When to talk and when to keep it to yourself? strategies for legitimating managerial intuitions in an organisational context

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When to Talk and When to Keep It to yourself? Strategies for Legitimating Managerial Intuitions in An Organisational Context

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies deployed by managers in organisations to legitimate their intuitions. Managerial practice is a continual process of emergence and integration of problems and projects, and by which managers navigate a complex world. To do so, they rely partly on their intuitions, whose effectiveness has largely been demonstrated in the literature. However, the rational model is still considered the optimal cognition and decision-making process in organisations. The persistence of the myth of rationality compels managers to deploy strategies to legitimate their intuitions. But these strategies are poorly understood. The aim of this study therefore was to describe them. For this purpose, we collected 191 accounts of episodes where managers legitimated their intuitions. Our analysis of these accounts revealed seven intuition legitimation strategies. Some of these strategies had not previously been identified in the institutional literature (personalisation, transparency, exploration and compound strategy). For others which had already been partly described (rationalisation, manipulation and relational strategy), we show that managers deploy new modes. These results contribute to the knowledge of legitimation strategies from a conceptual point of view. They also shed some light on the mistrust of intuition that still prevails in organisations, despite its importance.

Keywords: *Intuition; Legitimation; Expertise; Manager*

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> *An intuition comes to me, boom! […] I look at them wondering how I'm going to structure the idea that I had so they will agree to it… They won't accept it as an intuition, so I try to build a line of reasoning that will lead to the idea that came to me by intuition […] but using* what they said…
>
> (Respondent 2)

We have known for a long time that managerial practice is a process in which emerging concerns, problems, and projects are continually integrated into each other (Hales, 2001). At every moment, managers face contextual complexity and have to solve problems in difficult and uncertain environments, while also managing uncertainties and ambiguities (Mintzberg, 2013). To do this, they rely partly on their intuition (Barnard, 1938; Calabretta et al., 2017; Coget et al., 2009), that is to say 'affectively charged judgments that arise through rapid, nonconscious, and holistic associations' (Dane & Pratt, 2007, p. 40). An abundant literature has demonstrated the effectiveness of drawing on intuition in a strategic context (e.g., Hodgkinson et al., 2009), under heavy constraints (e.g., Dane & Pratt, 2007; Kahneman & Klein, 2009) and in unstable, complex and uncertain environments (e.g., Khatri & Ng, 2000; Salas et al., 2010). In contrast, the ideology of rationality (the 'myth' of rationality according to March, 1982, 1999, 2010) has not lost any of its lustre. Several studies have shown the extent to which the idea of the superiority of rational, systematic, conscious and linear analysis remains deeply rooted in organisations and the thought patterns of managers (Meziani, 2020; Mintzberg, 2013). Cabantous and Gond (2011) argue that it is a constructed social norm that has been equipped with tools and techniques and commodified for managers and consultants. To managers, rationality appears to be self-evident, as much because it is performative (Cabantous & Gond, 2011) as because this mental model is implicit in current management education (Czarniawska, 2003). In this light, intuitions naturally appear dubious (Bertolucci & Pinzon, 2015)

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because they come out of a radically different cognitive process: completely internal and therefore invisible and inscrutable, as well as unconscious, non-linear, rapid and operating through holistic associations. Intuition is therefore entirely at odds with the social norm of rationality (Dane & Pratt, 2007).

In their daily practice, therefore, managers are obliged to reconcile their use of intuition with the social expectations that the organisation imposes on them (Agor, 1989; Burke & Miller, 1999; Dameron & Torset, 2014; Sadlert-Smith & Burke, 2009). To reduce the gap between the two, they have to try to legitimate their intuitions, that is, to find a way to make them appear to be directly compatible with the norm and not look dubious. Previous studies have not dealt with this question, and the way managers legitimate their intuitions remains a blind spot in managerial practice. We therefore ask the following question: what strategies do managers use to legitimate their intuitions? By analysing 191 instances of managers legitimating their intuitions, we identify seven main strategies, some of them already known in other contexts albeit in new forms or modes, and others completely new. These results contribute to a better theoretical and practical understanding of the way managers can and do make room for their intuitions in their daily practice. In the following pages, we will detail the various legitimation strategies identified in the literature and then describe our empirical study. We then present and discuss our results.

Legitimation

Legitimation is a process that establishes legitimacy. Specifically, conceiving of legitimacy as a perception by an evaluator (Suddaby et al., 2017), the aim of the process is to lead the evaluator to judge what they are being presented as 'desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman, 1995, p 574). Actors evaluate an element (action, object, idea, etc.) positively when it is congruent with norms and values that are generally accepted in their socio-organisational context (Suchman, 1995). Inversely, when an element is considered to be out of step with accepted social norms, legitimation efforts are required in order for the element to be accepted. In other words, as soon as something may be perceived as socially transgressive, efforts need to be made to place it within the bounds of acceptability and social comprehension, that is, to establish its legitimacy. Bitektine and Haack (2015) emphasise that the process of legitimation involves both evaluators and those evaluated (hereafter 'evaluees'). These authors observe that evaluators make use of heuristics; their perception and their judgements are structured institutionally. As for the evaluees, they anticipate the consequences of the evaluation; this is why they proactively seek to legitimate the ideas they are advancing, through a discourse or specific actions in order to avoid a situation that would be detrimental to them.

