Locus of Control and Its Relationship With Other Constructs: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Abstract:
In recent years, increased attention has been given to the study of organizational work dynamics and personality characteristics of individuals. Numerous studies of interrelationships between Locus of Control and other constructs have been conducted in the recent past. Prominent theories have linked perceptions of control in various forms to employee well-being (broadly conceptualized to include positive attitudes and absence of physical and psychological symptoms) as well as to other variables. The present study is an attempt to document the research work concerning Locus of Control and its role in various Organizational variables of interest. Various theories of LOC have also been discussed along with the moderating role of Locus of Control.

Key words: Locus of Control, Attribution, Moderator.

Introduction: Locus of Control is used to describe individual’s perceptions of the extent to which they have control over outcomes in their lives (Lefcourt et al., 1981). The construct is measured on a continuum from Internals (individuals who believe that they themselves control outcomes) to Externals (individuals who believe that the outside environment control outcomes) (Rotter, 1966). The research concerning Locus of Control has been rapidly evolving since Rotter’s first article on the subject in 1966. Since then, numerous studies have been conducted regarding Locus of Control (Dailey, 1980; Kasperson, 1982; Knoop, 1981). Furnham and Steele (1993) state that Locus of Control is conceived of as a belief that a response will, or will not, influence the attainment of reinforcement. Thus, Locus of Control is an individual’s belief in his or her own ability to influence outcomes. Prominent theories have linked perceptions of control in various forms to employee well-being as well as other variable. For example, one of the most widely studied model of job stress i.e. Karasek’s demands-control stress model (1979), suggests that control at work buffers the impact of job stressors on well-being.

Internal and External Locus of Control: Literature review indicates that internals and externals differ in numerous ways, particularly in terms of their cognitive activity and environmental mastery. Research supports the notion that internality is associated with positive well-being both on and off the job. Studies have revealed that people with internal Locus of Control (ILOCs) have higher levels of perceived autonomy at work (Spector and O’Connell, 1994), are more motivated, involved and feel more able to participate in decision making than externals (Kimmons and Greenhaus, 1976). An investigation of the effects of Locus of Control and task complexity on task...
characteristics (Perrewe and Mizerski, 1987) reported that higher job enrichment was perceived by ILOCs on complex tasks and by ELOCs on simple tasks. In their meta-analysis on LOC in the working environment, Sorensen and Eby (2006) found that individuals with Internal Locus of Control reported higher levels of job motivation and have more positive social experiences. Researchers have also noted that Externals are more likely to resort to the use of coercive power while Internals are more likely to use persuasive forms of power (for example, Goodstadt and Hjelle, 1973; Mitchell et al., 1975). It has also been found that internals are more considerate supervisors and are more satisfied in a participative work environment (Hendricks, 1985; Licata et al., 1986; Mitchelle et al., 1975; Pryer and Distefano, 1971; Runyon, 1973; Spector, 1988). Entrepreneurial behavior has also been related with Locus of Control in a number of studies (Begley and Boyd, 1987; Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Brockhaus, 1975; Durand and Shea, 1974; Miller and Toulouse, 1986; Shapero, 1975; Taylor, 1985). The findings of these studies showed that Internals are more actively oriented and are likely to possess entrepreneurial qualities (e.g. take risks). The beneficial effects of internal Locus of Control on well-being has been studied in the areas of both work and general life (for example, Frese, 1989; Lefcourt et al., 1981; Ross and Mirowsky, 1989; Judge et al, 1998; Doef and Maes, 1999). Overall, Internals were found to have more favourable attitude, less dysfunctional behaviours and higher levels of performance on the job (Blau, 1985; Fusilier et al., 1987; Mia, 1987; Storms and Spector, 1987). Conversely externals have been shown to report more burnout (Glogow, 1986; McIntyre, 1984), job dissatisfaction (Spector, 1982), stress (Halpin et al., 1985; Lester, 1982), alienation (Korman et al., 1981), and lower self-esteem (Lester, 1986).

