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ATTRIBUTIVE CRITERIA FOR WAGE PREMIUMS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

Three modes of salary distribution are usually advanced by the theoreticians of the distributive justice: equality, equity and need. Here, we have examined their respective influence while taking in consideration (with regard to the equity) the performance of the employees and their degree of allegiance/rebellion to discriminatory hierarchical injunctions while taking into account the reasons of this allegiance/rebellion (allegiance by conviction, legalism or opportunism/ethical rebellion). This research confronted 511 French employees to a concrete case in which they had to advise a person in charge of an agency as for the distribution of a bonus between his different employees. These last were characterized by their respective performance, one of them being definite as being (or no) financially in the need and as having (or no) complied to a discriminatory hierarchical injunction towards the strangers.

The results show that the distribution of the bonus follows the equity rule and, but more weakly, the need rule: the most efficient employees, and the employees financially in the need are the most rewarded. Otherwise it is to note that the allegiant employees are rewarded in an identical manner, whatever the reason of their allegiance, as well as the rebel one.

KEYWORDS: *distributive justice; equity; performance; allegiance; ethics*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and practitioners of human resource management have long been interested in organizational justice (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005; Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). Indeed, the sense of justice / injustice

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influences a number of professional conducts (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; El Akremi, Nasr, & Camerman, 2006). It has to do with job satisfaction (Di Fabio & Bartolini, 2009; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), the intention to resign (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Greenberg, 1988, 1995), organizational commitment (Di Fabio & Bartolini, 2009; Folger & Konovsky, 1989), work performance (Chang & Dubinsky, 2005; Fields, Pang, & Chiu, 2000; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Miles & Klein, 1998; Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2002), organizational citizenship behaviours (Moorman & Byrne, 2005), resistance to change (Shapiro & Kirkmann, 1999), etc.

Organizational justice is defined by Byrne and Cropanzano (2008, p.4) as *“the field of psychology that focuses on the perception of justice at the workplace”*. Initially used by Greenberg (1987), the concept of organizational justice is usually considered to refer to three sub-dimensions (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Konovsky, 2000) : distributive justice (which refers to resource distribution: *see* Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Folger, 1987; Leventhal, 1976), procedural justice (which deals with decision-making regarding the allocation of various resources: *see* Leventhal, 1980; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walter, 1975), and interactional justice (*see* Bies, 2001; Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993), the last being generally considered to consist of two components: an interpersonal component (that is to say, respect and courtesy towards employees: Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), and an informational component (which relates to the justification of practices and decisions: Bobocel & Zdaniuk, 2005; Colquitt & Shaw, 2005). Numerous studies also show that those three dimensions are not independent. An interaction between distributive justice and procedural justice has been demonstrated (Brockner, Konovsky, Cooper-Schneider, Folger, Martin, & Bies, 1994; Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996, 2008; Hegtvædt, Johnson, Ganem, Waldron, & Brody, 2009; Lucas, Zhdanova, & Alexander, 2011; Tata, 2000). Skarlicki and Folger (1997), Lupfer, Weeks, Doan, and Houston (2000) have also shown on this three factors model, the existence of a triple interactive effect between distributive, procedural and interactional justice. However, we mention that certain studies (such as Colquitt, 2001) conclude on the existence of four factors, by considering the interpersonal component and the informational component as two dimensions in their own right and not as two components of interactional justice.

The concept of distributive justice (DJ) is used to describe two types of situations: those in which one interacts with others and when we compare each person's benefits and investments (such as negotiations between a buyer and a seller) and those where two individuals receive a benefit from a third party (for example two employees receiving wages from an employer). Identifying with the second case, Gales and Barzantny (2000) underline that research on JD includes two directions of analysis. The first is from the point of view of the receiver of the resources distributed in order to examine their perception of justice and the

behavioural consequences (especially in terms of performance) of that perception (Cowherd & Levine, 1992; Hulin, 1991; Pfeffer & Langston, 1993; Sweeny, McFarlin, & Inderieden, 1990). The second focuses on the person deciding the allocation and the distribution rule (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Deutsch, 1975; Kabanoff, 1991; Leventhal, 1976; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992). The theorists of distributive justice (Deutsch, 1975, 1985; Leventhal, 1976; Sampson, 1986) distinguish between three distribution methods: equality, also called parity (everyone is remunerated identically, regardless of their contribution), and two non-equalitarian methods, with equity (which recognizes merit, and specifically each person's contribution: in an equitable situation, the remunerations are proportionate to the respective contributions) on the one hand, and need (each individual is remunerated according to their need) on the other hand.