Researchers have naturally begun to explore what this undertaking consists of and prior studies have shown that there are a variety of legitimation strategies. Several theoretical reviews of existing studies have also been conducted (e.g., Suddaby et al., 2017), underlining in particular the discursive aspects (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Green, 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Van Leeuwen, 2007) and socio-psychological aspects (Tost, 2011) of the efforts deployed to build legitimacy. Bringing together these first syntheses, as well as more recent studies that emphasise, for example, visual (Lefsrud et al., 2020), material and artistic artifacts (e.g., Cnossen & Bencherki, 2023), we were able to identify four main legitimation strategies found in the literature. They may be split into two categories as shown in Table 1. Indeed, while all these strategies pursue the same goal (obtaining a judgement

Table 1. Legitimation strategies described in the literature

Strategies focussing on the element to legitimate	Strategies focussing on the evaluator
– Rationalisation: confer ostensible rationality on the element to be legitimated	– Relational: influence the evaluator through one or several facets of their personal relation with the evaluee
Modes used in rationalisation:	Modes used in the relational strategy:
• logical discourse	• emotions
• numbers and profitability	• authority
• problem-solution narrative	• reward-coercion
– Manipulation: artificially align the element with the social norms the evaluator subscribes to	– Normalisation: have the evaluator focus on the characteristics that conform to certain social norms and moral values
Modes used in manipulation:	Modes used in normalisation:
• semantic shifts	• metaphors
• gaps in knowledge	• familiar framing
• lies/mystification	• combination of text and image

Source: Own elaboration.

of legitimacy) vis-à-vis the same actor (the evaluator), they follow different paths: some focus on the element to be legitimated (which must be altered or disguised to change its appearance), whereas others target the evaluator, focussing on their perspective (in the manner of a lens).

The common principle of the strategies in the first category (left side of Table 1) is that the evaluee's efforts focus on the presentation of the element to be legitimated. The idea is to alter the appearance of the element, recast it in order to present a legitimate picture. In the rationalisation strategy, the element to be legitimated is brought in line with social norms through a discourse that refers to its utility or its function (Vaara et al., 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2007). Such a discourse will describe the benefits and advantages to be obtained, and highlight the corresponding usefulness or function of the element to be legitimated. For example, the ethics and compliance officers interviewed by Treviño et al. (2014) legitimate their position in the organisation by, among other things, articulating a discourse aimed at highlighting the organisational benefits to be derived from their dual ethics and financial perspective. Rationalisation often mobilises figures and calculations to back up its logic, but may also consist in telling a narrative that links a given 'problem' to its 'solution' (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Vaara et al., 2006). The second strategy focussing on the element to legitimate is manipulation, which consists in artificially aligning the intuition with the social norms the evaluator subscribes to, that is, fabricate a socially compliant reality, tailored to the evaluator. Here, it is a matter of reorienting or knowingly transforming certain elements of the picture (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). For this purpose, the language used may be altered (Treviño et al., 2014) to blur certain aspects and attach positive connotations to the object being judged. It is also possible to select the information to be transmitted to evaluators, or to lie to them. For example, Brown's (1994) study of the quest for legitimacy in a commercial expansion project in the confectionary industry shows that certain actors resorted to mystification and control over the flow of information in order to make their decisions appear more legitimate in the eyes of the board of directors: concealment of the most negative conclusions of successive market studies, exclusively presenting studies that were aligned with their goals, and showcasing the latter in order to 'manipulate' (Brown, 1994, p. 869) the understanding of the board members.

Strategies that fall into the second category (right side of Table 1) share the principle that the evaluee's efforts are aimed at controlling the stance of the evaluator and the way they view the element to be legitimated, as if to impose a viewpoint on them. Here, the relational strategy is to play on one or several facets of the relationship between evaluee and evaluator: exploit the emotions of the evaluators and build legitimacy by eliciting fear or stoking greed (Green, 2004) or by invoking authority. For example, Vaara et al.'s (2006) study on the discursive strategies of legitimation deployed following a major industrial restructuring in the pulp and paper industry shows that certain actions were legitimated by referring to actors in a position of authority with respect to the audience, such as journalists. Another approach in the relational strategy may consist in rewarding or punishing the evaluator depending on how they respond (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011). In these situations, a potential sanction may even lead the evaluator to retract their judgement (Suddaby et al., 2017). The second legitimation strategy aimed at the evaluator is normalisation. This consists in compelling the evaluator to focus only on certain characteristics of the element to evaluate, specifically those that conform to certain social norms and moral values (Vaara et al., 2006; Vaara & Monin, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2007). Owing to a halo effect, the evaluator may then be inclined to perceive the whole element as natural (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) and therefore unquestionable (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). To succeed in this strategy, evaluees may employ metaphors (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), terms or images that draw attention to the element's conformity with certain moral values (Lefsrud et al., 2020). Brown (1995, p. 958) describes this 'niche marketing' approach in a case where actors sought to legitimate a new information technology (IT) system in a hospital. These actors systematically took into account the interests and priorities of the different groups they were addressing, directing the attention of certain stakeholders to potential savings, that of others to a better quality of care, without however misrepresenting the system itself.

As we can see, of the four legitimation strategies thus far identified in the literature, two directly target the evaluators to influence the way they perceive/engage with the object to be legitimated, while the other two focus on the object itself in order to shape what is offered for evaluation. Despite their richness, these four strategies are nevertheless relatively general. Moreover, they concern highly diverse objects to legitimate such as multinationals (Vaara & Tienari, 2011), mergers and acquisitions (Vaara & Monin, 2010), organisational restructuring (Vaara et al., 2006), artistic events (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2023) or ethics and compliance (Treviño et al., 2014). But as objects to legitimate, intuitions are quite different. They are eminently personal, such as ideas, orientations, judgements. They also come from an entirely individual cognitive process, unlike the more organisational and strategic elements investigated thus far in the literature. Finally, given the nature of the intuitive cognitive process, the evaluee faces their evaluator(s) alone and also acts alone to legitimate their intuitions, during interactions that are sometimes quite short and direct. Given these differences, it has not been possible thus far to state that general strategies are able and sufficient to describe and understand the way that managers legitimate their intuitions within organisations. This study aims therefore to discover the specific strategies deployed by managers in such situations.

