INTERNAL ATTRIBUTIONS IN AN INTERGROUP BUSINESS SETTING

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RÉSUMÉ

ATTRIBUTION D'INTERNALITÉ ET RELATIONS INTERGROUPES

Les recherches en matière d'attribution intergroupes ont mis l'accent sur le fait que les gens ont tendance, au moins dans les cas de relations intergroupes symétriques, à attribuer plus de valeur aux membres de leur propre groupe qu'aux membres des autres groupes. Jusqu'à présent, les travaux réalisés ont surtout insisté sur l'importance de la désirabilité des événements à expliquer et de leurs rapports avec des effets de complaisance et de malveillance. Nous allons voir dans cette étude qu'en s'intéressant à l'attribution d'internalité, on peut prolonger ces travaux en situant les processus étudiés dans le registre de la valeur sociale et de la normativité. L'étude, conduite à partir du paradigme d'identification, a été réalisée auprès de 80 salariés (40 managers et 40 subordonnés) d'une société nationale de la grande distribution. Les sujets étaient invités à prédire les réponses des membres de leur propre groupe hiérarchique (contre celles d'un autre groupe) à un questionnaire d'internalité. Dans l'ensemble, les résultats montrent (1) une prédiction d'internalité globale très générale (2) les managers et les subordonnés attribuent autant d'internalité aux membres de leur propre groupe dans l'explication des événements positifs que négatifs quand ils ont à prédire les réponses de membres de leur groupe (3) indépendamment de la désirabilité des événements, les managers choisissent significativement plus d'explications internes quand ils ont à prédire les réponses de membres de leur propre groupe que celles de membres de l'autre groupe (4) le pattern opposé est observé pour les subordonnés et s'observe principalement pour les événements connotés négativement, aucune différence n'est observée pour les événements à connotation positive.

Ces résultats sont discutés en regard de la théorie de la norme d'internalité qui dans le cadre des relations intergroupes conduit à postuler que l'attribution de plus ou moins d'internalité à une cible indépendamment de la désirabilité des événements est une autre façon de lui accorder plus ou moins de valeur (favoritisme, attribution d'internalité).

Mots-clés : *Anticipation d'attributions, Attributions Intergroupes, Relations entre groupes asymétriques, Norme d'internalité.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Attempts to predict the explanations of others, that is, to make inferences about how so-and-so (a friend, a co-worker, a supervisor, etc.) would interpret such-and-such an event, is an important facet of interpersonal relations. Such inferences allow us not only to form impressions of the people around us, whether we are relating to them for personal or occupational purposes, but also to attribute them value or worth. In short, we judge the protagonists of our interpersonal relations, both oneself and others (see Beauvois, Gilibert, Pansu & Abdelhaoui, 1998).

The present article deals mainly with the attribution of value in relations between groups. We try to provide new insight into how people imagine the attributions made by ingroup and/or outgroup members about their own behavior or the behavior of others. In this respect, this paper pertains to many formal and informal evaluation activities that enter into decision-making, both in personnel evaluations and more generally in human resource management (relations between work teams or branches of a company, complaints and requests, promotions, etc.). Evaluative situations of all kinds nearly always involve an asymmetrical intergroup relationship, but they are rarely addressed in terms of intergroup relations in the evaluation discourse. Yet it is indeed during the exercise of power that the link between group X and group Y is formed (by way of orders, instructions, grading, etc.), and this link is necessarily subject to attribution processes.

I.1. Intergroup attributions

An important research trend on intergroup relations (for a review, see Deschamps & Beauvois, 1994; Deschamps & Clémence, 1990; Hewstone, 1990) contends that people have a tendency, at least in so-called symmetrical (equal-rank) relations between groups, to attribute more value to members of their own group (ingroup) than to members of other groups (outgroup). Many studies on intergroup attributions have demonstrated the impact of the desirability of the to-be-explained events (Pettigrew, 1979; Taylor & Jaggi, 1974). These studies largely show that a desirable behavior is almost always attributed to an internal cause when the person at stake is an ingroup member, and that the same behavior is attributed to an external cause when the person is an outgroup member. The opposite is observed when the behavior is undesirable. This intergroup-attribution phenomenon is in fact quite close to an individual attribution behavior rooted in the self-serving bias[1]. It is what Pettigrew

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1. Self-serving biases reflect the tendency people have of attributing the causes of desirable events to themselves and refusing to be held accountable for the negative effects of undesirable events.

