

## **INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTION OF GROUP PERFORMANCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN METRO MANILA: THERE IS AN “I” IN TEAM**

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*This paper investigates individual attribution of group performance among university students in Metro Manila. Two methods were used to understand the attributions that individuals make of their group performance outcome after receiving feedback; the open-ended thought-listing technique and a structured method. Sixty-three students from a convenience sample participated in the study. Participants who received positive feedback rated their own groups higher and generated more positive thoughts about their groups as a whole than those participants who received negative feedback. Those who received negative feedback also generated more negative thoughts about their groups as a whole and towards other members of the group. The conclusions from the two methods were the same: in success, attributions were made more towards the team as a whole, while in failure, there was a tendency for individuals to separate themselves from the group.*

*Keywords:* attribution, group success, group failure

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

People want to make sense of the world around them. They want to be able to explain the behavior of people or why events happen. Attribution theory helps explain how people make sense of events and the behaviors of others. Forsyth and Schlenker (1977) concluded that an individual's attribution will be affected by the consequence of the event; people will respond more favorably after receiving a positive evaluation and will seek to increase the link between themselves and a positive result. They will also decrease their link to a negative result. In achievement settings, Weiner (1985) identified the four most common perceived causes of success and failure to be ability, effort, luck and the nature of the task. These factors can also be

explained in terms of the dimensions of locus, stability and controllability. The locus dimension pertains to whether the cause is internal or external to the person. For example, those qualities that reside within the person are ability and effort while factors such as luck and the nature of the task are external to the person. Weiner et al. (1971, as cited by Weiner, 1985) further elaborated that these internal and external factors may be stable or may vary. For example, ability is perceived as stable whereas effort is not. Among external factors, one's perceived luck may change whereas a task's difficulty is constant. The third dimension, controllability, focuses on the volitional control that an individual possesses over

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internal factors. For example, an individual can manage the effort he puts forth but may not have much control over his physical coordination (Weiner, 1985). Individuals will make decisions and evaluate information in a way that serves their own or their group's interest or esteem (Sherman & Kim, 2005).

Self-serving behavior is prevalent, but not universal, in the individual, group and organizational levels (Johns, 1999) and this has been shown in both laboratory and naturalistic settings. For example, Dobbins and Russell (1986) found that students who were randomly assigned the roles of leaders or subordinates to work on a simulated manufacturing task made the same attributions about success and failure; those assigned the role of leaders attributed poor group performance to subordinates and students assigned the role of subordinates attributed low group performance to leaders. The leaders also attributed good performance to their own actions while the subordinates ascribed success to their own efforts. Such self-serving bias is also evident in groups when attributing their group's performance. For example, in sports competition, team members made more internal attributions about their team when their team succeeded than when their team failed; teams attributed their failures (losses) to external factors (Sherman & Kim, 2005). This finding is also consistent with social identity theory, in which members will exhibit a bias towards and attribute success to the internal characteristics of its in-group members (Abrams, Frings, & de Moma, 2005). This group-serving bias can be mitigated, as Sherman and Kim (2005) showed in their study, by providing individuals with feelings of worthiness. They wanted to show how the self served as an anchoring basis for judgments about the group and theorized a motivational aspect in attributing more to the group, particularly, in how it helped to protect and enhance one's self esteem. In their study involving undergraduates who participated in team sports competition, they

observed group- and self-serving attributions as winners claimed internal causes to be more responsible for their team's success than losers did for their defeat. However, this bias was not reflected among those individuals that completed an individually-based self-affirmation. Self-affirmation caused feeling of being worthy. When the motivational pressure to maintain one's image was reduced, people were less group-serving in their judgments.

Individuals make two distinct attributions at the group level, attributing performance to either individual members or to the group as a whole. The focus on individual members may include herself or other members only, to the personal contributions, effort and ability (Sherman & Kim, 2005; Tindale, Kulik & Scott, 1991) and the skills and unique characteristics that they bring. Past research suggests that individuals will claim more responsibility for group success but not for group failure (Forsyth & Kelley, 1994).