Research design and methods

In order to shine a light on the strategies that managers use to legitimate their intuitions vis-à-vis their organisational interlocutors, we conducted a qualitative study, in which data were collected from managers using a method inspired by Flick's (2000) episodic interviews: asking respondents to relate situations of their choosing in which they had an experience related to the subject. The narratives collected thus include the concrete circumstances of the experiences (time, space, people, events, situations). In order to collect numerous episodes of intuition legitimation, we naturally considered the different types of intuition described in the literature. As the literature is particularly abundant and offers classifications which sometimes differ greatly from each other, we made sure to take in all the different categories, combining the classifications according to four main types of intuition, as described in Table 2.

As indicated in Table 3, we also took into account the hierarchical position of respondents and their level of expertise in building our sample. Indeed, the literature has shown that certain types of intuitions are not accessible to novices. We therefore included in our sample respondents with recognised expertise in their field (Dane & Pratt, 2007), whom we identified on the basis of the length of their professional experience (Glöckner & Witteman, 2010), their hierarchical level (Bertolucci & Pinzon, 2015) and the recommendations of their peers (Kahneman & Klein, 2009). Furthermore, we decided to interview middle managers in organisations with at least 50 members in order to maximise the chances of identifying legitimation episodes, because middle managers are often confronted with complex situations and have to legitimate their intuitions to their superiors, their peers or their subordinates. Table 3 describes our final sample.

As shown in Table 3, we conducted 30 interviews in total, averaging 1 h each, with respondents aged at least 40, working in a variety of organisational environments. We used the same interview guide for all of the interviewees. Following an introductory phase and basic profile questions, we prompted the respondent to give a detailed account of concrete, lived situations (Flick, 2000) in which they had to share an intuition with colleagues. All of the interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the respondents, then fully transcribed and anonymised.

Our analytical process was made up of two stages. First, we extracted the legitimation episodes from the interviews. To do so, we defined a legitimation episode as a respondent's testimonial that contains the following elements: description of an intuitive experience (see Table 2), efforts or actions undertaken to make it legitimate to colleagues and various contextual factors specific to the situation (subject, actors, issues, etc.). This first phase led to the identification of 191 legitimation episodes. In the second stage, we analysed these episodes to characterise and identify the legitimation strategies that were deployed in them. In each episode we coded the different modes of action (one or several) that were deployed for the purpose of legitimation. Our respondents mobilised a total of 382 modes of action in the 191 intuition episodes. Then we grouped these modes together into strategies (a single episode may contain several strategies). To do this, we used a mixed coding method (Miles et al., 2019), taking into account the four legitimation strategies found in the literature, while leaving open the possibility that new strategies might emerge.

Results

The analysis of our data reveals that managers deploy seven different strategies to legitimate their intuitions. Table 4 provides a summary (see Table 1A in the Appendix for more detail).

As shown in Table 4, three of the strategies identified in our data are already partially described in the literature (rationalisation, manipulation and relational strategy) where some of

Table 2. Operational synthesis of the main types of intuition described in the literature

Heuristic intuition	Associative intuition	Expertise intuition	Introspective intuition
Gigerenzer & Selten, 2001; Glöckner & Witteman, 2010; Pretz et al., 2014	Glöckner & Witteman, 2010; Pretz et al., 2014	Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012; Hodgkinson & Sadler-Smith, 2011; Kahneman & Klein, 2009; Pretz et al., 2014; Salas et al., 2010	Hodgkinson & Sadler-Smith, 2011 Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012
Immediate	Immediate	Immediate	Occurring later, after focussing on a problem; Eureka effect
Consists of indications, automatic reflexes/mental shortcuts	Consists of ideas, sensations, opinions, positive or negative feelings	Consists of sensations, opinions or solutions	Consists of a solution to a given problem
All practitioners	All practitioners	Experts	All practitioners
All domains	All domains	Specific domain	All domains

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Respondents

Respondent	M/F	Hierarchical level	Years in the sector	Years in the position	Sector	Interview duration (in minutes)
No 1	M	CEO	15	15	Retail	66
No 2	F	Manager	37	5	Real estate	61
No 3	F	Director	35	6	Real estate	53
No 4	M	Director	26	9	Real estate	59
No 5	M	CEO	18	5	Industry	32
No 6	M	Manager	23	4	Finance	55
No 7	F	Manager	18	3	Retail	60
No 8	M	Director	25	5	Retail	45
No 9	M	CEO	17	5	Industry	50
No 10	M	CEO	4	17	Industry	51
No 11	M	Director	32	15	Industry	53
No 12	M	Manager	33	3	Finance	73
No 13	F	Manager	28	12	Finance	31
No 14	F	CEO	27	14	Industry	51
No 15	M	CEO	11	11	Industry	63
No 16	F	Manager	30	18	Industry	46
No 17	M	Manager	27	5	Industry	63
No 18	M	Director	33	6	Industry	76
No 19	M	Director	29	15	Retail	68
No 20	F	Manager	19	16	Industry	38
No 21	M	CEO	32	3	Industry	32
No 22	M	Director	23	9	Industry	72
No 23	F	Manager	33	14	Finance	71
No 24	M	Manager	32	6	Industry	43
No 25	F	Manager	17	9	Finance	52
No 26	M	CEO	15	7	Finance	73
No 27	M	CEO	32	3	Industry	46
No 28	M	CEO	34	8	Consulting	61
No 29	F	Manager	15	7	Consulting	47
No 30	M	Director	28	12	Industry	30