(1979) called "the ultimate attribution error". For this author, there is a general tendency among groups to be positively biased toward themselves, and in many cases, to be negatively biased toward persons in other groups. This attribution error is thought to increase as the perceived differences between the groups increases. So, one way to attribute value to persons in the ingroup (target-serving) consists of using internal explanations to account for their successes and socially desirable behaviors, and external explanations to account for their failures and undesirable behaviors. Inversely, one can stigmatize persons from the outgroup (target-derogating) by attributing external causes to their desirable behaviors or events and internal causes to their undesirable ones. For example, saying "Dirk's results are due to luck" is an accrediting way to treat Dirk if he did poorly (undesirable event) and a discrediting way to treat him if he did well (desirable event). In this view, the internal/external orientation has no intrinsic value, since the very same explanation (here, external: "the results are due to luck") allows a person to accredit or discredit Dirk. More specifically, saying "Dirk's results are due to luck" can either be target-serving (if Dirk failed his exam) or target-derogating (if Dirk passed his exam). The important thing here is the desirability of the event being explained (success or failure) and the judger's aim regarding Dirk (accredit/discredit him with the value of the event).

However, while this kind of ingroup favoritism is highly prevalent in groups that occupy symmetrical social positions, it is not necessarily so in cases of social asymmetry. Indeed, when the social actors occupy asymmetrical positions (as in minority *vs.* majority groups), ingroup favoritism may decrease or even be reversed (Deschamps & Beauvois, 1994; Hewstone, 1990). Several studies point in this direction (Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Hewstone, Wagner & Machleit, 1989). They have shown that while majority groups exhibit ingroup favoritism, minority groups may not only fail to do so, but may even exhibit the opposite tendency (favoring majority groups, i.e., the outgroup). Apparently, highly esteemed social groups are capable of imposing their way of thinking on dominated groups. This leads the dominated groups to accept the dominant point of view and to adopt target-serving attitudes toward outgroup members rather than ingroup ones as they normally would (see Deschamps, 1997). What these studies reveal is how sensitive between-group attributions are to the relative positions of the groups in question. This is what Deaux and Emswiller (1974) showed in a study on explanations of success, where men and women had to assess a target man or woman's performance on a typically male or female task. The results showed, for male and female subjects alike, that performance on the male task was attributed to competence for men (internal causality) and to luck for women (external causality). But the opposite effect was not observed for a specifically female task, where a male target was judged almost as competent as a female target. Yarkin, Town, and Walson (1982) found similar results in a study on the working world, where a man's success was again most often attributed to his skills, whereas a woman's success was mainly attributed to luck by both men and women. These findings are

interesting in that they show how attribution processes not only take place at the (inter)personal level, but "also imply the phenomena that occur in the relationships between groups [here the gender category] and that have an impact on inferential mechanisms" (Deschamps, 1997, p. 20).

However, whether they examined symmetrical or asymmetrical group relations, most of these studies obtained target-serving and target-derogating effects in intergroup relations. In this framework, explanations have no intrinsic value of their own; their value depends solely on the desirability of the event, and on the judger's attitude (target-serving or target-derogating) toward the person involved in the event. The main function of such explanations, then, is to attribute to a person the positive or negative aspects of the event, or to contest that such an attribution can be made. Although these studies shed light on the fact that causal explanations serve to attribute value, they also seem to put intergroup evaluative processes within the realm of affect (having good or bad intentions regarding persons in a given social group).

One can broaden this approach by taking another aspect of evaluative activity into account, the normative dimension. This is exactly what the judgment norm researchers did (Beauvois *et al.*, 1998; Dubois & Beauvois, 1996; Dubois, Beauvois, Gilibert, & Zentner, 1999) when they approached internality attribution from a new angle that simultaneously brought causal attributions and evaluative processes into the picture.

I.2. Value of internal explanations

Internality-norm theory (Beauvois & Dubois, 1988; Dubois, 1994, 2003; Jellison & Green, 1981; Stern & Manifold, 1977) disregards the desirability of events and only considers the intrinsic value of event explanations. Remember that this norm was defined by Beauvois and Dubois (1988) as the "social valorization of explanations of behaviors (attribution) and outcomes (locus of control) which emphasize the causal role of the actor" (p. 299). Contrary to what we saw in the preceding section, this definition emphasizes the fact that internal explanations can be valued independently of the valence of the events. In this view, the internal explanation "Dirk's exam grades are the result of how hard he worked" would necessarily be a valued explanation because it informs one about Dirk's worth (whether he passed or failed), whereas "Dirk's exam grades are due to luck" would not be a valued explanation because it says little about Dirk's worth (whether he passed or failed). Here, the internal/external orientation has a genuine value of its own: valued when the explanation is internal, devalued when the explanation is external. Major work done on this issue has shown that in Western societies, where emphasis is placed on the role of the actor in what he/she does or what happens to him/her (whether desirable or undesirable, positive or negative), internal causal explanations are valued (Dubois, 1994, 2003). For our purposes here, recall that internal causal explanations (traits, abilities, inclinations, etc.) have more value than external ones (luck,

power of others, the situation), simply because they are normative and are rooted in a social demand: evaluation. Their value lies precisely in the fact that they are directly associated with the evaluation practices that contribute to social operations. They thus directly produce knowledge that is action-oriented and allows us to say that "(a) what people do is the reflection of what they are and what should be attributed to them, and (b) what happens to them in the organization is the consequence of what they do and thus of what they are" (Beauvois & Le Poultier, 1986, p. 100).