Attributions to the group as a whole have focused on group properties that include shared norms, values or beliefs (Goncalo, 2004), performance and teamwork (Sherman & Kim, 2005), and shared cognition, which refers to the thoughts, attitudes, knowledge and expectations that are common to all members of the group (Park, 2008). Park elaborated a group's cognition to cover shared mental models and schema similarity, and agreement on communication rules as factors that determine group satisfaction. Shared mental models—knowledge structures held by members of a team—enable them to form accurate explanations and expectations for the task and coordinate their action and behaviors to the demands of the task (Levesque, Wilson & Wholey, 2001). Schema similarity refers to the degree to which group members have similar knowledge structures for organizing and understanding team-related phenomena (Rentsch & Hall, 1994, as cited in Rentsch & Klimoski, 2001). Park's (2008) study investigated the effects of shared cognition

on group member satisfaction and subsequent task performance, focusing on having agreed communication rules. The results showed that group members were more satisfied and performed a task better than those that did not have agreement on communication rules.

Finally, Zaccaro et al. (1987, as cited by Tindale et al., 1991) also posited that individuals may also attribute performance to factors external to the group, especially when experiencing failure. Such attributions include luck and an opposing team's skills, task difficulty and time constraints (Tindale et al., 1991).

Culture has also been found to exert differences in the causal attributions that individuals make (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). The diversity of religions within East Asia exerts an influence in shaping and interpreting behavior even in the various countries within the region (Jocano, 1999).

In their review of relevant studies, Norenzayan and Nisbett (2000) concluded that the reasoning of East Asians and Americans were different. East Asians emphasize more the context in which the behavior occurred, while Americans focus more on the person's disposition. Goncalo and Kandathil (2007) studied the effect of individual characteristics on attributions, testing how Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance might explain differences in attribution. They performed a cross-cultural study with participants from the US, which is identified as being high on individualism and low on power distance, and India, which is identified as being high on collectivism (and, conversely, low on individualism) and high on power distance. They predicted that individualists would attribute the causes of a group's performance to the specific contributions of each individual in the group and those who were from high power distance countries would likewise attribute more to the individual. Undergraduate students from both the US and India who

participated in the study were given the same case vignette describing a product development team and were asked to write down the most important causes of the team's performance. The results supported their hypothesis: individualism and power distance were positively associated with the propensity to attribute the causes of group performance to the contributions of each individual in the group. Similarly, Miller (1984) demonstrated differences between Americans and Hindus resulting from different cultural meaning systems: people in the U.S. focused on disposition while Hindus stressed a more holistic view of the person. Heine et al. (1997, as cited by Heine & Lehman, 1997) theorized that Westerners are predisposed to self-serve in their attributions because of their culture's emphasis on independence and autonomy. They also posit that Eastern cultures, particularly the Japanese, do not have this predisposition because its culture emphasizes fitting in. In their research, Heine and Lehman (1997) found European Canadians exhibiting more group-serving bias than Japanese. In fact, Asian Americans, exposed to the culture of the West that promotes individualism, were also found to exhibit more group-serving bias than did Japanese, but not as much as the European Canadian sample. However, in an experimental study done in Indonesia, the results were consistent with self-serving bias, contrary to the study's prediction. Supratiknya (1992) had predicted that as a result of the Javanese social norm of humbling one's self and not showing off, college students who have participated in the study would not attribute success to internal causes. However, regardless of the participant's level of traditionalism, subjects attributed success to internal rather than external causes. But they also attributed failure to internal causes.

Filipinos are stereotyped to be fatalistic, as expressed in the term *bahala na*. Bonifacio (1977) wrote about the Filipinos' tendency to ascribe success and failure to

luck, explaining this as resulting from an important value orientation in the belief over forces that they have no control over. Bostrom (1986, as cited by Enriquez, 1992) defines fatalism as a "passive acceptance" of events, of not taking "responsibility for one's action". This implies that the Filipino will simply wait for and accept whatever happens to him because he cannot change what fate gives him. Lagmay (1976, as cited by Enriquez, 1992; De Guia, 2005) sought to correct this misconception when he explained that, contrary to Bostrom's assertion, the Filipino will confront the situation, use all his abilities, do everything he can to "make the situation better" and persist despite uncertainty. Angeles (1977, as cited in Watkins & Astilla, 1981) describes this as "optimistic fatalism," that "allows the Filipino to accept his own lot because he believes that by hard work he will come to a better future". Guthrie (1977) writes about farmers seeking "scientific explanations" for crop harvest failures instead of simply accepting the outcome as misfortune. Filipinos from depressed areas are prepared to work hard and strive, and not leave their fate to chance. Among those living in poverty, those with more education perceived the cause of their poverty as a result of their own effort, or lack thereof (for example, having no or a low-paying job) but these attributions are transient and controllable (Generalao, 1998). This inner strength is how Enriquez (1992) characterizes the Filipino's confrontative attitude.