The equity rule is "*focused on the objective to discover, value and reward the differences between the members of an organization*" (Bagger, Cropanzano, & Ko, 2006, p. 29). It was born from the works of Adams (1963, 1965) which specifically supplements the research on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1961; Kelly & Thibaut, 1978), and examines not justice, but injustice, by analyzing antecedents and consequences, aiming to develop a theory of inequity. According to this theory, an individual will establish a ratio of his/her payments according to his/her contributions and compare it to that of others. Merit-based payments are primarily associated to situations in which the organization promotes performance and productivity (Colquitt, 2001), and it was actually concluded that the enforcement of the equity rule has led to high efficiency (for example Fast & Berg, 1975; James, 1993; Martin & Harder, 1994). Therefore, the rewards based on merit can be considered incentives to be more and better productive (Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996). They promote inter-individual competition (Kabanoff, 1991) at the expense of teamwork and group harmony. *A contrario*, the rule of equality is associated with the preservation of such harmony (Chen, Meindl & Hui, 1998; Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001; Leventhal, 1976), therefore reinforcing group identification (Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996). It entails relationships of high interdependence among individuals, whereas equity is observed especially in situations of low interdependence (Chen, Meindl & Hui, 1998). It also appears (Dubet, 2006, p. 250) that the working-class is the most attached to equality. As for the rule of need, it is especially applied when one wishes to promote the well-being of everyone (Steiner, Trahan, Haptonstahl, & Fointiat, 2006), which is observed especially in limited contexts such as family organizations.

It was also found that the preferred rule depends mainly on culture (Bond, Leung, & Schwartz, 1992; James, 1993; Leung, 1988; Leung & Bond, 1984; Leung & Park, 1986; Lind, 1994; Lind & Early, 1992; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990; O'Connell and Bartlett, 1998). Dubet (2006, p. 84) also states that the Europeans (except for the Czechs), favour need, than merit and rank equality the lowest. In

order to better understand the cultural elements leading to these differences, certain researchers (such as, Leung & Park, 1986) have used the Hofstede's model (1980, 1991) of cultural individualism-collectivism, of hierarchical distance (which corresponds to the greater or lesser acceptance of social inequalities), of uncertainty control, of masculinity-femininity (which refers to the greater or lesser permeability of roles between men and women) and Confucian dynamism. It was therefore demonstrated that collectivist cultures favour equality and needs, while individualistic cultures are more focused on equity (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982; Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Greenberg, 2001; Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Miles & Greenberg 1993; Morris & Leung, 2000; Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002; Murphy-Berman, Berman, Singh, Pachauri, & Kumar, 1984). More precisely, it was found that the north-Americans prefer to employ equity (James, 1993; Leung & Bond, 1984; Miles & Greenberg 1993), the Chinese and the Koreans choose equality more (Kim, Leung & Bond, 1984), and the Indonesians choose needs (Murphy-Berman & Berma et al., 2002). However, in a recent meta-analysis, Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, and Jones (2013) have observed that the examination of the impact of cultural differences is still very limited and focuses mainly on the perceptions and reactions of employees, but little on the behaviour of managers. It is also important to note that the cultural preference for a particular distribution rule may, however, be conditional. Leung and Bond (1984) show that the Americans prefer equity regardless of the nature of the social situation, while the Chinese use equity conditionally: they use it when dealing with persons outside their social group, but for distributions within their social group, they prefer equality. Martin and Harder (1994) also note that the rule of need is especially desired when the actors are culturally and emotionally close. In other words, it appears that the choice of rule may depend on various factors, such as the nature of the social situation, the scarcity of the resources to be distributed (Skitka & Tetlock, 1992) or the nature of those resources (Martin & Harder, 1994).

If the rule of need may be based on a limited number of indications, by contrast, the use of equity is likely to refer to numerous criteria. The contributions taken into consideration by Adams are actually very diverse: the effort made in order to obtain a result and the result obtained (Miller, 1999, speaks of "*Merit*" in the first case and "*Deserts*" for the result), education, seniority, age (which is often correlated with seniority), gender, intelligence, ability, social status, ethnical origin, appearance, attractiveness, health, the possession of certain tools, the characteristics of the spouse, the responsibilities undertaken, the risk exposed to (including the risk of dismissal), etc.