Three paradigms have often been used in these studies to check whether internal explanations are in fact value-bearing in themselves (on this topic, see Gilibert & Cambon, 2003). One is the self-presentation paradigm, which involves manipulating the internality-questionnaire instructions by asking subjects to present themselves either in their usual way (spontaneous self-presentation), in a positive way (make yourself look good), or in a negative way (make yourself look bad). Studies based on this paradigm have revealed that one of the preferred strategies for looking good in other people's eyes consists in presenting oneself as internal for both desirable and undesirable events. The results with spontaneous self-presentation instructions are often close to those obtained for positive self-presentation. Among the many findings, the most relevant to the present study are the ones pertaining to spontaneous self-presentation. They show that internal causal attributions are preferred among persons who occupy a privileged social position (directors or managers *vs.* workers, the unemployed, etc.), that is, among socially successful people who hold the power in the concerned organization (see Beauvois & Le Poultier, 1986; Dubois, 2003).

The second paradigm, the judge paradigm, can be used to determine which of the various self-presentation strategies[1] is the most effective in evaluative situations. Subjects have to judge persons who use the internality or externality strategy, or the self-serving or modesty strategy. Almost all of the results show that, regardless of the desirability of the event in question (desirable or undesirable), a person known to have given internal explanations is virtually always judged more favorably than a person who gave external explanations. The value attributed to others thus seems to depend upon what kind of explanations they give (Pansu, 1997; Pansu & Gilibert, 2002). Several studies have even shown that this effect is not cancelled by the knowledge the evaluators have of the target person's performance: an average internal applicant is judged as favorably as a highly qualified external applicant (for a review of studies conducted in a business setting, see Gilibert, 2004, Exp. 1; Pansu, Bressoux, & Louche, 2003).

In the third paradigm, called the identification paradigm, subjects are instructed to answer an internality questionnaire by putting themselves in the shoes of another person who is characterized by his/her value

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1. Other less-frequently used strategies also exist, such as the self-serving bias, modesty (the opposite pattern to the self-serving bias), and externality (systematic choice of external explanations regardless of event valence).

(e.g., answer as if you were a good or poor employee, a supervisor or a subordinate, etc.). After choosing their own causal explanations, the subjects have to choose those of other persons who are assumed to be valued to different extents. The results obtained with this paradigm have shown that subjects often apply the internality strategy to describe persons or groups that carry value. This is the paradigm the researchers who developed norm-of-internality theory used to study intergroup relations.

I.3. NORM OF INTERNALITY AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS: FAVORITISM BY ATTRIBUTION OF INTERNALITY

The norm of internality, as it was first introduced into the study of intergroup settings, led to the hypothesis that attributing more or less internality to a target, irrespective of event desirability, is another way of attributing more or less value to that target. In this view, positive attitudes toward targets in one's own group may simply be manifested by the attribution of more internality to those targets than to outgroup targets (hereafter called favoritism by attribution of internality). This was indeed one of the findings of the very first studies on this topic (see Beauvois *et al.,* 1998; Dubois & Beauvois, 1996; Dubois, Beauvois, Gilibert, & Zentner, 2000), where we again find the identification paradigm, but this time situated in an intergroup relational setting. Subjects had to select causal explanations and say which ones would be chosen by ingroup and outgroup targets.

As a whole, the results of these initial studies showed that internality is attributed more often to a person supposedly answering an internality questionnaire if he/she is known to be an ingroup member than if the person is identified as an outgroup member. Similar internal-attribution effects have also been found in "minimal" categorization situations where the groups are created artificially, and therefore have no history and are not subject to stereotypes (Dubois *et al.,* 2000). In this case, ingroup favoritism is interpreted in terms of the normativeness of internal explanations as opposed to external ones. In other words, if people attribute more internality to an ingroup member than to an outgroup member, it is because they recognize that giving internal explanations lends credit to the person who gives them. For example, by expecting more internal explanations from managers than from subordinates, Harvey, himself a manager, is attributing more value to his own group. In fact, these first studies (see fig. 1) show, in various situations, that the norm of internality can also be at work in categorical differentiation processes.