Bonifacio (1977) also describes that it is uncommon for a Filipino to take personal credit for success. This can also be explained by a modesty that is expected when among his peers, with wanting to be just one among the group and not standing out. Guthrie (1977) wrote about the strong social process of leveling to bring back into line individuals who outperform others. The strong social norm is "we are all equal." Jocano (1999) described the Filipino emphasis on sensitivity, reciprocity and collectivity.

Filipinos are socialized to get along with other people, to maintain harmonious relationships, because these others can assist him in the future. The desirability of social acceptance and an ability to get along well with others are highly valued among Filipinos and this is supported by the value of smoothness of interpersonal relationships (Lynch, 1973). This is consistent in a collectivist culture such as the Philippines, where there is a strong group orientation and an emphasis in fitting in (Adler, 2008).

Lagmay's (1976, as cited by Enriquez, 1992; De Guia, 2005) assertion and Enriquez' (1992) characterization of a proactive and assertive Filipino are reflected in some of the attribution studies done with Philippine subjects. For example, with education being made more accessible to many, Filipinos have placed more emphasis on what they can do through their own efforts and less emphasis on the role of luck (Guthrie, 1977). In a study of school children in a rural part of the Philippines, subjects rated their ability or effort, but not luck, as the cause of their performance. However, those students that experienced failure attributed their performance to factors not within their control, consistent with the self-serving bias hypothesis (Watkins, 1982). In a related study by Watkins and Astilla (1981) on Philippine subjects, the investigators concluded that high self esteem students attributed success to internal causes, but not failure. Farmers who adopted modern land management techniques also attributed their success to their hard work and emphasized less the role of prayers and God's help, soil conditions, favorable weather and absence of pest. However, those who experienced poor harvests ascribed the result to bad weather and fate (Abregana, 1988). These findings appear to support Heine and Lehman's (1997) theorizing that exposure to Western methods increased the propensity for self-serving bias---attributing success to internal factors and failures to external factors.

These studies, however, have focused on individual attributions and not on attribution of a group performance. In the only group attribution study included in this review, involving an organization with long-tenured teams comprised of first-level managers and their subordinates, Davila (2003) asked participants to recall three instances of group successes and group failures and to enumerate the factors that contributed to these outcomes. She found that participants attributed their group's success to stable group and individual traits – such as their knowledge, teamwork, effective communications, personal initiative and perseverance – and attributed group failure to unstable group traits and external causes, such as misunderstanding among group members, lack of communication, complicated requirements and difficult people outside their groups. The researcher was unable to find any published studies investigating attributions of group performance in the Philippine setting.

This paper seeks to add to the attribution literature in the Philippines, specifically on how students from one of the top universities in the country attribute the performance of their group and how they ascribe their and

their other group mates' contribution to the effort. The present study attempts to explore the cognitive responses of individuals in a natural setting, in particular after receiving either a positive or a negative feedback on their groups' performance on a presentation made in class during the semester. The setting provides as natural a setting as possible unlike the artificial set-up in a laboratory. The intention is to capture the cognition of participants in which the type of feedback matters a lot to them, since it is based on an activity that will have an impact on their grades. In this study, factual data (date of presentation, title of case or topic of presentation) were used as the context for providing feedback.