However, in spite of this abundance of criteria, we believe that certain contributing indicators have been insufficiently examined, either because they have been classified as retributions (Gangloff, 1994, indicates that the working conditions could be included in the risks undertaken and therefore be considered in terms of contribution), or because they have only recently been satisfactorily

above), that the equity rule will override the need and equality rules; 2) consistent with the results of Gangloff, Mayoral, and Personnaz (2015), that performance, as part of distribution based on equity, will bear the largest share; 3) consistent with the results of Duchon and Gangloff (2008), that a more substantial wage distribution will occur for the legalistic or conviction-based allegiant employees than for the opportunistically allegiant employees. Finally, we will not establish a precise hypothesis for the rebel employees, since their rebellion may be offset by their ethical origin.

METHOD

The study, conducted in France, has involved 511 male employees working in various private sector companies. They were contacted at their work place, in order to respond, voluntarily, to a questionnaire in which they were asked to advise the manager of a real estate agency on the distribution of a monthly premium of 3600 Euros between his six employees.

Research design.

More precisely, our participants were asked to suggest a specific amount to be distributed to one of the sales agents (Stéphane), based on three information characterizing Stéphane, information corresponding to three independent variables: 1) the fact that Stéphane is or is not in need (Stéphane has two children and his wife is unemployed / he has no children and his wife has just come into a very good situation)

2) his effectiveness based on performance (Stéphane is the 2nd or 5th best sales agent, according to his performance)

3) his obedient or disobedient behaviour in relation to a discriminatory hierarchical order (the manager asked his employees to avoid renting apartments to foreigners), with three possibilities of obedience (obedience out of legalism, that is to say, the subject believes that an employee should systematically obey their boss); obedience out of opportunism (the employee obeys out of personal interest), or obedience out of conviction (the employee obeys out of partisan reasons, out of conviction, because he shares his boss' opinion) and one case of disobedience (disobedience out of moral or ethical reasons, by refusing such discrimination) : *see annex.*

The three independent variables were crossed in order to reach a factorial plan of 16 cases, with the elaboration of 16 questionnaires, each participant being faced to one of these 16 questionnaires (*see Table 1*).

Table 1
Distribution of participants for the 16 experimental cases

	Stéphane is in need		Stéphane is not in need	
	Stéphane 2 nd	Stéphane 5 th	Stéphane 2 nd	Stéphane 5 th
Legalist allegiant	30	31	31	31
Convinced allegiant	30	32	34	30
Opportunistic allegiant	30	30	27	31
Moral rebel	55	29	29	31

Our dependent variable, which concerns changes in the amounts proposed by our participants according to the experimental conditions, was examined in two stages. At first, we focused on the number of equal and unequal distributions between the six employees; then, in a second step, considering only the unequal distributions, we focused on the premiums attributed to Stéphane.

In terms of statistical processing, we used the X^2 (and phi coefficient) to compare the number of equal vs unequal responses, and for the premiums granted to Stéphane, a variance analysis according to the following plan: 2 (rank: second vs. fifth) x 4 (allegiance: legalistic vs. opportunistic vs. out of conviction vs. disobedience) x 2 (need vs. no need).

RESULTS

The number of egalitarian and non-egalitarian distributions

The distribution of premiums was first examined according to its egalitarian *versus* non-egalitarian nature (table 2, graphs 1 and 2). It is observed that, overall, our participants proceed to more non-egalitarian distributions (n=333, meaning 65%) than egalitarian distributions (n=178, meaning 35%), that is to say (compared to a random distribution) $X^2(1,511)=47,02$, $p<.001$; $\varphi= 0,3$. It is noteworthy that this predominance of non-egalitarian distributions is almost systematic, with two exceptions: 1) Stéphane in need, 5th and rebel, 2) Stéphane not in need, 2nd and legalist (see Table 2).

Distribution of the number of equalitarian and non-equalitarian responses in the allotment of the premium under the experimental conditions.

The amount of the premium allotted

The Ranking factor, referring to the effectiveness of the employee according to his performance, plays a major role in the allotment of the premium: the premium allotted is always higher when the employee is ranked second than when he is ranked fifth, and regardless of the employee's position in terms of allegiance or need. Therefore, ranking – be it second or fifth place – appears to be the determining and massive factor in the participants' decision to allot the employee a more or less important premium.

However, it appears that the Need factor also plays a role, albeit small ($\eta^2=0,05$), in the allotment of the premium, the employees in need being more rewarded than those who are not in need (see Table 3 and Figures 1 and 2).

Table 3

Average premium amounts allotted under the experimental conditions (the higher the score, the higher the premium allotted). NB: the equalitarian cases were not taken into account for these statistics and calculations.

