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EXECUTIVE BEHAVIOUR AT WORK : RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCUS OF CONTROL

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship of executives' locus of control with certain personal orientations and job related behaviour. Personal orientations included need for achievement and two work values, namely, expressive work ethic and instrumental work ethic. Job related behaviour contained both positive and negative work outcomes. Specifically, job performance, job satisfaction, organizational identification, organizational loyalty and sense of powerfulness belonged to positive work outcomes, while various dimensions of job strain, namely, frustration, lack of leisure time, feeling of uneasiness, physical strain, work aversion, unjust work and reward, latent hostility and bearing others incompetence, and alienation and intention to leave the organization formed the part of negative work outcomes. Two hundred and fifty executives from seven private and three public sector organizations participated in the study. Data were analyzed through factor analysis and correlation techniques. The trend of relationship suggested that internality was positively related with positive work outcomes, and personal orientations; while, negative work outcomes were negatively related. Implications of the findings were discussed.

What determines one's destiny has been the question of philosophers and social scientists since the time of existence of humanity. Some people believe that they are the masters of their own destiny while others believe that whatever happens in their lives is just a matter of chance and luck. The first kind of persons are called internals, while the latter kind who believe that they don't have any control over events in their lives are termed as externals. Persons' belief of the sources of their destiny is called locus of control.

The concept of locus of control as proposed by Rotter (1966) refers to linkage between action and results or outcomes, to what extent an action produces a result. Those who have high perception of such linkage (believe that their actions produce the results) are labeled as internals, and those who perceive poor linkage (believe that results are not due to their actions) are said to be externals or with external locus of control.

Persons' belief system has a great impact on persons' motivation and behaviour.

With this hypothesis in mind many researchers have explored the relationship of locus of control with various

dimensions of work behaviour. A brief review of such study follows.

A large number of studies report that externals are more alienated, less satisfied and less involved on their jobs than internals (see, Spector, 1982 for review). Why are externals more dissatisfied with their jobs? Probably, they feel that they don't have any control over those organizational outcomes that are important to them, and hence they crib. In the same situation, internals would feel that if there is an undesirable outcome, it is because of them and there is no body else to be blamed for the situation. Internal locus of control has been consistently found to be positively related to high job performance (Andrisani & Nestel, 1976; Majumdar, MacDonald & Greever, 1977)

Locus of control has also been studied in relation to stress and health. Persons with internal locus of control report better health and perceive the job as less stressful (Chandriah et al., 1997; Kirkcaldy, Furrham, & Cooper, 1994, Spector & O'Connell, 1994; Kirkcaldy & Martin, 2000).

The review of studies gives a very clear indication that internals report high job satisfaction, high job performance, better health and are less stressed as compared to externals. The question may arise then as to what is the purpose of this study? The response is that there are very few studies on managerial sample and particularly on Indian managers.

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Further, the earlier studies have preponderantly used Rotter's scale for measuring locus of control which has only two dimensions, namely, internals and externals, This study has used Levenson's (1974) scale for measuring locus of control. This scale consists of three dimensions namely, internal, external, and powerful other persons. In Indian conditions, many people believe that role of powerful others becomes very crucial for ascertaining favourable or desirable outcomes. However this researcher proposes that powerful other person is part of external control only .

On the basis of available researches following propositions are forwarded:

1. Internality will be positively related to need for achievement and expressive work ethic.
2. Internality will be positively related to positive work outcomes.
3. Internality will be negatively related to negative work outcomes.
4. Powerful person orientation will be positively related to externality.
5. Externality and powerful person orientation will be negatively related with positive work outcomes.
6. Powerful person orientation and externality will be positively related with negative work outcomes.

Method

Sample

The participants in the study were equitably drawn: 250 junior and middle level managers from seven private and three public sector work organizations in north India. All were male and their ages ranged from 28 to 57 years with an average of 35.38 years. The executives belonged to wide range of functional areas, including accounts, engineering, personnel, production, quality control, R. & D. and sales. An attempt was made to represent most of the departments in the companies, as far as possible. The average job experience of the respondents was 11.13 years and their average educational qualification was university or college graduation or equivalent professional training.

Measures

Locus of Control: It refers to the degree to which people believe that they are masters of their own destiny. This construct was measured through Levenson's (1974) three dimensional locus of control measure. The three dimensions

were: Internal, external, and powerful other person. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items, with 8 items for each of the three dimensions. A 5-point scale was used for assessment.