Source: Own elaboration.

their respective modes are detailed at other levels. But we show that managers also deploy these strategies in new modes to legitimate their intuitions. Four other strategies also emerge from our data as completely new and, likewise, are deployed in several modes. Moreover, as shown in Table 5, the strategies do not attract equal attention; some of them appear to be deployed more than others (though for reasons of consistency Table 5 is presented in the same order as Table 4).

We describe each of these elements below.

Modes specific to the legitimation of managers' intuitions within known strategies

Our data analysis reveal, first of all, that, to legitimate their intuitions vis-à-vis their colleagues, managers deploy three strategies already highlighted in the literature: rationalisation, manipulation, and relational. However, our data also show that managers deploy these strategies in specific modes, which we describe below.

Emerging modes in rationalisation

Rationalisation, a strategy seeking to confer ostensible rationality on the element to legitimate, such that it seems logical to the evaluators, is central in our data: not only does it represent a large share (38%) of all the strategies deployed, but all the managers we interviewed acknowledge using it. Some managers give great importance to this strategy and state that they prioritise its use. Furthermore, our data show that various modes of rationalisation are used by managers to legitimate their intuitions. Those already described in the literature and mentioned above (discourse constructing the logic of the

Table 4. Managers' strategies (and their modes) for legitimating their intuitions

Strategies aimed at the element to legitimate	Strategies aimed at the evaluator
Modes specific to the legitimation of managers' intuitions in known strategies	
– Rationalisation: confer ostensible rationality on the element to legitimate • Emerging modes: immersion, experimentation • Known modes detected: logical discourse, evoking figures and profitability, problem-solution narrative	– Relational: influence the evaluator by mobilising one or more facets of their personal relationship to the evaluee • Emerging mode: personal conviction • Known mode detected: reward-coercion
– Manipulation: artificially align the intuition with the social norms the evaluator subscribes to • Emerging modes: transfer responsibility, repetition, delay • Known modes detected: semantic shift, mystification	
Strategies specific to the legitimation of managers' intuitions	
– Personalisation: integrate the intuition and the evaluee into a single object to be evaluated • Modes: credibility, experience	– Exploration: lead the evaluator to have a similar or compatible intuition • Modes: maieutic method, brainstorming
– Transparency: make the intuition detectable as such • Modes: direct sharing, indirect sharing	
– Compound strategy: mobilise several strategies (and their modes) in the same intuition legitimation effort	

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Occurrences of strategies in the 191 episodes studied

	Occurrences		Occurrences in compound strategies	
	Number	Share	Number	Share
Rationalisation	147	38%	166	51%
Manipulation	37	10%	18	6%
Relational	73	19%	61	19%
Exploratory	19	5%	11	3%
Personalisation	9	2%	5	2%
Transparency	97	25%	63	19%
Total	382	100%	324	100%
of which compound strategies	133			
of which non-compound strategies	58			

Source: Own elaboration.

object, discourse or figures referring to profitability, problem-solution narrative) are present. In addition, two new modes appear: immersion and experimentation.

Immersion works by making the intuition appear rational with respect to a given context that the evaluator is exposed to. Experimentation makes the intuition appear rational with respect to a real situation the evaluator experienced. Although similar, these two modes are analytically distinct, as illustrated by episode 59. Respondent 10, a manager in the chocolate industry, took his team on a trip to Ecuador in 2012 so that his intuition about the future importance of organic products in the chocolate sector would appear logical to his colleagues.

> I told them 'We're going to Ecuador'. We made the same trip that I had made previously, and I kept quiet during the trip. The last day in Guayaquil we met in a room and I asked them 'What are your conclusions?' Three or four days visiting plantations, meeting growers, and tasting cacao had opened up many things among the team. And so we said, 'How do we transform that? … There really is a business opportunity here' because there is an expectation on the part of consumers.

This trip allowed the manager to legitimate his intuition through these two modes. He immersed the team in a specific production environment, in particular through visits to plantations and meetings with growers, and also had them

experience a different conception of the product and its quality, mainly through tastings. The result of all this was that the future importance of organic products appeared to the entire team as the logical and rational conclusion to the analysis of the new elements that had been brought to their attention during the trip.

Emerging modes in manipulation: Transferring responsibility, repetition and delay

Manipulation consists in legitimating an intuition by artificially aligning it with the social norms the evaluator subscribes to. The managers we interviewed acknowledged the importance they accorded to this strategy and that they used it occasionally, though they preferred to refer to it as 'principled guidance' (respondent 4) because the point was not to go against the interests of the evaluators but simply to have them see the intuition as consistent with social norms. In addition to the modes already identified in the literature, that is, mystifying or engineering a semantic shift in order to cast the object to be evaluated in a more positive light, three new modes were used by managers to legitimate their intuitions through manipulation: transferring responsibility, repetition and delay.