	Need			No need			Average
	2 nd	5 th	Average	2 nd	5 th	Average	
Legalistic allegiant	789	519	661	713	418	540	609
Convinced allegiant	900	541	716	683	416	573	646
Opportunistic allegiant	770	491	627	777	453	607	618
Moral rebel	751	490	686	707	387	543	618
Average	792	512	673	719	418	567	

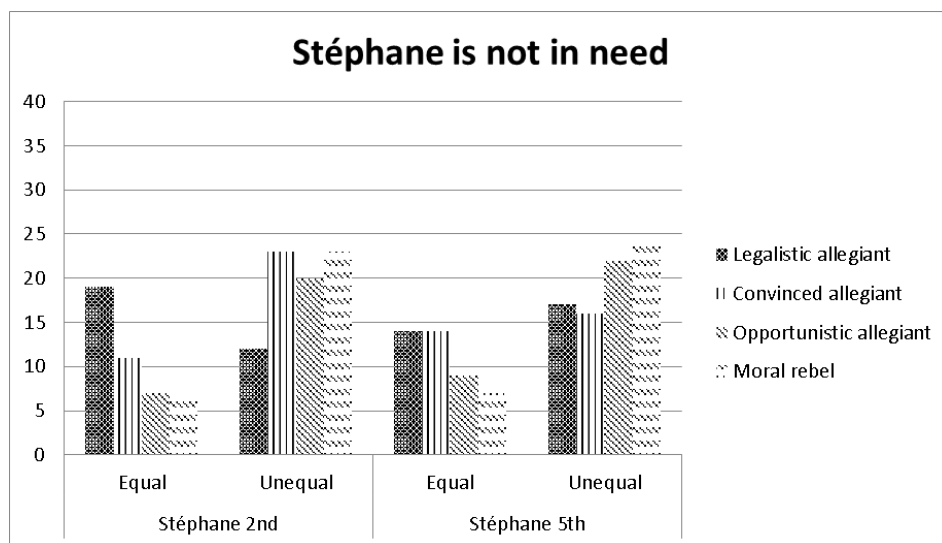


Figure 1

Distributions to Stéphane in need, under the experimental conditions

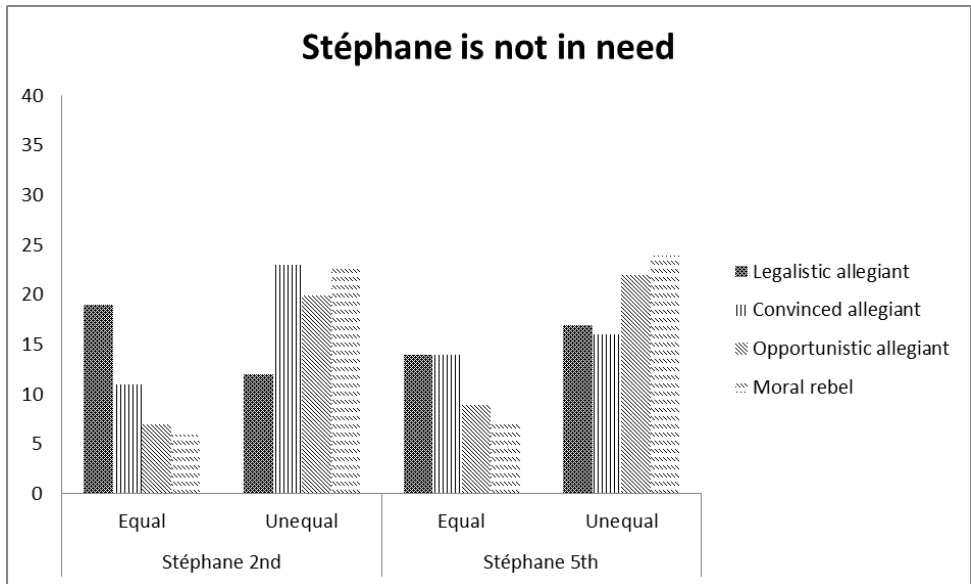


Figure 2
Distributions to Stéphane not in need, under the experimental conditions

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, we wanted to examine the preferential rule for distributive justice in the allotment of a wage premium: equalitarian or non-equalitarian rule, and in the case of a non-equalitarian rule, the importance of need and merit. More precisely, we analyzed the respective influence of three variables on wage distribution: need on the one hand, and on the other hand, in what regards the rule of merit, performance and allegiance to one's boss, taking into account the reasons for such allegiance/non-allegiance.