While a preference for the ingroup is generally observed in cases of symmetrical categorization, the results can be more divergent when asymmetrical categories are at stake. This is true for categorizations based on academic achievement (good *vs* poor student) or scholastic history (students who have repeated a grade *vs* ones who have never repeated a grade) (see fig. 1). In the second study by Beauvois *et al.,* 1998 (see the work context in fig. 1), this ingroup preference was maintained despite
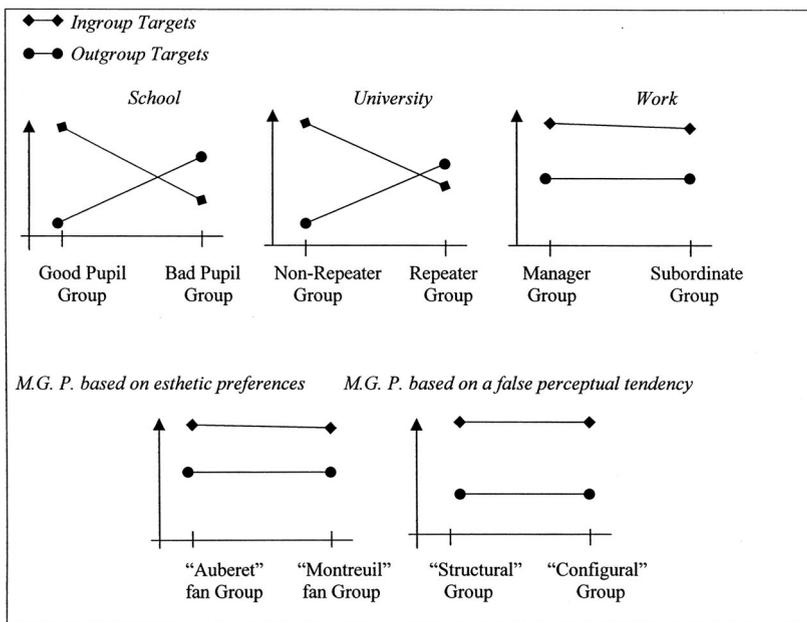
Fig. 1. — Attribution of internality as a function of participant group and target membership in ordinary contexts (School: Dubois & Beauvois 1996; University and work: Beauvois *et al.*, 1998) and experimental contexts (minimal group paradigms or MGP: Dubois *et al.*, 2000, Studies 1 and 2).

Attribution d'internalité selon le groupe d'appartenance des sujets et de la cible en contextes naturels (École : Dubois & Beauvois 1996 ; Université et entreprise : Beauvois *et al.*, 1998) et en contexte de catégorisation minimale (minimal group paradigms or MGP: Dubois *et al.*, 2000, Studies 1 and 2).

asymmetrical categorization: the participants, whether managers or subordinates, consistently predicted more internal attributions from persons whose job status was the same as their own than from persons with a different status. But the results obtained by Beauvois *et al.* cannot be generalized to all asymmetrical intergroup business settings. As Beauvois *et al.* (1998) noted, the value-placing strategies at play may be a result of the particular managerial culture where the mere fact of belonging to the company is what counts (this is what Beauvois *et al.* found in the two high-tech organizations they studied). In this type of managerial culture, the emphasis placed on membership in the superordinate category (the company) leaves room for employees to claim that members of their own job category are the best ones in the company. We can see, then, that the results obtained may depend upon the type of company and its in-house relations, such as the weight placed on the rank in the company hierarchy.

I.4. PREDICTIVE ATTRIBUTIONS AND VALUE
      OF CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS: HYPOTHESES

As soon as we agree that predicting internal explanations (regardless of the desirability of the event) is equivalent to attributing value, then it follows that ingroup favoritism can be manifested in at least two ways: (1) either by the use of target-serving explanations to account for the ingroup's behaviors and outcomes (favoritism by target-serving causal explanations), or (2) by the attribution of more internality to ingroup members than to others (favoritism by attribution of internality). Thus, evaluative processes may be based as much on affect—via target-serving or target-derogating strategies (which bear on event desirability)—as on the normativeness carried by the explanation itself, which is not contingent upon the desirability of the explained event. While research on favoritism by target-serving causal explanations is abundant, studies dealing with favoritism by attribution of internality are still scarce. This is why it seemed worthwhile to conduct a new study in this line.

The present study used the identification paradigm in an intergroup relations setting. The participants (managers and subordinates) had to state what causal explanations they thought were likely to be chosen by either a member of their own job category (ingroup) or a member of another job category (outgroup). Our goal was thus to see whether we could use predictive attributions to obtain results with the same theoretical significance as in Beauvois *et al.* (1998), namely, that attributing more or less internality to targets (irrespective of event desirability) amounts to attributing them more or less value.

