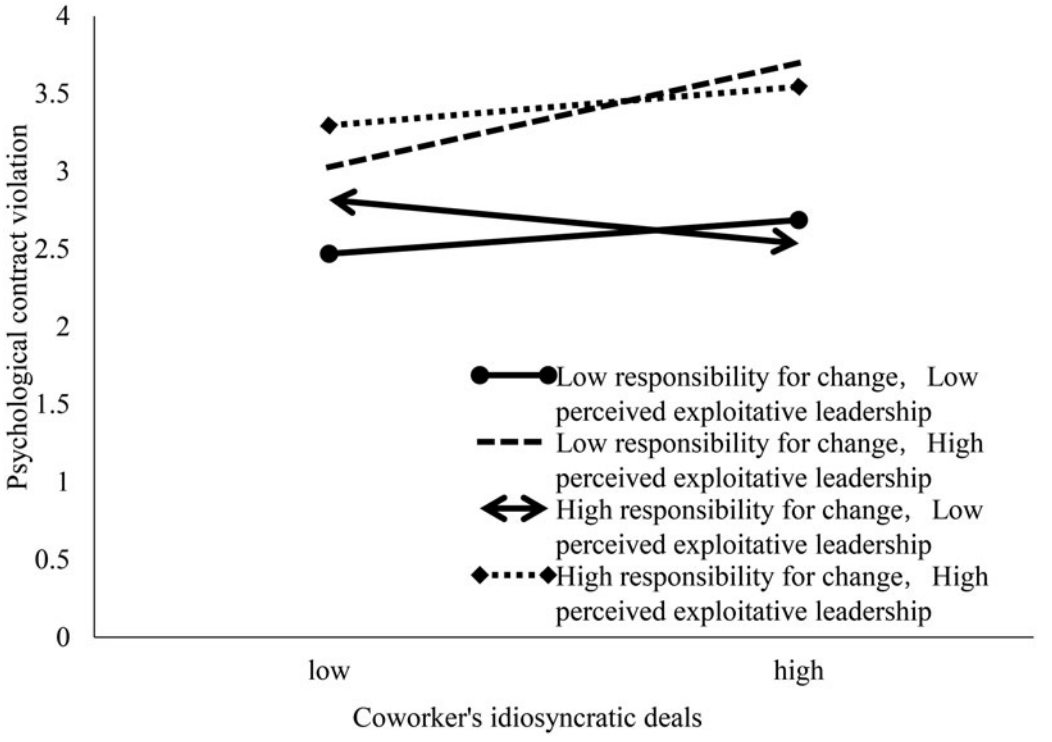

Figure 3. Combined moderating effect of study 2.

high responsibility for change and low perceived exploitative leadership ($B_{\text{difference}} = -.072$, BootSE = .031, 95% CI [−.140, −.017]). Hypothesis 3 was supported, the conditional indirect effect of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement via witness's psychological contract violation was significant and strongest when employees were low in responsibility for change and high in perceived exploitative leadership.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the mediating effect of psychological contract violation found in study 1, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported again. Study 2 also indicated that the indirect effects of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's creative process engagement was significant and strengthened at the combination of low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership. In contrast, the indirect effects were nonsignificant at the combinations of low responsibility for change and

low perceived exploitative leadership, high responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership, high responsibility for change and low perceived exploitative leadership. Together, these results showed that the damages of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on the witness's psychological contract may be connected with creative process engagement only when employees have low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership.

General discussion

We explored and tested the theoretical connections between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement, proposing the mediating mechanism of psychological contract violation and the moderating mechanism of the combination of low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership. Through the lens of the fairness heuristic theory and the trait activation theory, converging evidence showed that coworker's idiosyncratic deals break witness's psychological contract, which reduces witness's creative process engagement when witnesses have low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership.