Our results firstly indicate, in agreement with the literature, and just as we predicted in our first hypothesis, that out of the three methods of distribution advanced by the theorists of distributive justice (equality, need, equity), equity is the main rule followed by our group sample. More precisely, the main result observed shows that the major factor in the allocation of the premium is performance, which is also consistent with the literature and with our second hypothesis. The premium allotted is in fact systematically higher when the employee is ranked second than when he is ranked fifth, and this regardless of the employee's situation both in terms of need, as well as in terms of obedience/disobedience.

We also note that need is also taken into account by our participants. This last result was not expected and also contradicts the observations of Wagstaff, Huggins, and Perfect (1993): while those authors find that, in the context of professional relationships, as is the case here as well, the preferential resource distribution method is equity, but they also observe the lack of interference of the need criterion, this, they say, being reserved for more emotional relational situations (for example family relations). Note, however, that taking into account the need remains low ($\eta^2=0,05$).

Whereas several studies (Duchon & Gangloff, 2008; Soudan & Gangloff, 2011) have previously demonstrated a differential valuation of allegiance according to it being opportunistic or legalistic, we also believed to see an effect of allegiance, with higher premiums being allotted to legalistic or convinced allegiants than to opportunistic allegiants (our third hypothesis). However, our results do not lead to any significant difference between the three methods, which we find inexplicable, except if we consider that the salience of the performance and need variables might have diverted our participants from examining the allegiance variable. It would be suited, later on, to measure the degree to which our participants have taken into consideration of each information provided to them.

Finally, we have not established the prognosis regarding the moral rebel: on the one hand, his rebellious spirit could have proven unfavourable to him (as shown for example by Gangloff, 2011); on the other hand, the ethical reason for his challenge could have likely been profitable for him (Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008, have in fact observed that the rejection of the moral deviant is not systematic). The results we have obtained may therefore reflect a mutual compensation between the negative character of rebellion and the positive character of its *raison d'être*. This hypothesis is to be tested, the operationalization of our study does not allowing us to respond.

Note, finally, some limits to our research. As we wrote above, it would have been suitable to measure the effectiveness of the allegiance information. Another point is that we kept constant the status of our participants (they are all male employees working in French private sector companies), but to obtain a sufficient population in each of the 16 cases of our factorial plan, we have not taken into account the age, neither, especially, the hierarchical level of our participants: it is not excluded that the premium distribution criteria can vary depending on this level. In further studies the manipulation of other variables could be considered. That said, in their current state, on a theoretical level, our results already confirm, while complementing, some of the existing knowledge on the criteria used in organizational justice. In terms of potential practical implications, our results could help management teams to be more aware of the criteria they use in terms of distributive justice. Thus, they could lead companies management and human resources department to rethink their assessment criteria, particularly in terms of the respective place they place obedience over ethics. All this seems even more

important if one considers, as shown in the literature, the positive organizational consequences of a satisfactory distributive justice.

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Annex: operationalization of the allegiance variable

Legalistic allegiance

Here is some information on the members of my team:

I am generally pleased with them: they are all serious and motivated in their work. *Especially Stéphane, who practically always respects my decisions.* For example, after taking office, I've noticed that more and more owners refuse to rent their apartment to people coming from certain European countries or North Africa. Since we depend on the owners, I asked my sales agents to take it into account. *And Stéphane has practically always taken it into account. It's a matter of principle for him: never challenge your boss.*

Opportunistic allegiance

Here is some information on the members of my team:

I am generally pleased with them: they are all serious and motivated in their work. *Especially Stéphane, who practically always respects my decisions.* For example, after taking office, I've noticed that more and more owners refuse to rent their apartment to people coming from certain European countries or North Africa. Since we depend on the owners, I've asked my sales agents to take it into account. *And Stéphane has practically always taken it into account. His goal: that I may think well of him and promote him quickly.*

Allegiance out of conviction

Here is some information on the members of my team:

I am generally pleased with them: they are all serious and motivated in their work. *Especially Stéphane, who practically always respects my decisions.* For example, after taking office, I've noticed that more and more owners refuse to rent their apartment to people coming from certain European countries or North Africa. Since we depend on the owners, I've asked my sales agents to take it into account. *And Stéphane has practically always taken it into account. He shares my opinion: we depend on the owners and therefore must meet their demands.*

Moral rebellion

Here is some information on the members of my team:

I am generally pleased with them: they are all serious and motivated in their work. *However, I've found that Stéphane practically always challenges some of my decisions.* For example, after taking office, I've noticed that more and more owners refuse to rent their apartment to people coming from certain European countries or North Africa. Since we depend on the owners, I've asked my sales agents to take it into account. *But Stéphane has practically never taken it into account. He considers that he shouldn't obey me if my decisions contradict his principles.*