In this study, the participants were employees of department stores and supermarkets all owned by the same large company. The groups were differentiated on the basis of their dominant ("managers") or dominated ("subordinates") status in the company. We tested the following hypotheses. Firstly, in the light of the internality-norm research, subjects in the dominant group (managers) can be expected to be more likely to base their causal-attribution predictions on the norm-of-internality model than subjects in the dominated group (subordinates). If so, managers should generally select more internal explanations for members of their own group than subordinates should. Managers can also be expected to predict more internal explanations from ingroup members than from outgroup members. Secondly, concerning the causal-explanation predictions of dominated-group members (subordinates), two alternative hypotheses can be set forth. Either we can expect subordinates to use the norm-of-internality model (favoritism by attribution of internality irrespective of event desirability) but to a lesser extent than managers, or we can expect them to use the causal-attribution model (favoritism by target-serving causal explanations), in which case they should attribute more internal explanations to ingroup members when the events are desirable than when they are undesirable.

II. METHOD

II.1. OVERVIEW

The participants (managers and subordinates) had to answer an internality questionnaire by predicting the explanations that other persons (also managers or subordinates) would make to explain situations involving a work-related event (behavior or outcome) with positive or negative connotations.

II.2. PARTICIPANTS

Eighty male employees (40 managers and 40 subordinates) of the same large group of stores and supermarkets located in France participated in the study. The 40 subordinates did not work directly under the 40 managers, so we were not dealing with a one-to-one manager-subordinate relationship. But all participants worked for the same company and had some knowledge of the organizational hierarchy and of the respective positions of the groups. In this context, asymmetrical power relationships between managers and subordinates are a social reality and group status is significant for all subjects. The participants were contacted during an in-house training class organized by the company. They were tested collectively during the first hour of the class. The mean age of the participants was 38.7 (SD=7.12).

II.3. MATERIALS

The internality questionnaire used for this study was a short and slightly modified version of the Dubois and Tarquinio's questionnaire (1997). Like other questionnaires used in the norm-of-internality research, the questionnaire was a normative-internality questionnaire, not an LOC scale (on this topic, see Jouffre, 2003). Unlike LOC scales, the purpose of this type of tool is not to detect individual differences and consistencies, but to study preferences, within a population, for a given type of explanation (internal or external)[1]. It was designed to bring out normative phenomena in a population. As such, internality questionnaires generally involve two types of events (outcomes and behaviors) of different valence (desirable and undesirable) that give rise to different

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1. In order to verify the value of internal explanations as opposed to external ones, we administered the questionnaire to 30 students who were unaware of the experimental goals and asked them to state how much they thought a good (or average or poor) employee would agree with each item. The internality-attribution scores calculated from the predicted questionnaire answers were found to be proportional to the value of the target employee (0.31, – 0.04, and – 0.76, respectively; $F(1.29) = 12.5$, $p < .01$).

explanations (internal and external)[1]. The questionnaire contained eight items that briefly described a situation and could pertain to either a subordinate or a manager. The questions were about various desirable and undesirable events. Each event was followed by four explanations (two internal and two external) with a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree). Here is an example.

In your opinion, if your requests for training are usually accepted, it's because:

— You are a conscientious worker (internal):
  Fully disagree 1 _ 2 _ 3 _ 4 _ 5 _ 6 Fully agree

— You know when you need to make the necessary efforts (internal):
  Fully disagree 1 _ 2 _ 3 _ 4 _ 5 _ 6 Fully agree

— Training is a standard part of company policy (external):
  Fully   disagree 1 _ 2 _ 3 _ 4 _ 5 _ 6 Fully agree

— Sometimes, one gets what one wants (external):
  Fully disagree 1 _ 2 _ 3 _ 4 _ 5 _ 6 Fully agree.

The hierarchical positions of the persons in the questionnaire situations (managers or subordinate co-workers) were underlined in the instructions. The subjects were told that in the questionnaire, they would find several work situations in which something happened to someone or someone did something. For each situation, four explanations were possible and the fact of preferring one over the others was said to often be a matter of opinion. The subjects (also managers or subordinate co-workers) were then asked to state what they thought some other person (either a manager or a subordinate co-worker) would answer. The instructions were as follows: "We are asking you, as a subordinate (*vs* manager), to answer this questionnaire as the persons involved in the events would, given that all of these persons are subordinates (*vs* managers)."

The materials were chosen in view of calculating an internality index without having to propose overly dichotomous answer choices to the participants (as in the Beauvois *et al.* study, 1998).

II.4. Procedure

During the first hour of training, the participants were given an internality questionnaire and asked to answer on behalf of other employees (identification paradigm) rather than on their own behalf. All subjects were given the same questionnaire; only the instructions

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1. Another variable was controlled here: the stability (over time) of the incriminated causal factor (stable *vs* unstable). Note that explanation stability has sometimes been successfully used to study social comparison strategies in an intergroup context (Hewstone, Jaspars, & Lalljee, 1982; Hewstone, Wagner, & Machleit, 1989).

changed. They were asked to predict the explanations that ingroup members or outgroup members would make to explain their behaviors and outcomes. Four groups were defined. In the first, 20 managers had to predict the answers of other company members in their own job category (ingroup identification instructions). In the second, 20 managers had to predict the answers of members of the other job category (outgroup identification instructions). The third group was composed of 20 subordinates who had to predict the answers of other subordinate co-workers (ingroup identification instructions). The fourth group was made up of 20 subordinates who had to predict the answers of company managers (outgroup identification instructions).