Need for Achievement Questionnaire: It refers to a persons' constant endeavour to do things better. It was measured through a 5-item questionnaire, containing the issues regarding feedback, responsibility, risk taking and competitiveness.

Protestant Work Ethic Questionnaire: Blood's (1969) Protestant Work Ethic questionnaire was used. It consisted of 8 items. Through Principal Component analysis of the eight items with oblique rotation, we found two dimensions: Expressive Work Ethic and Instrumental Work Ethic. This study has used response categories on 5- point scale.

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire: Cook and Wall's (1980) 9-item organizational commitment questionnaire was used. Principal component analysis of the nine items with oblique rotation revealed two factors. On the basis of factor loading the two factors were named as:

1. Organization Identification: Pride in organization, internalization of organizational goal.
2. Organizational loyalty: Affection for and attachment to the organization, a wish to remain a member of the organization.

Job Satisfaction Questionnaire : A 20-item questionnaire containing 20 facets of job satisfaction was used. Principal component Analysis with oblique rotation yielded two factors but none of the items loaded higher on the second factor, thus single factor of job satisfaction was used in the analysis.

Job Performance: Job performance was measured through an adapted version of Sutton and Ford's (1982) questionnaire of Personal effectiveness. This questionnaire contained items regarding effectiveness in getting things done on the job, helping people, arranging work and coping with unexpected demands.

Sense of Power: It refers to persons' feeling of being valued and ability to influence. It was measured through a single item: "I have a sense of power in this organization."

Alienation: This construct was measured through single item: "In this organization I feel alienated."

Intent to leave: This construct was also measured through single item - "I intend to leave this organization as soon as possible."

Job Strain Questionnaire: A 35-item questionnaire having various facets of negative experience and emotional

reactions was used. A principal component analysis with oblique rotation revealed eight factors in job strain. The eight factors are:

1. *Frustration*: Experience blocking of goal directed behaviour characterized by energized negative emotion.
2. *Lack of leisure time*: An experience in which the person feels that one has not got any time to devote to self and for fulfilling social obligations.
3. *Feelings of uneasiness*: Experience of discomfort and symptoms of uneasiness.
4. *Physical strain*: Maladjustive bodily symptoms like difficulty in keeping temper, feeling fidgety, feeling of tightness in chest etc.
5. *Work aversion*: Feeling like taking long time off from the job without any guilt. Don't feel eager to go to work.
5. *Unjust work and reward*: Sense of helplessness by watching that the performers are given large amount of work, but reward is given to some one else, i.e., sense of helplessness because of inequitable distribution of work and reward.
7. *Latent hostility*: Experience of negative emotional arousal, which is suppressed from public eye with effort. Examples of latent hostility could be : Reaction to stupid instructions of a fussy boss.
3. *Bearing of others incompetence*: Experience of putting up with others incompetence.

Means, standardization and Alpha Reliability of each variable used in the present paper is presented in Appendix I.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reveals that executives score relatively higher on internality as compared to externality or powerful people orientation. It is also revealed that executives do not have an extreme paranoid kind of view that they are the sole controllers of their fate or destiny. A low but a positive significant correlation of internality with externality and powerful people control orientation suggests that depending on the situation or event, managers are able to discriminate who are the actual controllers. The same executive may feel under control and behave like an internal in one situation, and may feel being controlled by significant powerful others or behave like external who find things happening randomly. A strong correlation of .79 between externality and powerful person control suggests that externality and powerful person orientation have a lot of shared variance and, in both, the

source of control is outside the person under consideration. This supports our fourth proposition.