The first mode that emerged from our data, transferring responsibility, consists in having a third party convey the manager's intuition. For example (respondent 26, episode 165):

> I remember when I was managing subsidiary Z. [In a meeting]: 'By the way, uhm… I don't remember who said it, I think it was you… I really liked the idea…' and then I tell them my intuition.'… Could you write me up a small note about it? …' so that he takes ownership of it… While I remain in the shadows and feed into it. We ran several projects like that, company acquisitions and other things, saying 'I will stay on the outside' and I slipped my ideas to others. That's rather Machiavellian [laughs].

The second emerging mode of manipulation is repetition. The manager being evaluated reiterates the same arguments, using the same elements, thus artificially transforming the intuition into a familiar element for the evaluator. For example, in episode 99 concerning some calculations and figures that respondent 17 intuitively had doubts about, he said:

> I said to myself, 'Hey, one solution would be to change this and that'. So I went back to that guy, but this time with a set of documents with his name on them, etc. and we resumed the discussion as if I hadn't gone to see him the first time… We had a rather technical discussion, on a peer-to-peer basis, about content. And it worked.

Delaying, the third emerging mode, consists in waiting for the right moment to speak and engage in legitimation. In episode 12, respondent 2, a property development lawyer had to talk to people she did not know very well about a technical subject related to construction on which her knowledge was limited. 'I had a sudden intuition. Boom! Then, as always, I sat back… I looked at each of them, wondering how I was going to structure the idea that I had had in order to get them to agree to it'.

Emerging modes in the relational strategy

The third legitimation strategy found in our data, already documented in the literature, is the relational strategy, in which the evaluee mobilises various aspects of their personal relationship with the evaluator to influence them. Our data indicate that it is quite often deployed by managers (nearly 20% of occurrences). They also show that managers use various forms of coercion, consistent with the modes already mentioned in the literature, accounting for half of the occurrences (36 out of 73). For example, respondent 12 in episode 77:

> It was about a missing functionality. We held meetings and someone within the company said 'it can't be done'. But I felt that it was feasible. I felt that it just wasn't possible that it couldn't be done. That was the intuition: it's not possible that it can't be done. So he came to the meeting to explain to me why it couldn't be done… And I said to him, 'Don't waste your time telling me why it can't be done; find a solution so that it works. Because I feel, I'm sure that it can be done. And if I find out later that it was actually feasible, then you're not going to be in my good books'.

At the same time, our data reveal another significant mode, a new one this time, of the relational strategy: personal conviction or when the evaluee shares their positive emotions with the evaluator, usually to spark their enthusiasm. For example, respondent 19 reports that he had a conversation with a peer about the potential of another person:

> You have to take a position. I've done it several times, saying: 'Look, I think that in five years this person will be at such a level. And in ten years I think [the respondent mimes and bangs the table with his fist], I think and I affirm that they can be [bangs the table again] at such a level. I've done that several times [he bangs the table again] (episode 116).

The relational strategy can operate in reference to both negative and positive aspects in the evaluator/evaluee relationship.

New intuition legitimation strategies

In addition to the new modes of already known strategies, our data analysis also revealed several intuition legitimation strategies not hitherto identified: personalisation, transparency, exploration, and a compound strategy.

Personalisation

In the personalisation strategy, the manager strives to augment the cogency of their intuition by imbuing it with their personal value as an individual. In other words, the intuition and the manager who promotes it are presented to the evaluator as if they were a single element submitted to the evaluator's judgement. This strategy may seem similar to the relational strategy described above, however, contrary to the latter which seeks to influence the evaluator's perspective, the personalisation strategy focusses its efforts on the intuition to be evaluated.

We found two modes for this strategy in our data: the manager may either emphasise their credibility as a person or the more technical merit of their experience, their professional expertise. When managers base the legitimacy of their intuition on their personal credibility, they highlight one of their qualities, such as their reliability. This is the case of respondent 11, an international sales director in telephone systems, who in episode 70 encouraged his bosses to respond to a call for tender. 'So I said to them "Trust me, there is a good deal to be had here." Playing it mysterious… I may have some cards up my sleeve that I don't want to show'.

But managers also highlight the value of their experience. For example, when a major IT outage paralysed the company's entire invoicing system, respondent 12, an IT director with recognised expertise in his organisation, legitimated his intuition to his superior on the basis of his experience: 'There is not much to bring in terms of facts other than "I have experience, I sense that it is all going to work out."' (episode 75)

Transparency

The second emerging intuition legitimation strategy, transparency, consists in presenting (directly or indirectly) the intuition for what it is: an intuition. Our data reveal that this strategy is frequent (it accounts for a quarter of occurrences). Some managers even prefer this strategy to the others, like respondent 3 who proudly calls it his 'trademark'.

The intuition may be expressed directly, 'I feel, I don't feel', which clearly reveals the intuitive nature of what is being presented to the evaluator, albeit without naming it as such. For example, respondent 21, managing director of a subsidiary of a large corporation that manufactures machine tools, expressed an intuition to his team about an issue on which he was not an expert (episode 131): 'Because I have less certainty about that, so let me explain: "This is what I feel, what I have understood. This is what I have understood or perceived."'

The transparency strategy may also be indirect, that is, not openly saying that it is an intuition, though not trying to legitimate it with another strategy. There are variations in vocabulary: 'I thought of … in relation to what we were saying the last time, I think that…' (respondent 29, episode 187), 'It's a solution that I rather like' (respondent 30, episode 190), 'I have an idea [laughs]' (respondent 4, episode 26). Finally, what is particularly striking in our data is that this transparency strategy is used in combination with other strategies in two thirds of the cases, that is, as part of a compound strategy as described below.