The study predicts that participants who are given positive feedback will rate their groups' characteristics higher than those who are given negative feedback. It is also predicted that those who receive positive feedback will generate more positive thoughts focusing on the group than those given negative feedback, and that those given negative feedback will generate more negative thoughts focusing on other factors external to the group.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Attributions have traditionally been measured in two ways; an open-ended method or a structured method (Wisniewski and Gaier, 1990). This study used both methods, the thought listing technique and a questionnaire to identify participants' attributions. The thought-listing technique aims to capture the thoughts that pass through the participants' minds after they received positive or negative feedback (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). The technique assumes that an individual's thoughts and feelings can be analyzed by content analyzing the thoughts, feelings and ideas that the individual reports. These thoughts, feelings and ideas are rated in terms of their

valence and target (Cacioppo, von Hippel, & Ernst, 1997). The main dependent variables from this technique were participants' positive, negative and neutral thoughts focused on the self, group as a whole, others in the team and all others out of the team. The dependent variables from the structured method were the participants' post-feedback attributions of their group performance.

### Participants

Sixty-three undergraduate students enrolled at a state university in Metro Manila agreed to participate for course credit in a study purportedly dealing with "people's

thoughts about working in teams.” There were 45 females and 18 male participants whose ages ranged from 19 to 23 years with a mean age of 20.75. All participants were given credit towards their class participation.

Participants were randomly assigned in groups of three to five members at the beginning of the semester. As part of the requirements for the course, the students worked with their groups to lead a discussion on the chapter topic or analyze a business case and present their analysis in class. The topic or case assigned was different for each group and covered a new chapter in the textbook. Each group had already presented at least once during the semester when the experiment was conducted. All the groups were told at the start of the semester that their presentations would be evaluated based on the quality of their analysis and how they delivered their presentation. Feedback on their presentation had not yet been given to the presenting groups so the study took the opportunity of conveying the feedback and provided the context for the experiment.

### **Procedure**

Before the experiment, the investigator explained the purpose of the experiment (i.e., to know about people’s thoughts about working on teams) and that the participation of the students was purely voluntary. The feedback for their group presentation would be given after the experiment to those students who opted not to participate. Each student signed an informed consent form prior to the study and the experimenter debriefed the participants fully after all the data were collected.

Each group was given a brief discussion of its case presentation (i.e., date delivered, case title and its grade component). Based on pre-test results, the state of success or failure was given by indicating to the group how its score compared to the average ratings of the other groups (whether the group was higher or lower than the average) in the two classes

handled by the teacher during the semester. In fact, whether the score was above or below the average was bogus. The following uniform script was used in giving feedback to all the groups:

The rating I will give you is for your group presentation last (date) on (topic/case title). In case you might have forgotten, that group presentation comprised (x)% of your final grade for the course. The assessments made in class were very stringent. Your group grade for that case was (xx)%. This grade is (above or below) the average for all the groups in the classes that I am handling for this course this semester. I now request you not to discuss anything with your group mates until after you have completed a series of questionnaires.

Afterwards, the groups were led to rooms where they were given three sets of instruments to complete in the following sequence; a thought-listing instrument, an attribution questionnaire, and a feedback form on the experiment.

Participants were given five minutes to list all the thoughts that went through their minds as they evaluated their group’s performance. The following instructions were given (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981):

We are now interested in what you are thinking about your group. Please list down all the thoughts that went through your mind as you evaluated your group’s performance. Please state your thoughts and ideas as concisely as possible ignoring spelling, grammar and punctuation. You will be given five minutes to write your thoughts. We have deliberately provided more space than we think most people

will need to insure that everyone will have plenty of room to write the ideas they have about their groups. Do not worry if you don't fill the space. Just write down whatever thoughts come to mind. Please be completely honest.

Each was given a sheet with horizontal lines. Each of the thoughts provided was rated in two ways; the first, to determine the polarity of the thought (whether positive, negative or neutral) and, the second, to determine the focus of the attribution (whether to the self, to the group or to all others outside the group). The group-focused attributions were further classified into those that focused on either the group as a whole, which included the participant, or to other members of the group only not including the self.

After completing the thought-listing task, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing eighteen questions related to the elements of team effectiveness, such as the group's cohesiveness, diversity of ideas in solving the case, level of task conflict, satisfaction, level of influence, knowledge and ability, effort contributed to the task and to context factors (Staw, 1975; McElroy & Downey, 1982; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2005).