The sum of the findings of above mentioned studies suggests that Internality plays a significant role in human development and purposeful living. Nevertheless, negative consequences of being internal have also been noted. For example, those who perceive their own abilities and actions as exclusively responsible for their failures are likely to be more stressed and may become more self-punitive (Mitchell et al., 1979).

Numerous theories exist in literature which explains the fact what actually contributes to this personality construct (LOC) and its impact on various individual and organizational characteristics. Few among them are described in the following section:

**Locus of Control Theories**

**Social learning theory**

The concept of Locus of Control is grounded in Rotter’s social learning theory (Rotter1954).

Rotter’s social learning theory can be represented as: NP = f (FM + NV) where NP is need potential, FM is freedom of movement, and NV is need valence. To paraphrase Rotter, the potential for a behavior leading to the satisfaction of a need (NP) is a joint function of the expectancy that it will lead to reinforcement and the perceived value of the reinforcement. So the original concept of LOC was within the context of the
expectation that reinforcement was under personal or environmental control. The reason why this dispositional-situational distinction is important is because it has implications for the stability and change of LOC over time. Expectancies are influenced by situational factors and are therefore changeable, whereas stable dispositions tend to be resistant to change across situations.

It may be noted that there are several social learning approaches (including Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1973; Rotter et al., 1972; Strain 1993; Naila 2001). All of them share the premise that learning takes place in a social context and that it is learning which accounts for human behavior. Social learning theories focus on behaviours that can be very discrete events or subtle things such as avoiding certain situations or behaving confidently (Phares, 1992) accounts for human behavior. As with most learning approaches, the environment is seen as the major force shaping behavior. With proper control of the environment, the learning process may explain both the acquisition and modification of behavior (Phares, 1992).

**Attribution theory** : Another theory similar and often considered the same as Locus of Control is the “Attribution theory” by Bernard Weiner (1972). It is a theory about how people explain things. No matter the cause, we have a strong need to understand and explain what is going on in our world. Because people must explain, it opens up some interesting influence possibilities (Bem, 1972). When we offer explanations about why things happened, we can give one of two types. One, we can make an external attribution. Two, we can make an internal attribution. An external attribution assigns causality to an outside agent or force. An internal attribution claims that some outside thing motivated the event. By contrast, an internal attribution assigns causality to factors within a person. Or as the sinner would say, “I’m guilty, grant me forgiveness.” An internal attribution claims that the person was directly responsible for the event (Bem, 1972). The attribution theory and Locus of Control is so closely related that it is often considered to be the same concept.

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<tr>
<th>STABILITY DIMENSION</th>
<th>LOCUS OF CAUSALITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>STABLE</td>
<td>INTERNAL ABILITY</td>
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**Source: Weiner (1972)**

The locus of causality referred to in the figure relates to whether the individual perceives the cause of success or failure to lie with *Internal* (relating to oneself) or *External* (environment/situational) factors. These two theories are the predominant theories in the Locus of Control literature.

**Locus of Control and Other Constructs**

The literature for LOC and its relationship with other constructs is reviewed in the following section: LOC is often studied in a work-related environment and has been shown to relate to many work related outcomes. For example, job satisfaction...
work performance (Anderson and Schneier, 1978; Arnold, 1985; Avila and Fern, 1986; Colwill, 1987; Govindarajan, 1988; Govindarajan, 1999; Hollenbeck et al., 1988; Miller and Toulouse, 1986), work alienation (Mitchell, 1975; Seeman, 1967; Wolfe, 1972), organizational commitment (Luthans et al., 1987; Spector, 1988), leadership styles (Fusilier et al, 1987; Govindarajan, 1989; Hollenbeck et al., 1988; Mia, 1987; Storms and Spector, 1987), levels of efficiency in the work (Place, 1979), productivity of employees (Johnson et al, 1984), Coping behaviours and levels of worry (Scott, 2010), job security (Peng et al., 2003) and work retirement (Bradley and Web, 1976; Reid and Zigler, 1981). Locus of control also plays a major role in many aspects of human behavior such as achievement motivation, success-orientation, self-control, socially adjustment, independence and expectancy (Almajali, 2013).

