

Locus of control



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Theories of personality

Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. The concept was developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1954, and has since become an important aspect of personality studies. One's "locus" (Latin for "location") can either be internal or external. If a person has an internal locus of control, that person attributes success to his or her own efforts and abilities. They have a positive expectancy for success to come from attempts at personal control. A person with an external locus of control, who attributes his or her success to luck or fate, has a negative expectancy for success to come from attempts at personal control.

Rotter (1975) cautioned that internality and externality represent two ends of a continuum, not an either/or typology. Internals tend to attribute outcomes of events to their own control. Externals attribute outcomes of events to external circumstances. This has obvious implications for differences between internals and externals in terms of their achievement motivation.

The locus of control has been extensively studied since its development. Many studies have addressed the relation of locus of control to student achievement. Is it more academically beneficial to have an internal or external locus of control? Rotter (1966) believed people with an internal locus of control exhibit high achievement motivation and low outer-directedness. This belief is supported by one study by Pugliese (1994), who found that locus of control had a negative correlation with course withdrawal and failure. In other words, the more students had an external locus of

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control, the more likely they were to withdraw from the course. Another study by Njus & Brockway (1999) gives further evidence, as they found that students with an internal locus of control showed better adjustment to college in terms of academic achievement and social adjustment.

Since this evidence clearly indicates that people with an internal locus of control will be more successful academically than those with an external locus of control, I wonder if it is possible for individuals with an external locus of control to change? Henryk (1996) studied the stability locus of control in adolescence in a longitudinal study. They “ examined the relationship between the type ... of locus of control ascertained in the first testing and its changes after one and two years”. Despite girls demonstrating slightly more external locus of control than boys, no real significant changes among boys and girls in locus of control, which indicates that adolescence is a period of loci stability.

Bianod & MacDonald (1971) hypothesized that “ participants having external locus of control orientations would conform to both subtle and overt influence attempts, whereas internals would react against such attempts”. They found that externals conformed under low influence and high influence. In contrast, internals were negatively influenced, though some reacted under high influence only. However, the difference between internals under no-and high-influence conditions was hardly significant ($p < .10$, two-tailed test).

Parks, Becker, Chamberlain, & Crandell (1975) took these findings a step further to develop a workshop for students with the purpose of preparing them to face and work through fear in order to overcome self-defeating

behaviors. They hypothesized that participants in the workshop would “ become more internally controlled than a control group not experiencing the workshop”. They found that the workshop experience did affect self-reported locus of control, and that the effect remained relatively stable over time. Posttest scores were indicative of a stronger preference for internal control.

Works Cited

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