After each question, a horizontal line measuring eighty (80) millimeters in length with a definition of each of the two end-points representing opposites, for example, "not at all" and "to a great extent" or "very little" and "a great amount," was provided. The participant was instructed to place an "X" along the line that best represented his/her feelings/answer to the question. The questions relating to the team effectiveness elements were randomly arranged and the values for the scale were reversed on some questions as a check against set response. To score the response, the distance was measured, in millimeters, from the end point of the extreme response that represented

disagreement with the question (for example, "very little" or "not at all") to the point along the line where the "X" was placed. Hence, a score of zero (0) meant full agreement with the negative response; a score of 80 meant full agreement with the positive response (for example, "to a great amount" or "to a great extent"). Please refer to Appendix for the attribution questionnaire.

The questions relating to cohesiveness, diversity, task conflict and satisfaction required the participants to assess their respective groups as a whole. For the questions relating to influence, knowledge and ability, and effort participants were asked to rate their own contribution and the contribution of other members of their groups. The responses to the questions were combined to get summary ratings for the group as a whole. However, the responses to the questions relating to influence, knowledge and ability, and effort, were also combined to get summary ratings for self-contribution and for others (in the group)-contribution.

## Measures

### *Independent variable*

*Success or failure.* Each group was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions:

- Condition 1: False positive feedback (from here on, success group)
- Condition 2: False negative feedback (from here on, failure group)

Since not all of the members in the groups participated in the study, thirty-four students were eventually assigned to condition 1 (success) and twenty-nine to condition 2 (failure).

### *Dependent variables*

*Manipulation check.* Two manipulation checks were made---at the start and at the end

of the experiment. Before they began with the thought-listing exercise, the participants were asked the question "How would you personally rate the performance of your group? Please place an "X" in the appropriate box.". The question was accompanied by the following response scale: "very successful," "successful," "neither successful nor unsuccessful," "unsuccessful" and "very unsuccessful." The response scale was given equivalent values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

After the thought listing and the attribution questionnaire were completed, participants were given a third questionnaire that asked for their feedback on the activity. Included was a question asking them: "How did your group do relative to the other groups?" Participants were asked to place an "X" along a horizontal line that measured 80 millimeters in length with opposite ends having the values "Below the average" and "Above the average." (The appendix shows the attribution questionnaire which provided the same response format used for the second manipulation check.)

*Thoughts.* The dependent variables from

the thought-listing method were the number of positive, negative and neutral thoughts that focused on the self, the group and to all others. The group-focused thoughts were further classified into either the group as a whole or to other members of the group.

*Attributions.* The dependent variables from the attribution questionnaire were summary scores for cohesiveness, diversity, task conflict, knowledge and ability, influence, effort, satisfaction and context. The scores for knowledge and ability, influence and effort were also combined to get summary scores for self-contribution and others (in group)-contribution.

### **Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences between the individual attributions of group performance after participants received either positive or negative feedback using two methods, the thought listing technique and the attribution questionnaire. As there are only two levels of the independent variable (i.e., the success and failure groups), independent t-tests were used to compare the means.

## **III. RESULTS**

### **Manipulation Check**

The manipulation was effective in the experiment. Asked to rate the performance of their group, participants who were given bogus positive feedback rated their groups significantly higher than those who were given bogus negative feedback in the two manipulation checks that were administered in separate times during the experiment. In the first manipulation check, given at the start of the thought-listing exercise, participants in the success groups gave their groups an average rating of 4.56 (out of a maximum of 5.0) while those from failure groups rated their group an average of 3.38,

$t(38.20)=5.39, p<0.001$ . For the second manipulation check, given towards the end of the experiment after the participants had completed the thought-listing and attribution questionnaire, participants from the success groups gave their groups a mean rating of 72.07 (out of a maximum of 80.0) while those from failure groups gave their groups a mean rating of 20.28,  $t(36.517)=11.74, p<0.001$ .

### **Cognitive Response**

The number of positive, neutral and negative thoughts generated by each experimental group is presented in Table 1.



Participants from success groups generated more positive thoughts, more neutral thoughts and more thoughts in total than those from the failure groups. Participants from failure groups generated more negative thoughts. Each group generated more positive thoughts than negative and neutral thoughts.