Theoretical implication

The current paper makes several notable contributions to the literature. First, as one of the few studies of coworker's idiosyncratic deals, we examined how it reduces witness's creative process engagement. Drawing on the fairness heuristic theory (i.e., Lind et al., 2001; Tyler & DeGoey, 1995), our finding is that psychological contract violation connects coworker's idiosyncratic deals with witness's creative process engagement shows that cognitive activities (i.e., psychological contract violation) can explain how coworker's idiosyncratic deals lower witness's creative process engagement in the workplace. From our perspective, the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement is very interesting and worthwhile. Our study extends the understanding of the negative influence of coworker's idiosyncratic deals in the small body of literature. Although previous studies have investigated an array of destructive effects of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on witness's outcomes, such as resulting in witness's turnover (Ng, 2017) and deviant behaviors (Kong et al., 2020), these impressive literature on coworker's idiosyncratic deals have ignored its influence on creative endeavors, including problem identification, information searching and encoding, and idea generation, known as creative process engagement (i.e., Amabile, 1983; Gilson et al., 2005; Mollen & Wilson, 2010). This limitation is regrettable and unfortunate because coworker's idiosyncratic deals occur frequently in real organizational settings, and may be associated with other organizational behaviors (Garg & Fulmer, 2017). To address this omission, we present a model that integrates coworker's idiosyncratic deals with witness's creative process engagement. To have a comprehensive understanding of the destructive effects of coworker's idiosyncratic deals, we hope that this study and other pioneering research studies in the idiosyncratic deals arena will inspire further coworker's idiosyncratic deals research in diverse contexts.

Second, our study focuses on the mediating role of psychological contract violation, linking coworker's idiosyncratic deals to witness's creative process engagement, which adds to the explanatory mechanisms related to coworker's idiosyncratic deals. As prior research studies have noted, psychological contract violation has numerous insights into employee behavior. It is likely to reduce employees' job performance (Turnley & Feldman, 1999), job satisfaction (Turnley & Feldman, 2000), and organizational citizenship behavior (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), lead to higher levels of counterproductive behavior and increased intent to exit (Lemire & Rouillard, 2005; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainus, 1988). Therefore, aside from linking coworker's idiosyncratic deals with witness's creative process engagement, psychological contract violation represents an important mediation through which one's creativity and creative behavior might be lowered by exposure to unfair treatment, which can be widely applied to other similar relationships in future studies.

Third, even though the interrelation between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and outcomes has been suggested in recent years, studies linking these two phenomena have mainly focused on the mediating mechanisms (i.e., Kong et al., 2020; Ng, 2017). What is less known is when coworker's idiosyncratic deals predict outcomes. Our paper contributes to restoring this gap by enriching the boundary conditions that influence the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's creative process engagement association. We adopted the trait activation theory and fairness heuristic theory and found that coworker's idiosyncratic deals play a stronger role in affecting creative process engagement (via psychological contract violation) when an employee with low responsibility for change and high perceived exploitative leadership opens up a research avenue on the context in coworker's idiosyncratic deals to explain when the damages of coworker's idiosyncratic deals are more likely to manifest in the witness's creative process. Our examination of the combined boundary of these two factors consists of the work environment literature, which proposes that not only personality traits matter but also leadership (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Francioli et al., 2018). Specifically, we provide a clearer picture of the effect of exploitative leadership on employees with different responsibilities for change within the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's psychological contract violation – witness's creative engagement process. Employees with high responsibility for change are more willing to bring about change in the workplace (Lee et al., 2019; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). So they may not be as significantly impacted by coworker's idiosyncratic deals compared with low responsibility employees within a low exploitative leadership climate. On the other hand, low responsibility employees who are seldom thought to just take charge of their deals may result in more psychological contract violation when operating that ultimately reduces creative process engagement within a high exploitative leadership climate.