Brien (1984) noted Rotter’s (1975) warning that Locus of Control is likely to be most useful as a construct in organizational measures, when it is embedded in a theory that includes both situational and personality variables. In the light of this statement and the relationship of Locus of Control with the constructs mentioned above, it may be noted that Locus of Control is an important variable to be studied.

**Locus of Control Vis-a-vis Role Stress and Coping:** Locus of Control has been found as an antecedent of Role Stress (Organ and Green, 1974; Cohen and Edwards, 1989; Kliewater & Sandier, 1992; Seifer et al., 1991; Cumins, 1989; Weigel et al., 1989; Cooper et al., 1994; Wilson et al., 1990). Although Keenan and McBain (1979) argued that there is a lack of conceptual support for this relationship, later researchers have proposed several explanations. For instance, Singh and Rhoods (1991) found that those with an internal Locus of Control experience less role ambiguity, since they tend to be better informed about their role and task environment. Similarly, Von-Emster and Harrison (1998) argued that ‘Internals’ have a greater sense of control over situations and as a result experience less role ambiguity. Other researchers (Parkes, 1994; Wheaton, 1983) have shown that Locus of Control moderated the relationship between stress and mental health. Kalberts and Fogarty (2005) found those with an Internal LOC are less likely to experience a high level of stress but those with an External LOC are more likely to be vulnerable to stress and are more likely to perceive certain events as stressful. In addition, these researchers concluded that external LOC has a significant negative influence on job stress and tends to reduce personal accomplishments and job performance. Cohen and Edwards (1989) concluded that Locus of Control is a personality characteristic that provides the most consistent and strongest evidence of stress moderation; in that case external Locus of Control acted as a vulnerability variable. Locus of Control has been found as an important construct for Stress Coping. Research has shown that individuals who are inclined to view events as more internally controllable tend to exhibit
higher levels of coping self-efficacy, and increased use of problem-focused coping behavior (Chwalisz, 1992; Rahim, 1996). Conversely, an external Locus of Control has been found to be related to poor coping with stress, increased use of emotion-focused coping behavior and self-defeating personality styles (Folkman, 1984; Schill & Beyler, 1992).

Besides relating Locus of Control with Role Stress, various studies exist in literature where Locus of Control has been related with other constructs. The brief of such constructs is given in the following section.

**Locus of Control as a Moderator Variable:** Moderator variable is defined as a qualitative or quantitative variable that affects the direction/strength of the relation between an independent or predictor and a dependent or criterion variable (Barren and Kenney, 1986).

Locus of Control construct has been studied as a moderator function in various studies, for example, Role Stress and Coping relationship (Rashid and Talib, 2013), leader-member relations (Algattan, 1983; Awan, 2003; Awan et al., 2008; Goupil, 1985; Howell and Avolio, 1993; Leonard, 1992; Podsakoff et al.1984), leadership behaviors and faculty outcome (Awan et al., 2011), contingent punishment and work-satisfaction relationship (Podsakoff, 1984), job satisfaction and performance (Dailey, 1980; Brownell, 1981; Kasper, 1982; Judge et al., 2003; Thoresen, 2003), task variability, task difficulty and job performance (Dailey, 1980), organizational Role Stress and managerial effectiveness (Srivastava, 2009; Rahim, 1996; Daniels and Guppy, 1992), negative attitude and external Locus of Control (Kasper, 1982), Internal Locus of Control and job skill variability and job feedback (Knoop, 1981), Locus of Control and self-efficacy (Judge et al., 1998), self-reported performance feedback and personal sacrifice relationship (Tang et al., 1996), job satisfaction and worker productivity (Runyon, 1973; Kimmons and Greenhaus, 1976; Abdel-Halim, 1980; Knoop, 1981; King et al., 1982; Perrew, 1986; Spector and O’Conell, 1994), task complexity and perception of task characteristics (Perrew and Mizerski, 1987). These studies have found the moderating effect of Locus of Control on various individual and organizational characteristics.

**References**


