

THE LOCUS OF CONTROL

Please check true or false to the statements below that best fit your own beliefs. Please do so before reading the rest of this note.

Locus of Control Instrument¹		
	TRUE	FALSE
1. I usually get what I want in life.		
2. I need to be kept informed about news events.		
3. I never know where I stand with other people.		
4. I do not really believe in luck or chance.		
5. I think that I could easily win a lottery.		
6. If I do not succeed on a task, I tend to give up.		
7. I usually convince others to do things my way.		
8. People make a difference in controlling crime.		
9. The success I have is largely a matter of chance.		
10. Marriage is largely a gamble for most people.		
11. People must be the master of their own fate.		
12. It is not important for me to vote.		
13. My life seems like a series of random events.		
14. I never try anything that I am not sure of.		
15. I earn the respect and honors I receive.		
16. A person can get rich by taking risks.		
17. Leaders are successful when they work hard.		
18. Persistence and hard work usually lead to success.		
19. It is difficult to know who my real friends are.		
20. Other people usually control my life.		

¹ A professor in the psychology department at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania, Terry Pettijohn developed this variation to Rotter's original Locus of Control survey.

Scoring the Locus of Control Instrument

Once you have completed the questions on the previous page, tally your score using the table below. For example, if you marked statement #1 true, add 5 points, and if you marked it false add none.

	TRUE	FALSE	MY POINTS
1. I usually get what I want in life.	5	0	
2. I need to be kept informed about news events.	5	0	
3. I never know where I stand with other people.	0	5	
4. I do not really believe in luck or chance.	5	0	
5. I think that I could easily win a lottery.	0	5	
6. If I do not succeed on a task, I tend to give up.	0	5	
7. I usually convince others to do things my way.	5	0	
8. People make a difference in controlling crime.	5	0	
9. The success I have is largely a matter of chance.	0	5	
10. Marriage is largely a gamble for most people.	0	5	
11. People must be the master of their own fate.	5	0	
12. It is not important for me to vote.	0	5	
13. My life seems like a series of random events.	0	5	
14. I never try anything that I am not sure of.	5	0	
15. I earn the respect and honors I receive.	5	0	
16. A person can get rich by taking risks.	0	5	
17. Leaders are successful when they work hard.	5	0	
18. Persistence and hard work usually lead to success.	5	0	
19. It is difficult to know who my real friends are.	0	5	
20. Other people usually control my life.	0	5	
	TOTAL		

The results are scored along the following scale:

<i>Score</i>	<i>Degree of control personality</i>
0 - 15	Very strong external locus of control
20 - 35	External locus of control
40 - 60	Both external and internal locus of control
65 - 80	Internal locus of control
85 - 100	Very strong internal locus of control

Now continue reading the theory and interpretation sections below.

The Locus of Control Concept

Most managers have heard employees who were tardy for work say something like “Sorry I was late, but traffic was outrageous this morning” or “Sorry I was late, but I needed to pick up my shirts from the cleaners.” Although one could weigh the validity of each statement, the differences could represent something else about employee personalities. Even though most of us fancy ourselves to be unique individuals, psychologists have spent years etching out patterns in our personality traits that suggest we share some very similar qualities—those who believe they are capable of controlling events in their lives and those who don’t.

One observer of human behavior, Julian Rotter, developed the concept of “locus of control” (LOC), that is, “Where (locus) is your sense of control in the world—inside or outside?” Rotter developed a forced-choice, 29-question tool to measure the degree to which individuals believe they have the ability to control what happens to them (internal) or how much they think that forces beyond their control affect their situation (external). Variations of Rotter’s concept, called the *locus of control*, have been applied in numerous situations—from building strong marriages to better performance on the golf course, to leadership in corporations—to explain outcomes. Business organizations have used test results to improve retention, examine hiring practices, study and attempt to lower the effects of stress, increase job satisfaction, and encourage employees to take personal responsibility for their actions. Any guesses on whether the employee caught in traffic tends to be more external or internal?

The locus of control idea is based on what psychologists call social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests that an expectation is reinforced² when the expected events or behavior actually occur in the future.³ In other words, if you expect something to happen and it does, your expectation is reinforced, and if your expectation does not occur, your expectation is weakened.⁴ Rotter proposed that whether or not one believes they have control over the causes of reinforcement determines the outcome. This is like the “self-fulfilling prophecy” concept you may have heard about.⁵ Essentially Rotter’s definition of “control” includes anything that you have power over. He postulated that individuals who believe that their own behavior or characteristics determine or cause events possess an *internal locus of control*. On the other hand, people who think that reinforcement following an action is not entirely contingent upon their own actions but instead perceived as luck, fate, chance, or other forces beyond their control have an *external locus of control*.

