

Shifting the Blame: On Delegation and Responsibility

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To fully understand the motives for delegating a decision right, it is important to study responsibility attributions for outcomes of delegated decisions. We conducted an experiment in which subjects were able to delegate the choice between a fair or unfair allocation, and used a punishment option to elicit responsibility attributions. Our results show that, first, responsibility attribution can be effectively shifted and, second, this constitutes a powerful motive for the delegation of a decision right. Furthermore, we propose a formal measure of responsibility and show that this measure outperforms measures based on outcome or intention in predicting punishment behavior.