Exploration

The third strategy emerging from our analysis, exploration, consists in influencing the evaluators by gradually immersing them in an intuitive cognitive process, thus making them more inclined to deem the evaluee's intuition as legitimate. In our data, this strategy comprises two main modes: the maieutic method and brainstorming. In the maieutic method, the manager engages the evaluators in a series of questions (more or less direct questions, depending on the case), sounds them out and subtly guides them toward an intuitive cognitive process:

> I presented [my intuition] differently. First, I asked questions… I sounded out my colleagues actually. (Respondent 19, episode 114)

> The form [I use] is that of questions. I ask questions … so as not to convey my thinking too much, but to orient, accompany, guide them so they go and explore, have them explore the subject of my intuition. (Respondent 4, episode 27)

> It always happens like that – I give them something to think about. I ask them questions, I ask them questions. (Respondent 18, episode 104)

Brainstorming, on the other hand, is usually deployed when the manager is dealing with a group of people and decides to try a collective intuitive experience. For example, respondent 26 in episode 167 explains to his teams that he does not know how to resolve the problem alone and proposes that they conduct a collective brainstorming session during which he asks them to write their ideas down on sticky notes to be posted on a board. He gradually rearranges them in order to visualise the ideas: 'I tell them "We need you, don't hold back!" … They throw out ideas… We don't always try to orient them, but we have observed that the group goes exactly where we want to go…'

Finally, whether through a series of questions when the evaluator is alone or through a creativity activity for a group, managers who deploy an exploration strategy strive to legitimate their intuitions by guiding evaluators to expand their thinking until they are engaged in an intuitive cognitive process on the subject. This strategy may seem similar to certain modes of rationalisation (immersion and experimentation), but it differs in its target (it is aimed at the evaluator, not the intuition to be legitimated) and its principle (engaging in an intuitive process, not highlighting a characteristic of the object).

Compound strategy

The last strategy emerging from our data consists in combining several of the strategies described so far, which is why we called it a 'compound strategy'. For example, in episode 142, respondent 23 seeks to legitimate to her manager her intuition about the soundness of certain transformations in the human resources management system and combines several strategies to do so.

To start with, she presented her idea as very positive and desirable, using language consistent with the objectives and preferences of her manager (manipulation through a semantic shift):

> This person had just been appointed a few months prior and she came from the Innovation department. So I said to myself, well, this new director … she will want to carry out large-scale projects that have a big impact, and then … since she comes from Innovation, if I propose an innovative method, then she will necessarily…

Therefore, she presented her idea as an innovation (rationalisation through experimentation) and artificially positioned it in the competitive context (manipulation through mystification):

> I showed her a mini prototype … you use that to draw them into your project… And then I explained that [the main competitor] hadn't done it yet and that they were just getting started… To cause my boss to react out of panic, saying 'Quick quick quick! They've done it, we have to do it' … [laughs]

Finally, she deployed a relational strategy emphasising the payoff (recognition by colleagues): 'And I said to her "Look, uhm … would you like to contribute to a big project… And your opinion is very important… Your expertise in this area would be a major asset for our group…"'

Such compound strategies are prevalent in our data. They are at the core of 133 episodes (i.e., seven out of 10, see Table 5). It is also noteworthy that such strategies overwhelmingly include rationalisation, as shown in Figure 1.

Moreover, as seen in Figure 1, in the quarter of compound strategy cases without rationalisation, our data indicate that manipulation (18 occurrences) or coercion (9) are more often present.

Furthermore, our data also suggest that rationalisation, manipulation and coercion are frequently associated with transparency in compound strategies. Transparency is present in nearly half the compound strategy episodes (see Table 5), but it is usually accompanied by one of the other three strategies mentioned above. Respondent 8 offers an illustration in episode 47 where he combines transparency and rationalisation:

> When I joined company X, I was asked to go and carry out a study on opening up new markets [in two Eastern European countries] … I came back with an intuition… I felt that there was a market to be had there … and I knew how we should go about approaching it… I had to go and make a presentation to the board of directors… I was 32 or 33 at the time. I had to go and sell them on the idea that the company should invest in these countries… I decided to hedge my bets and use two approaches. I started by sketching out a feeling, an impression of what it could be like, and then I gave them much more rational elements.

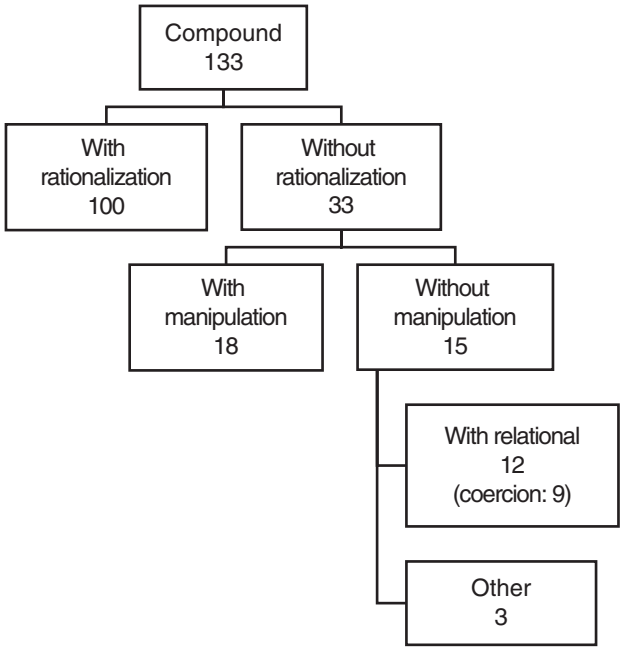

Figure 1. Rationalisation, manipulation and (coercive) relational strategies in compound strategies.
Source: Own elaboration

In our data, the type of strategy most frequently deployed by managers seeking to legitimate their intuitions is the compound strategy, often accompanied by transparency strategies, and very frequently by strategies of rationalisation, manipulation or coercion.