On average, participants from success groups generated 7.18 thoughts (SE=0.59) compared to 6.76 thoughts (SE=0.54) generated by failure groups though the difference was not significant,  $t(61)=0.52$ ,

$p=ns$ . However, participants from success groups generated significantly more positive thoughts on average ( $M=5.09$ ,  $SE=0.53$ ) than did participants from failure groups ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SE=0.53$ ),  $t(61)=2.15$ ,  $p<0.05$ . Meanwhile, participants from failure groups generated significantly more negative thoughts on average ( $M=2.83$ ,  $SE=0.52$  versus  $M=1.03$ ,  $SE=1.03$ ),  $t(61)=-2.93$ ,  $p<0.01$ . There was no significant difference between the groups in the numbers of neutral thoughts generated,  $F(1,61)=1.23$ ,  $p=ns$ .

**Table 1**  
**Number of Thoughts Generated**

Polarity	Independent Variable	
	Success	Failure
Positive	173	101
Neutral	36	13
Negative	35	82
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>196</b>

Table 2 classifies the focus of the thoughts generated by both groups to the self, group or to all others (external to the group). Over 87% of the total thoughts generated by both groups focused on the group. Of the total thoughts generated by participants from success groups, over 91% focused on the group (i.e., samples of comments provided include “we had great group dynamics,” “complete attendance in most scheduled meetings,” “we work well together though we haven’t been group mates before”). Among participants from failure groups, nearly 83% of their total thoughts focused on the group (i.e., samples of comments provided include “some group mates are not

actively participating,” “I think we were successful simply because we put in a lot of effort into making the presentation,” “cooperative”).

On average, participants from success groups generated 4.94 positive thoughts (SE=0.52) towards their groups compared with 2.79 positive thoughts (SE=0.56) generated by failure groups towards their own groups. The difference was significant,  $t(61)=2.80$ ,  $p<0.01$ .

On average, participants from failure groups generated significantly more negative thoughts towards their groups ( $M=2.41$ ,  $SE=0.49$ ) than did those from success groups ( $M=0.68$ ,  $SE=0.21$ ),  $t(61)=-3.29$ ,  $p<0.01$ .

**Table 2**  
**Focus of Thoughts**

Polarity	Focus	Independent Variable	
		Success	Failure
Positive	Self	1	16
	Group	168	81
	All Others	4	4
	Sub-Total	173	101
Negative	Self	1	0
	Group	23	70
	All Others	11	12
	Sub-Total	35	82
Neutral	Self	0	0
	Group	32	11
	All Others	4	2
	Sub-Total	36	13
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>244</b>	<b>196</b>

The group-focused thoughts were further classified into whether these were directed towards the group as a whole, which included the participant, or to the other members of the group only, which excluded the participant. Table 3 shows the object of the group-focused thoughts.

Participants from success groups directed more of their group-focused thoughts on the group as a whole than to other members only (173 such thoughts, or 91% of total group-focused thoughts). The object of group-focused thoughts of the failure groups was also more on the group as a whole, but at a lesser percentage (113, or 75% of total group-focused thoughts).

Participants from success groups also had substantially more positive than negative group-focused thoughts (168, or 88% of total). On average, participants from success groups generated significantly more positive

thoughts towards the group as a whole ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SE=0.53$ ) than did participants from failure groups ( $M=2.52$ ,  $SE=0.48$ ),  $t(61)=2.77$ ,  $p<0.01$ . There was no significant difference in the average number of positive thoughts towards other members that were generated by both groups,  $t(61)=0.61$ ,  $p=ns$ .

Participants from failure groups generated nearly the same amount of negative as positive thoughts (70, or 46% of total group-focused thoughts were negative). On average, participants from failure groups had significantly more negative thoughts directed towards the group as a whole ( $M=1.38$ ,  $SE=0.33$  versus  $M=0.56$ ,  $SE=0.19$ ) and towards other members of the group ( $M=1.03$ ,  $SE=0.32$  versus  $M=0.12$ ,  $SE=0.06$ ) than did participants from success groups,  $t(61)= -2.15$ ,  $p<0.05$  and  $t(61)= -2.86$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively.

**Table 3**  
**Object of Group-focused Thoughts**

<b>Polarity</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Independent Variable</b>	
		<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>
Positive	Group as a Whole	154	73
	Other Members	14	8
	Sub-Total	168	81
Negative	Group as a Whole	19	40
	Other Members	4	30
	Sub-Total	23	70
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>191</b>	<b>151</b>

### Attributions

The eighteen statements in the attribution survey were combined to form composite scores for the following factors: cohesiveness, diversity, task conflict, knowledge and ability, influence, effort,

satisfaction and context. Table 4 shows the mean scores of the two groups on these factors.