II.5. DESIGN

The independent variables used to test the internality-norm hypotheses were the status of the participant (manager *vs* subordinate), the target (ingroup *vs* outgroup), and event desirability (desirability *vs* undesirability). Only the participant's status and the target's group were between-subject variables.

The dependent variable was the internality score, which was calculated by subtracting the degree of agreement with external explanations from the degree of agreement with internal explanations ($I = \Sigma int - \Sigma ext$; for each event explained). The minimum and maximum values of the dependent variable were $- 5$ (external pole) and $+ 5$ (internal pole).[1] Note that a separate internality score was calculated for the desirable events and for the undesirable events.

III. RESULTS

First of all, note that predictions of internality largely prevailed: as a whole, the subjects predicted more internality than externality in others (see Table 1). All scores were positive, and the smallest score (1.23) was significantly different from zero ($t(19) = 11.66$, $p < .00001$). Note also a clear-cut ingroup/outgroup effect: regardless of their own status, subjects predicted more internal choices for ingroup members than for outgroup members ($M = 2.45$ *vs.* $M = 2.17$; $F(1.76) = 11.23$, $p < .005$). The results are presented in Table 1.

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1. Scores above 0 indicated a preference for internal causes and scores below 0 for external causes.

Table 1

Internality score for the ingroup and the outgroup,
by event desirability

Score d'internalité selon la désirabilité des événements
pour l'ingroup et l'outgroup

	Managers		Subordinates	
	Ingroup (n=20)	Outgroup (n=20)	Ingroup (n=20)	Outgroup (n=20)
Desirable Events				
Mean	2.83[a]	1.23[e]	2.20[cd]	2.23[cd]
SD	*0.38*	*0.47*	*0.55*	*0.44*
Undesirable Events				
Mean	2.63[ab]	2.40[bc]	2.12[d]	2.80[a]
SD	*0.51*	*0.46*	*0.51*	*0.53*

Note: In this table, differences between means of over 0.35 are significant at $p < .05$ and differences over 0.25 are at least marginally significant at $p < .10$ (two means with the same letter superscript are not statistically different).

III.1. Managers' results

We expected dominant-group subjects (managers) to base their causal-attribution predictions on the internality-norm model more than dominated-group subjects (subordinates). Our results support this prediction. The interaction between the participant's status and the target's group was significant ($F(1,76) = 57.14$, $p < .00001$). First, managers foresaw more internal explanations (for the two types of desirability pooled) from members of their own group than subordinates did from members of their own group ($M = 2.73$ *vs* 2.16; $F(1,76) = 23.21$, $p < .00001$). Second, managers predicted (two types of desirability pooled) more internal explanations from ingroup members than from outgroup members ($M = 2.73$ *vs* 1.82; $F(1,76) = 59.51$, $p < .00001$).

This result pattern coincides perfectly with predictions derived from norm-of-internality theory, especially since the interaction between participant status, target group, and event desirability was significant ($F(1,76) = 7.44$, $p < .01$). And the breakdown of this effect (planned comparisons; see Table 1) revealed that (1) while the number of internal explanations predicted for ingroup members was significantly higher than for outgroup members on events with a positive connotation (desirable: $M = 2.83$ *vs* 1.23), the opposite did not occur for negative events, where the very same tendency was found (undesirable: $M = 2.63$ *vs* 2.40); and (2) when they had to attribute explanations to members of their own group, the participants predicted internal causality for desirable events, but also for undesirable ones ($M = 2.83$ *vs* 2.63; see Table 1). In contrast,

when managers predicted the answers of outgroup members (subordinates), they did not rely more on the norm-of-internality model (regardless of desirability). They based their answers on event desirability, selecting significantly more internal explanations for undesirable events (2.40) than for desirable ones (1.23; see Table 1).

III. 2. Subordinates' results

Concerning the causal-explanation predictions of dominated-group members (subordinates), the results (for the two desirability levels pooled) showed that unlike managers, subordinates predicted more internal explanations from outgroup members than from ingroup members ($M = 2.52$ *vs* 2.16; $F(1,76) = 8.85$, $p < .005$). This result was obtained at the overall level and for negative events (2.21 *vs* 2.80). No difference was observed for positive events (see Table 1). Even though we used identification instructions, these findings are quite close to response patterns based on attribution theories. We will come back to this point in the discussion. Note, however, that for predictions assigned to ingroup members, the subordinates did not exhibit a self-serving bias, since they attributed as much internality to positive events as to negative ones (2.20 *vs* 2.12). Note also for the outgroup only that subordinates expected more internal explanations from outgroup members than the managers did (2.52 *vs* 1.82; $F(1,76) = 34.47$, $p < .00001$).