Table 1. Mean, SD and Intercorrelations of Locus of Control Dimensions

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlations		
			1	2	3
1. Internal	28.72	2.98	1.00		
2. Significant Person	20.69	4.56	.14	1.00	
3. Chance	19.11	5.08	.17	.79	1.00

Locus of Control and Personal Orientations

As expected, internal locus of control was positively related with need for achievement and expressive work ethic. Need for achievement has been a crucial factor in managerial performance and success. Managers with a high need for achievement set, measurable, high but achievable goals. Such people take moderate risks and aspire to better their own previous performance. Such people also indulge in skill related games in preference to chance related games. It is quite obvious to expect that executives with high need for achievement would also believe that whatever they achieve in their lives are the results of their own omissions and commissions. (Table 2)

Table 2. Correlation of Locus of Control Dimensions with Executive Behaviour

Variable	Internal	Person	Chance
	r	r	r
1 Expressive Work Ethic	.39**	.01	.04
2 Instrumental Work Ethic	.02	.20**	.17*
3 Need for Achievement	.23**	.04	.06
4 Organizational Identification	.29**	-.12	.07
5 Organizational Loyalty	.06	-.40**	-.37**
6 Job Performance	.31**	-.10	.00
7 Job Satisfaction	.23**	-.21**	-.15
8 Powerfulness	.34**	-.14*	-.05
9 Frustration	-.02	.43**	.42**
10 Lack of Leisure time	.29**	.38**	.44**

Variable	Internal	Person	Chance
	r	r	r
11 Feeling of Uneasiness	-23**	.00	-.10
12 Physical Strain	-.13*	.22**	.20**
13 Work Aversion	-.19*	.06	.02
14 Bearing Other's Incompetence	-.05	.21**	.18*
15 Unjust Work and Reward	-.19**	.56**	.51**
16 Latent Hostility	-.14*	.38**	.36**
17 Alienation	-.24**	.28**	.29**
18 Intent to Leave	-.17*	.24**	.24**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Expressive work ethic - a component traditionally known as protestant work ethic was also positively related with internal locus of control. Protestant work ethic has been related to persistence, postponement of need gratification, valuing time as a resource. Persons with high expressive work ethic treat work as a means for expressing ones' creative self. A good job done satisfies them a lot and a bad job done lowers their self-esteem. People with high expressive work ethic believe that any thing can be achieved through sincerity and hard work. The same is the belief of internals and hence a positive correlation.

Instrumental work ethic, means that work is only a means to earn sufficiently to take care of personal and family needs. Thus the prime motive to work comes from outside and not from within. On examination of overall trend there is adequate support for proposition 1.

Positive Work Outcomes

Organizational commitment, job performance, job satisfaction, and sense of powerfulness were studied in the category of positive outcomes. Sense of powerfulness is a single item variable. Table 2 revealed that all positive work outcomes, but organizational loyalty showed positive correlations with internality. These findings are inline with previous studies that internals show a high level of performance and report higher job satisfaction. The study also revealed a positive association between locus of control and effective commitment also. The explanation for such finding is straightforward. Executives with high score on internality spend enough effort and acquire adequate competence to mould the work outcomes in their favour. If that happens they feel positive. They put higher effort and seek more

information and take more initiative thus perform better. People like their organization as they feel valued and believe that their efforts bring out results. Sense of powerfulness also develops when executives feel whatever they try within the reasonable limits, that happens. If executives' efforts are fetching rewards, their contributions are recognized, they may feel a sense of powerfulness. Powerfulness and internal locus of control has meeting ground in the belief that, "I can influence."

Externality and powerful person orientation are either not related or negatively related with positive work outcomes. Organizational loyalty, job satisfaction, and sense of powerfulness were negatively related with powerful person orientation. The results suggest that executives report low job satisfaction, low organizational loyalty and powerlessness when they perceive that important rewards or decisions are controlled by significant others sitting in powerful positions. They perceive themselves inconsequential without their support. If executives develop feeling of powerlessness because everything is perceived to be granted by powerful people, they will withdraw psychologically. Similarly, job satisfaction and organizational loyalty were negatively related with externality. The results are in line with earlier studies suggesting that managers faced with undesirable and unexpected work outcomes, start cribbing and complaining, thus reporting low satisfaction, low loyalty towards the organization. The findings are partially supportive of proposition five.