Closing discussion

Observing that managers' use of their intuitions is effective and proven in organisations (Barnard, 1938; Coget et al., 2009; Dane & Pratt, 2007; Hodgkinson et al., 2009; Kahneman & Klein, 2009; Salas et al., 2010), but that in these same organisations the myth of rationality continues to endure (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; March, 1982, 1999, 2010; Meziani, 2020), in this study we investigated the way that managers reconcile their use intuition with the social expectations that the organisation imposes on them. In other words, what are the strategies that managers deploy to legitimate their intuitions within organisations? Our analysis of 191 episodes allowed us to shed light on seven main strategies deployed by managers, as well as some of their specific modes: rationalisation, manipulation, relational

strategy, personalisation, transparency, exploration, and compound strategy.

From a theoretical point of view, our study enriches our knowledge of legitimation strategies and their modes, especially at the inter-individual level, which has been largely under explored; existing research has essentially focussed on legitimation situations involving organisational actors and objects such as firms, the media, corporate strategy or evolutions in different sectors (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Tost, 2011; Vaara et al., 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2007). Strikingly, our study reveals the sizeable presence of the compound strategy, which consists in combining several legitimation strategies with each other. Its overwhelming presence in the data leads us to believe that a single strategy rarely suffices for a manager to legitimate their intuitions. This certainly reflects the complexity of relations in a dynamic managerial context. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to explore the way this strategy varies according to the type of manager. However, determining whether there is a relation between the two and understanding its nature could teach us a great deal. Our data indicate, furthermore, that while the compound strategy often includes a direct or indirect transparency strategy, it almost always contains a component of rationalisation (most often), manipulation or coercion (as a mode of the relational strategy): a go-to trio of strategies and modes whose popularity may be indicative of their effectiveness. Our data do not allow us to affirm anything in this regard, however, as we did not include the effects of legitimation strategies in our data collection. Additional research could be carried out in this direction.

At the same time, the prevalence of rationalisation in our results, both in terms of the variety of its modes and the scale of its deployment, implicitly suggests the preponderance and strength of the ideology of rationality in many organisations, which corroborates the observations of Dane and Pratt (2007) or Cabantous and Gond (2011). It would therefore be interesting to explore further the effectiveness of the different intuition legitimation strategies, especially for comparative purposes. Is rationalisation more effective than the other strategies? In light of the dominance of the rationality ideology, we might imagine it thus, but then we would have to investigate why the other strategies exist and, consequently, what happens when managers deploy them. Are they more or less effective? Are their intuitions taken less seriously? Do intuitions have less weight in decisions than if they had been presented as rational? In the same perspective, it would also be interesting to take into account the characteristics of the evaluator. While previous studies have remained relatively neutral in this matter, certainly owing to their organisational level of analysis (Bitektine & Haack, 2015), inter-individual dynamics are more heavily dependent on the characteristics of each actor: cognitive orientation, personality, etc. This dimension is beyond the scope of our study, which is exploratory and centred on the identification of strategies, especially given the great diversity of compound strategies deployed by the respondents. Further quantitative research ought to be done in this direction which would rigorously take into account the psychological traits of evaluators in measuring the effectiveness of legitimation strategies relative to each other. Given the variety of types of intuition (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Glöckner & Witteman, 2010), we also think it would be useful to try to cross-reference legitimation strategies with forms of intuition to determine whether certain combinations prove to be more effective than others. Another striking point is that the normalisation strategy, although identified in the literature, does not appear in our results. It is conceivable that deploying such a strategy would be less appropriate for legitimating something very personal like intuitions, especially in an inter-individual relationship where evoking social norms may appear condescending to the evaluator and therefore counterproductive for whoever is trying to gain their assent.

In addition to these research contributions, our study may also enrich managerial practice, particularly by shedding light on the challenge of accepting intuitions in organisations. The variety of legitimation strategies (and their modes) highlighted by our study suggest that intuition is frowned upon in numerous organisational situations. A consequence of this finding is that it is important not to fall into the trap of taking the impression that intuitions are little used for reality. Many intuitions are in fact dressed up to hide their true nature. The weight and importance of managers' intuitions in organisations are certainly greater than they may appear at first glance, and it would be a grave error to underestimate them. This could adversely affect practitioners' understanding of managerial issues and, more importantly, may lead to neglecting reserves of expertise and organisational creativity. Moreover, the massive use we observed of rationalisation and legitimation strategies other than transparency indicates that to make more room for intuition in organisations, recognising its intrinsic value (which is what studies usually recommend, e.g., Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004) is not enough. A major obstacle lies in the social value of intuition. Although managers attach importance to their personal intuitions, they make significant use of rationalisation to legitimate them. But in doing so, they directly reinforce the socio-organisational norm of the superiority of rationality, and thus play a part in their own intuitions not being acknowledged for what they are, nor their true value being recognised. Inversely, in their eye, the intuitions of others certainly appear more valuable when they are not presented as intuitions and when they are legitimated (especially when rationalised). It is therefore worth investigating the degree to which rationalisation and other intuition legitimation strategies contribute to impoverishing or

diminishing the very content of intuitions. Making more room for intuitions in organisations and benefiting from their potential would require challenging, at least partially, the ideology of rationality in organisations so that the expectations of managers would be less tainted by it. In this regard, while today's managers have learned about the legitimation of intuitions by practising it in the field, they could be encouraged to engage in critical reflexivity and become fully cognizant of their own expectations of rationality. In the same perspective, training the next generation of managers on these issues thanks to an evolution in management education (Czarniawska, 2003) would also prove to be beneficial.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Illustrations of managers' intuition legitimation strategies and modes (respondent number – episode number)