IV. DISCUSSION

The aim of this article was to further our understanding of the evaluative processes at play in value attribution to people in an intergroup setting. We hypothesized that beyond the motivational dimension of intergroup-attribution processes (favoritism by target-serving causal explanations), another dimension of evaluative activity could be considered: the attribution of normativeness. This dimension was grasped here by way of the norm of internality, which leads one to postulate that the fact of attributing more or less internality to targets (oneself or others), independently of event desirability, is another way of attributing them more or less value (favoritism by attribution of internality). We could therefore expect a preference for one target over another (favoritism) to follow one of two routes (favoritism by attribution of internality or favoritism by target-serving causal explanations), and that the choice of one strategy over the other would depend above all on the positions of the groups at stake (dominant *vs.* dominated). In this study, the process of ingroup and outgroup value attribution was approached by looking at a particular kind of attribution, predictive attributions. The idea was not to study how people explain the behaviors of ingroup and/or outgroup members, but to find out what types of explanations they imagine those individuals might make about their own behaviors. The results obtained

using the identification paradigm brought out four essential points: (1) an overall valuing effect by attribution of internality, (2) an ingroup-valuing effect by attribution of internality, irrespective of event desirability, (3) a greater ingroup internality-attribution effect for managers than for subordinates, and (4) attributions of explanations to the outgroup based on event desirability.

First, recall that taken together, the results of this study indicate the overall predominance of internality predictions. In other words, the subjects generally predicted more internality than externality for others. Of course, one could see this effect as stemming from the fact that internal explanations are more spontaneously produced by individuals in general than are external explanations (Le Floch & Somat, 2003). But one could just as well consider (without necessarily going against the preceding interpretation) the overall internality effect to be due to the subjects' anchoring of their representations and evaluations in the general normative system of our liberal societies, where a prevailing idea is that what happens to people (oneself or others), or what people do, is a reflection of what they are. Another possibility is that the overall internality pattern simply stems from the weight of the superordinate category (the company where all of the employees worked) and the subjects' clearsightedness about the social value of internal explanations (clearsightedness about the norm of internality; on this topic, see Py & Somat, 1991; Somat & Vazel, 1999). This would lead employees to refrain from pointing out to outsiders any pronounced intergroup differences within the organization (Beauvois *et al.*, 1998). Obviously, the desire to not overly stigmatize other employee groups does not imply granting equal value to all groups.

A second interesting finding for our purposes here concerns the attribution of internality to the ingroup rather than to the outgroup (which confirms the effect observed in the norm-of-internality research; see fig. 1). Contrary to what might be expected on the basis of the causal-attribution research (see Hewstone, 1990), for the ingroup here, neither the managers nor the subordinates exhibited the self-serving bias, since they attributed as much internality to ingroup members' explanations of positive events as to their explanations of negative events. This means that a target-serving strategy was not used to lend credit to one's own group of membership. By contrast, these results are closely in line with the norm-of-internality model (favoritism by attribution of internality) since the employees (whether managers or subordinates) predicted ingroup causal-attribution scores that did not significantly depend on event valence (which was not the case for outgroup members). In fact, they assigned their own group members an explanation mode preferentially based on internal explanations, regardless of the desirability of the event in which those members were involved.

Thirdly, as the internality literature would lead us to expect (see Dubois, 1994, 2003), the ingroup-internality effect occurred mainly for managers. Indeed, the results showed, as hypothesized, that only managers (dominant-group members) predicted more internal expla-nations for the ingroup (i.e., regardless of desirability) than for the

outgroup. The opposite pattern was observed for the subordinates (see below). This finding suggests that managers more than subordinates see the members of their own group as acting in a normative way, and they use the norm of internality, unlike the other employees of the company. In a situation where category assignment is a social reality, as it is in a large company (dominant position for some, dominated position for others), it would seem that the attribution of internality serves as a marker of the social distance between hierarchically ranked groups. This set of findings means that dominant-group members are sensitive to the hierarchical structure, and thus that dominant-group membership can affect the ingroup/outgroup comparison process along a normative dimension. Remember on this point that according to Beauvois (1994), "the social norm of internality is associated with liberal democratic practices in the exercise of power" (p. 60), and that managers are precisely the ones who hold the power in organizations. Because of this, they are more accustomed than subordinates to practicing and talking about ways of evaluating. The difference observed here between managers and subordinates in their predictive attributions of internality to the ingroup also supports the idea that managers perceive their own group members as being closer to having the social value and utility implied by liberal ways of exercising power. Accordingly, predicting more internality (and thus more normativeness) for ingroup members is a means for managers of asserting their position and differentiating themselves from other staff members. This is especially true since, in their role as holders of a position of power, they learn to recognize those values. It seems logical, then, that they might be better than anyone else at applying those values when talking about their own social group, where they find themselves acting both as observers and as actors.