The differences between groups were significant across all the factors except for task conflict.

**Table 4**  
**Mean Scores of Attributions**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>	<b>t(61)</b>
Cohesiveness	70.51	53.59	3.84***
Diversity	57.59	48.71	2.12*
Task Conflict	47.50	46.97	.15
Ability	65.81	57.17	2.20*
Influence	66.31	59.19	2.70**
Effort	70.41	62.43	2.62*
Satisfaction	65.85	51.10	3.45**
Context	59.85	44.16	4.02***

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

Participants rated themselves as well as other group members in terms of influence, knowledge and ability, and effort contributed towards the task. This allowed the researcher to separate each participant's assessment of their own (self) as well other members' (others) contribution. Table 5 shows how each group rated their own as well as their other members' contributions.

Participants from success groups rated their own as well as their other group members' contributions higher than those from failure groups. Participants from success groups rated their own contributions higher ( $M=66.82$ ,  $SE=1.80$ ) than did those from failure groups ( $M=62.71$ ,  $SE=2.10$ ),  $t(61) = 1.50$ ,  $p=ns$ . There was a significant difference, however, in how participants

rated the contributions of other group members; those from success groups rated the contributions of their other members significantly higher ( $M=68.20$ ,  $SE=2.14$ ) than did those from the failure groups ( $M=56.48$ ,  $SE=3.15$ ),  $t(61) = 3.07$ ,  $p<0.01$ .

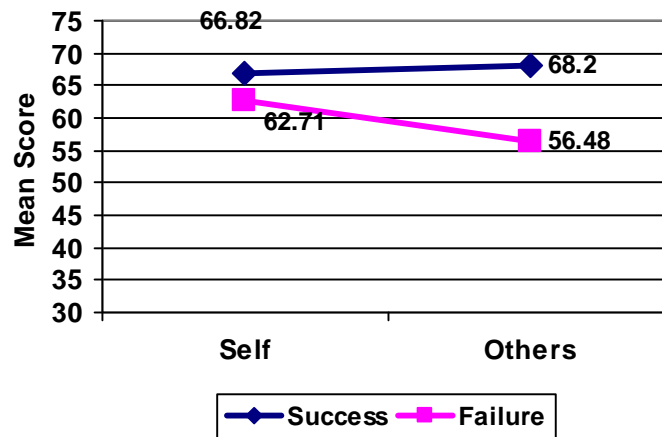
Figure 1 shows that participants from success groups rated their other group members' contributions slightly higher than their own contributions. Meanwhile,

participants from failure groups rated their own contributions towards the task higher than the contributions of their other group members. Though these differences were not significant (using paired-samples t-test), participants from success groups appear to deflect the success to other group members, while those from failure groups also appear to deflect the failure away from themselves.

**Table 5**  
**Mean Scores of Contributions of Self and Others in Group**

	<u>Independent Variable</u>	
	<u>Success</u>	<u>Failure</u>
Self-contribution	66.82	62.71
Others-contribution	68.20	56.48

**Figure 1**  
**Mean Scores of Ratings of Self- and Others-Contribution**



**IV. DISCUSSION**

The results of the study supported the hypothesis that participants who received positive feedback rated their groups' characteristics higher and generated more positive thoughts about their groups than did those who received negative feedback. Participants that received positive feedback

on their group performance rated their groups higher in terms of cohesiveness, diversity, task conflict, knowledge and ability, influence, effort, satisfaction and context. They also rated the contributions of their other group members towards the task higher than their own. The results from the thought-

listing procedure also revealed that participants from success groups generated more positive thoughts in total and directed a large proportion of these positive thoughts to their group as a whole. On the other hand, not only did participants from failure groups rate their groups lower on those factors mentioned above, they also rated their other group members' contributions lower than their own and had more negative thoughts about their group as a whole and other members of the group. These results are consistent with findings of previous studies focusing on attributions of group performance after receiving positive or negative feedback (Bachrach, Bendoly, & Podsakoff, 2001; McElroy & Downey, 1982; Sherman & Kim, 2005; Staw, 1975; Urban & Wit, 1989).