Negative Work Outcomes

Eight job strain dimensions and two variables namely, alienation and intent to leave organization were studied in the category of negative work outcomes. Out of 10 negative outcome variables seven were negatively related with internality. Only lack of leisure time was positively related with all the three dimensions of locus of control. First the results of lack of leisure time are examined. A positive relationship between internality and lack of leisure time suggests that internal executives spend too much time on work and are not able to devote adequate time with family and on leisure activities. This happens because internals feel that they have set a particular goal, they have to attain it come what may, thus lack of leisure time. A positive relationship with powerful others and externality may be due to the reason that executives are not in control of events and don't plan their time properly and thus fail to complete the assignments on time. Alternatively, these managers are given too much work which they are unable to refuse because

they know that significant others in powerful positions control their valued rewards and they have to be pleased, hence a positive relationship. Thus internals work longer because they want to, whereas externals including high scorers on powerful other people orientation work longer because they have to remaining seven relationships are in the expected direction suggesting that internality reduces the probability of negative reactions among executives. The results simply suggest that executives with high internality scores feel less strained. They report lower: uneasiness, physical strain, work aversion, latent hostility, and other complaining behaviour like unjust work and reward or bearing others incompetence. These executives also report lower alienation and intention to quit.

The findings regarding externality and powerful person orientation were also in the expected direction. Out of 10 variables 8 relationships are significant in both the cases. We have already discussed the results of lack of leisure time, thus we shall take other variables. Externals and people who believe that powerful others control the events in their lives report higher: frustration, uneasiness, physical strain, work aversion, latent hostility, alienation, intention to leave the organization and other complaining behaviour like unjust work and reward and bearing others incompetence. Congruent with previous findings in the literature externals and powerful other controlled people see things beyond their means and control and thus show a sign of helplessness and report symptoms of strain and intention to quit the organization. Thus the results support the sixth proposition of the study.

The broad trend suggests that internal belief system of executives lead to higher performance, satisfaction and higher organizational commitment and sense of powerfulness. Internal belief system makes the executives persistent, achievement oriented and less vulnerable to stresses experienced at work. But internal belief system is not devoid of problems. Internals blame themselves for failure and poor performance and thus punish themselves severely and are susceptible to depression. External belief system of executives lead to low performance, low satisfaction, high vulnerability to stress. Such belief system is by and large dysfunctional for the executive as a person as well as for the organization. But external belief system come handy when executives are bombarded with so many negative feedback, as executives are able to cope with stresses by externalizing the causes of failure.

Implications Beyond the Study

The results have clearly shown that executives with internal belief system see things better and do things better.

Thus a community looking for productive members of society would like to develop internal belief system among its members. Can we do some thing to change the belief system of people? Can we change the belief system of community members to internal belief system? Internality is not something we are born with. We learn and develop internality, therefore we can change the belief system of executives and community members if the executives and community members so desire. Internality lab, self awareness lab, cognitive reorganization through attribution reengineering, achievement motivation training, assertion training and supportive demand (Pareek,1981) are some of the interventions through which internality can be enhanced. Seligman(1993) has also recommended cognitive reorganization of belief system. He has experimentally demonstrated that optimism can be learned. Persons with high internal locus of control have higher resilience and keep themselves motivated even in the face of initial and temporary setbacks. Internal locus of control and associated resilience is integral part of Emotional Intelligence(Goleman,1998) which is suggested to influence executive success twice more than IQ alone. Thus it is recommended that in order to provide opportunity of success to executives, provide all support necessary for discharging the responsibilities. Expose people and executives to human process labs focusing on internality for enhancing internality.

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Appendix -I

Mean, Standard Deviation and Alpha Reliability of Variables

Variable	M	SD	No. of items	Alpha Reliability	Variable	M	SD	No. of items	Alpha Reliability
Personal Orientations					Alienation	2.67	0.89	1	--
Expressive Work Ethic	15.08	2.26	4	.64	Intent To Leave	2.73	0.90	1	--
Instrumental Work Ethic	13.02	2.41	4	.57	Frustration	20.56	5.29	9	.89
Need For Achievement	18.65	2.78	5	.75	Lack Of Leisure Time	15.42	5.28	6	.87
Positive Work Outcomes Performance	13.99	2.07	4	.87	Feeling Of Uneasiness	12.50	3.08	5	.71
Sense of Powerfulness	3.32	1.03	1	--	Physical Strain	16.69	4.57	8	.84
Organizational Identification	19.05	3.20	5	.81	Work Aversion	2.37	1.19	1	--
Organizational Loyalty	18.92	3.06	4	.77	Unjust Work And Reward	2.03	1.61	2	.45
Job Satisfaction	63.32	12.75	20	.96	Latent Hostility	8.95	2.40	3	.79
Negative Work Outcomes					Bearing of others Incompetence	3.17	0.90	1	--