The fourth point concerns the explanations predicted for outgroup members. Whether managers or subordinates, the participants expected persons from the other group to prefer internal causes when the events were undesirable rather than desirable. We seem to be dealing here with a desirability effect quite close to the target-derogating effect observed in the intergroup-attribution literature: outgroup members are held accountable for the events in which they are involved, especially when those events are undesirable (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). This result must be interpreted with caution however. It seems that for undesirable events (1) the managers were not granted more internality than they granted themselves (2.80 *vs.* 2.63), and (2) the subordinates self-attributed only a little less internality than the managers attributed them (2.12 *vs.* 2.40). An interpretation in terms of pure target derogation is thus uncertain. Another reason pertaining to the instructions (predict the answers of members of the other job category) does not allow us to rule out the possibility that subjects simply express what they would like others to be. For example, subjects may expect a target to usually credit him/herself with the most desirable work behavior if they consider that person to be effective at the job. On the other hand, if the target is considered ineffective but nevertheless responsible and pleasant, they may

expect him/her to self-attribute the responsibility for the most undesirable work events. This is precisely what Gilibert's (2004) data suggests. In this way, subjects may describe their outgroup co-workers as less effective than themselves at work, but still responsible and worthy of being treated well.

However, we can see from the group means obtained here (ingroup/outgroup; see Table 1) that the result pattern was different in the managers and subordinates, a probable reflection of the asymmetry between these two groups. On this point, recall that the lowest internality-attribution score (1.23) was observed for managers predicting the explanations of outgroup members on desirable work events. This finding seems to support the idea that managers describe subordinates (outgroup) as less effective on the job than managers (ingroup).

Lastly, concerning the subordinates' views of managers, remember that they assigned outgroup members a maximal amount of internality on undesirable events. One can assume that the subordinates not only said managers would self-attribute the merits of desirable events (2.23), but also that they would hold themselves accountable for undesirable events (2.80). The subordinates did not do this for themselves (2.20 *vs.* 2.12). Although they considered internal explanations to be the preferred mode of managers, we can understand why they might adhere less strongly to this model when a negative event was at stake: in cases of failure, they are the ones (as dominated-group members) who, due to their lower status, are often the most exposed to –and less equipped to face– negative feedback and punishing measures. This being the case, we can also understand why, compared to managers, they may tend to use fewer internal explanations to describe their own group.

At the present time, these results require further confirmation. A finer methodology for gathering information and designing the questionnaire instructions is needed to gain a better understanding of the intentions underlying attributions of internality to the outgroup as a function of event connotation. Our findings nevertheless support the hypothesis that ingroup favoritism can also be accounted for in terms of normativeness (favoritism by attribution of internality), not just in terms of target-serving causal explanations. As we have seen, moreover, these interpretations –one socionormative and the other motivational– are neither mutually exclusive nor irreconcilable.

From a pragmatic standpoint, these issues are well worth our attention, since the very exercise of evaluative power is a key element in relations among unequal-rank groups within an organization, between those who have the power and those who do the executing (orders, instructions, etc.). Relations of power between the dominant and the dominated are expressed through attribution processes (including predictions about the attribution processes of others). On this point, the present study sheds a new light on the issue of causality attributions in intergroup relations, and extends our understanding of the evaluative processes underlying the construction of personal value or worth.

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SUMMARY

The study reported here used the identification paradigm in an intergroup context. The participants were managers and their subordinates working in large department stores and supermarkets located in France. They had to predict the attributions of ingroup (vs outgroup) members by choosing between internal and external explanations of desirable and undesirable events. As a whole, the results showed that: (1) predictions of overall internality prevailed, (2) managers and subordinates attributed as much internality to positive events as to negative ones when they had to predict the replies of ingroup members, (3) regardless of the desirability of the event in question, managers chose significantly more internal explanations when they had to predict the replies of ingroup members than of outgroup members, and (4) the opposite pattern was observed for the subordinates. More specifically, subordinates did not choose more internal explanations to predict the replies of ingroup members than of outgroup members when desirable events were at stake, whereas for undesirable events they chose more internal explanations for outgroup members than for ingroup ones. The results are discussed in relation to internality-norm theory, while taking into account the normative dimension of evaluative activity in intergroup relations.

Key Words: *Predictive Attributions, Intergroup Attribution, Asymmetrical Group Relations, Norm of Internality.*