Although the study was not able to find a significant difference in how each group rated their own contribution relative to how they rated the contributions of their other group members, the conclusion that may be drawn from the two methods used in this study are the same: in success, attributions were made more to the group while in the failure condition, participants showed a tendency to separate themselves from other members.

The open-ended thought-listing technique provided participants the opportunity to list down anything about how they assessed the performance of their groups. However several considerations should be taken into account. First, there are limitations in the use of the technique; the participants' willingness to provide accurate information and the accuracy of their memory of events (Cacioppo et al., 1997) as the date of the presentations of the students varied, some occurring early on during the semester. The instructions given for this method are critical as it could limit the scope of factors considered (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). However, Smith (1994) pointed out that only salient and unusual factors encoded

as part of the target are recalled and considered as causes. On the other hand, the results could also be reflective of how failure groups attributed responsibility (i.e., to their groups but with a tendency to distance themselves as evidenced by the significant number of negative thoughts directed to the other members of the group). In this study, at least, the self-serving bias was clearly at work. However, the participants involved in the study consisted of high-achievement oriented students and the results may be different when based on a different set of individuals. As Heine and Lehman (1997) showed in their study, exposure to Western methods increased the propensity to exhibit self-serving bias. Nevertheless, it was interesting that the open-ended method generated thoughts that focused on the same factors as the structured method.

Group-level feedback does not provide an individual member with specific information on what specific behaviors need to be changed. They don't know where group feedback is directed, as such, to make sense of their worlds, they will use individual attributional biases to explain group-level performance (Tindale et al., 1991). If attributions are inaccurate, the choice of corrective actions may not be effective (Brown, 1984). It therefore becomes imperative that individual-level performance feedback is provided as well. Sherman and Kim (2005) demonstrated the effect that information given at the individual level improved the odds of individuals making more objective assessments of performance, perhaps even taking more responsibility for group outcomes. This level of interaction may also be required in a culture that values fitting in with and reciprocity towards other individuals that he will work with in the future. As Enriquez (1992) pointed out, only when a certain level of depth of relationship is attained will there be a willingness to share the true and real issues.

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APPENDIX

**Instructions:** Following are eighteen (18) questions about your group. Please mark an X along the line that best represents your feelings/answer to the question. Please be careful when marking the line as some of the values have been reversed.

1. To what extent did you enjoy working with your teammates?  
 Not at all ----- To a great extent
2. How much influence did you have on the final outcome of your case presentation?  
 Very little ----- A great amount
3. To what extent did you and your teammates each have different ideas about solving your case?  
 Not at all ----- To a great extent
4. In general, how much would you rate the level of knowledge and skills of your teammates in analyzing and solving the case?  
 Very high ----- Very low
5. In general, how adequate were the instructions or guidelines given to your team for analyzing the case?  
 Very adequate ----- Very inadequate
6. In working on the case presentation, what were your personal feelings toward your teammates?  
 I disliked them ----- I liked them
7. In general, how much support did your team get in solving the case?  
 None at all ----- A lot
8. How much did your teammates contribute in completing the tasks that were needed to be done for your case analysis and presentation?  
 A lot ----- None at all
9. To what extent did you have an open discussion of the different ideas of the team?  
 Not at all ----- To a great extent
10. How open were your teammates to your ideas and suggestions about solving the case?  
 Extremely open ----- Not open at all
11. How much did you contribute in completing the tasks that were needed to be done for your case analysis and presentation?  
 Not at all ----- A lot
12. To what extent did you enjoy working on the case?  
 Not at all ----- To a great extent
13. How much influence did all your other teammates have on the final outcome of the case presentation?  
 Very little ----- A great amount

*Appendix (Cont'd.)*

14. In general, how would you rate your level of knowledge and skills in analyzing and solving the case?  
Very high ----- Very low
15. In analyzing the case, to what extent did your teammates ever attempt to impose or force their position(s) on you?  
Not at all ----- To a great extent
16. How would you rate the cohesiveness or group spirit of your team?  
Extremely high ----- Extremely low
17. How fair do you think was the final rating given to your group?  
Very fair ----- Very unfair
18. To what extent would you want to work with this very same group in the future?  
To a great extent ----- Not at all