Strategies focussing on the element to legitimate	
Rationalisation	
Immersion	'Hmm … when I got that idea and I was quite sure of it, I brought someone with me "Come and see"' (19–123)
Experimentation	'I didn't tell my boss that I would go to extremes, because I don't know if you can really say that. In any case, I put the colleague to the test [the one I have doubts about] to see whether he's as good as I think or not'. (19–121)
Logical discourse	'Then it's about developing a logical explanation, where you try to bring together all the different elements so that at a given point you are able to say to yourself that the thing is logical and that there is surely a basis for what you are feeling'. (4–24)
Figures and profitability	'If I don't want to invest in this project, I can rationalize. I can say, "Great idea, but at the same time there are three other things that are more important. We have to focus on those three things and do them better, rather than adding a million other things."' (14–89)
Problem-solution narrative	'In order for people to be able to situate the subject of the intuition within the whole, there has to be a story. You have to give it meaning. […] And so I have actually slipped things into the explanation which made the other person's mouth water. It's not calculations and figures that get them excited, it's what they see […], they want the [product], they say to themselves, "Oh yeah, it's true that we can sell [this product] in these conditions. [This kind of] product is already being sold under these conditions."' (8–44)
Manipulation	
Transfer responsibility	'It's much better if it's other people who present the legitimating elements to say that we have to do something tomorrow, even if I'm the one who's guiding them [smiles]'. (9–53)
Repetition	'If you have a superior who says 'Hmm, don't bother me with that, I have other things to do', you can keep at them, you can ask them again a couple of times'. (27–172)
Delay	'I'm not going to just say "I had an idea when I woke up this morning." […] Instead, before talking to him about it, I will try to – how shall I put it? – analyze it, to see whether it's doable, whether it's feasible, what the potential benefits are, what results are possible, the amount of work that will be required… Basically I will analyze it first. Rather than going to him and saying straight out that I had an idea this morning. Because the risk then is that I fall flat on my face and he says to me "No, your idea … look, it just doesn't hold water."' (20–128)
Semantic shift	'It depends on who I'm talking to. I think that in such cases it's really about communication… And… So sometimes you have an intuition where there are people who don't want to listen to you because they are too… And so sometimes you try to get people to understand things by letting them burn themselves a little bit… So they become aware…' (4–23)
Mystification	'If you are completely negative they will wonder why I am negative from the outset… Whereas if you are really open … but you make a good argument then everyone will say that you are right. I will say "it's a super project, you have worked really well [but] unfortunately we don't have the money for it this year so we are not going to invest in this." Then there's no discussion because if I say there's no money that means there's no money. Even though you know the truth, whether you have the money or not'. (14–89)
Personalisation	
Credibility	'The more you work with the same team, the better they know you, the more it proves to be true in reality, in the way your bid in response to a call for tenders comes together or not, the more proof you have that you know how to do this type of analysis. So at some point they shift to having almost absolute confidence in you, saying to themselves "If he feels it, if he perceives it, then it must be true. That means there is no way we can miss."' (28–173)
Experience	'Oh, I explain it differently. I don't talk to people about intuitions; instead I talk about my experience in retail [smiles]'. (1–1)
Transparency	
Direct sharing	'Right now there is an ongoing product development that I have my doubts about [laugh] and it's been two years. When the designer proposed the first drawings, I thought they were … magnificent. Then we started to work on development. And one day … they told me that they weren't able to do it, but that they had found a [foreign supplier]. So I said "If our usual partners and our in-house [specialists] are unable to do it, then I have my doubts about it. I have my doubts. We can't move forward with this. And that's where we are now."' (15–94)
Indirect sharing	'I share my intuitions. I will tell the person, "I see this and that and so on. And what about you, how do you perceive it?"'. (16–97)

(Continued)

Appendix A (Continued) Illustrations of managers' intuition legitimation strategies and modes (respondent number – episode number)

Strategies focussing on the element to legitimate	
Relational	
Personal conviction	'So I tell them "There is definitely something that will make it work" … These are certainties that something will work … that there is another solution…'. (23–141)
Reward-coercion	'I create a sense of intimacy, albeit artificial, with the person so … that they will want to support me. That's it'. (2–12)
Exploration	
Maieutic method	'So I have my intuition and also I have my questions, a bit like a coach. I use that sort of technique, I mean I don't try to convey my thinking, but I do try to orient, accompany and guide them to explore, have the specialist explore the subject of my intuition'. (4–27)
Brainstorming	'I think that if I told them that I had an intuition, that would stress them out more than anything. So, in the end I try … through all the information they have themselves… And they are the ones who give me something to think about. I ask them questions: "Okay let's delve into this. Why not look into it? Give me a reason why you would say no. So we have to look into this subject… Let's dig into it." It's extremely rare to find a situation where they say they don't want to look into it'. (18–104)
Compound strategy	'I had an intuition, I had this feeling that it would work. And so I sold them on my idea… I went at it in two ways. I started by imparting a feeling, an impression of how it could turn out, through projection, telling them, "This is what it could look like, this is what the situation could be…" And then I gave them much more rational elements'. (8–47)

Source: Own elaboration