Finally, an exploitative approach to leadership that has emerged in recent years, is called exploitative leadership, which has a more negative impact on individuals and organizations than other destructive leadership (Syed et al., 2019). Although research into exploitative leadership has developed a scale to measure its construct, we know very little about the impact of it on follower outcomes, so researchers suggested exploitative leadership as a potential area of research (Schmid et al., 2019). This research contributes to the exploitative leadership literature by showing how exploitative leadership matters to employees' psychological contract and creative process engagement. We find that the combination of perceived exploitative leadership and responsibility for change moderates the indirect association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement demonstrates perceived exploitative leadership is an organizational barrier that unleashes the damage of coworker's idiosyncratic deals on the witness's creative process (via psychological contract violation). By showing the combined moderating role of them, this study pioneers the further probing into the harmful role of exploitative leadership on employee creative endeavors.

Managerial implications

Granting idiosyncratic deals to coworkers may produce dysfunctional consequences for witnesses, triggering psychological contract violation and consequently reducing creative process engagement in the workplace. Insofar as coworker's idiosyncratic deals may elicit witness's perceptions of a violation, managers should break the resource barriers between different functional departments (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014; Zhang & Bednall, 2016), ensure all employees have the same opportunity to negotiate idiosyncratic deals under similar situation and uphold transparency and justice of the criteria used to grant idiosyncratic deals. Through these strategies, organizations can encourage employees to undertake responsibility for change, employees with high responsibility will be more willing to engage in the creative process. On the other hand, managers may reduce the negative impacts of coworker's idiosyncratic deals by creating a supportive and developing rather than exploitative leadership climate where individuals with different levels of responsibility for change could view coworker's idiosyncratic deals from a more positive perspective. Specifically, supervisors need to provide learning opportunities and support followers' long-

term development. The organization could help managers to obtain a more clear view of themselves by using 360-degree feedback (Dame & Gedmin, 2013). On this basis, training in self-reflection will help supervisors to understand the interdependence with subordinates (Nesbit, 2012). It is also useful that the indicators and features of exploitative leadership are included in structured interviews and situational judgment tests of leadership behavior, as a valid tool for leader selection (Peus, Braun, and Frey, 2013). Furthermore, supportive and developing leadership is critical and should be jointly developed alongside any efforts to uphold the justice of idiosyncratic deals.

Limitation and future research directions

The current study has several limitations that should be mentioned for future research. First, despite we collected time-lagged data, the causality in the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals, witness's psychological contract violation, and creative process engagement could not be established. Future research could use scenario or field experiments to provide more evidence of causality. Second, in this study, we took a unique measure of the creative process engagement and is consistent with previous studies (Cheung et al., 2020; Zhang & Bartol, 2010a, b), but the relation between antecedents and the three stages of it (i.e., problem identification, information searching and encoding, and idea generation) may be different according to the results obtained by Henker et al. (2015). Future scholars could provide a closer look at how other antecedents are related to the different stages of the creative process or illustrate the importance of the different stages within the creative process as antecedents of employee outcomes. Third, although we examined psychological contract violation as the mediating mechanism in the coworker's idiosyncratic deals – witness's creative process engagement link, other mediators may exist. For example, Ho and Kong (2015) identified leader–member exchange and competence need satisfaction as two mechanisms linking idiosyncratic deals and organizational citizenship behavior. Future research could examine multiple mediating processes of other factors simultaneously, to the exam which mechanism is more important (Ng, 2017). Fourth, we examined the combination of responsibility for change and perceived exploitative leadership as critical boundary conditions in the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals, witness's psychological contract violation, and creative process engagement. Future research could examine whether other factors, such as employees' regulatory focus (Brockner, Paruchuri, Idson, & Higgins, 2002), strengthen or weaken the association between coworker's idiosyncratic deals and witness's creative process engagement. Fifth, exploitative leadership may also inform other negative implications, such as job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and burnout (Schmid et al., 2019). For future scholarship, it would be interesting to examine the mediating mechanisms between exploitative leadership and these work outcomes. And these associations may be impacted by employees' attribution and expectation about the qualities of supervisors (Peus, Braun, & Frey, 2012; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Finally, both of our samples are collected in China, cultural factors (i.e., power distance) may influence our findings (Hofstede, 2001). Future research could investigate data in certain national cultures to extend generalizability. Interesting research in this perspective refers to unfair idiosyncratic deals and exploitative leadership may be the norm.

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