Like most broad applications of any concept, one might expect exceptions and situations where not everyone fits into the polar internal-external ranges; in other words, we can think of

² Reinforcement is a consequence that immediately follows a response and either takes away “negative stimuli or adds a positive stimulus thereby increasing the probability that the behavior will be repeated.” Amy Mackey, “Power, Pessimism & Prevention,” <[http. www.units.muhiio.edu/psybersite/control/health.shtml](http://www.units.muhiio.edu/psybersite/control/health.shtml)> (accessed on 4 July 2003).

³ Julian B. Rotter, “Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement,” *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 80 (1966): 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

locus of control as a continuum from internal to external. Also, cultural norms have implications for the traits we exhibit.⁶ In some societies, like Japan and China, people are encouraged to adopt more collective behavior unlike American society where individualism is highly practiced. So having differences between cultures is certainly expected. Some people will possess both internal and external traits depending on the events and circumstances. And there may be people who use external beliefs to justify failures even though they frequently exhibit a locus of internal control.

Knowing whether one tends toward internal or external locus of control can help a person think about strategies for career management and lifestyle management in general. For example, individuals who believe they are unable to control or influence their performance may not see a reason to hope to improve.⁷ On the other hand, individuals with a high locus of control may even be overly optimistic about their abilities to create their futures. The LOC instrument can help employees and managers develop strategies that may not only improve conditions in the workplace but also an individual's experiences outside the office.

Interpreting Your Score⁸

Finding out your Locus of Control test results may leave you sitting at your computer screen asking, "So what?" since knowing your score is not going to provide you with much feedback unless you understand what it all means. Scholars have spent years applying the locus of control test to people and situations and reached several conclusions which are listed below. While the list contains the research available at the time this note was written, there is no doubt more information is being developed, tested, and made available all the time.

Read the lists of tendencies in various contexts that describe the characteristics of people with different loci of control and compare with your self-awareness. Do the tendencies ring true? Why or why not? What are the implications of your LOC score for the kind of work you should be seeking? How would your LOC score affect your natural ability to succeed in job offers or contexts that you may be considering?

Here are brief summaries of what social science research has inferred about the relationship between LOC scores and behavior. Again, as you read through them, please reflect on the implications of your score for the kind of work you should be seeking.

⁶ See Geert Hofstede's research on cultural differences.

⁷ Mandy Grantz, "Do You Have the Power to Succeed?"

<<http://www.units.muohio.edu/psybersite/control/education.shtml>. > (accessed on 3 July 2003).

⁸ Except where noted, this entire section is summarized from Julian B. Rotter, "Generalized Expectancies For Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement," *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 80 (1966): 1-21.

Controlling one's environment

- Internals have a tendency to control their weight, adhere to medical regimes, use birth control more effectively, are more open to immunizations and disease prevention, wear seat belts, and take regular trips to their dentists.
- Internals generally inquire about their medical conditions more than externals and are less satisfied with the information health care providers are willing to make available.
- Internals appear to experience lower anxiety levels than externals.⁹
- Independent of intelligence, internals tend to remember more bureaucratic information.
- Women tend to be more external than internal.¹⁰
- Union participation and knowledge of political events is usually higher among internals than externals.
- Generally people in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be externals than internals.
- Women who were sickly or experienced accidents as children are more external about their belief in their ability to control their own health.

Control of self

- Internals tend to enjoy high moral development.¹¹
- Nonsmokers are more inclined to be internal than smokers.
- Males who exhibit internal locus of control were more likely to stop smoking once the Surgeon General's report revealed smoking was dangerous to their health.
- Internals are more apt to repress failures than externals since externals have a tendency to already accept that factors beyond their control already determined failure.

⁹ Richard Bernardi, "The Relationships Among Locus of Control, Perceptions of Stress, and Performance," *Journal of Applied Business Research*. 1 (October 1997):13 <http://global.factiva.com/en/arch/print_results.asp> (accessed 3 July 2003).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Ability to influence others

- Internals generally are more persuasive than externals and better able to influence others' attitudes.
- Attempts to manipulate internals make them more resistive than when they are provided with conscious choices.
- Internals are more likely than externals to fully participate in public protests and take action in an attempt to make change happen.
- If internals are aware they are being manipulated they are more resistive than externals.
- Internals will conform if they perceive conformity to be to their advantage. If internals fail to see advantages in conforming they will strongly resist.
- If praised for an intrinsically motivated task, external's motivation declines once praise is stopped. Those internally inclined will work harder at the task the next time.¹²

Motivation and achievement

- The amount of time spent on homework and seeking parent's help is higher among internals than externals.
- Internals are more likely to examine colleges they are interested in attending.
- Internals tend to place more importance on skill conditions than on chance reinforcements.
- Internals are more likely to have attained higher academic achievements.¹³
- Since externals tend to have higher stress levels they also tend to be less satisfied with their work. This means externals are more likely to quit their jobs than internals.¹⁴
- Externals function better under high structure conditions—internals operate better in low structure conditions.¹⁵
- Internals are more likely to stay with and put energy into tasks they have been successful on. Externals have a tendency to give up and move on to another task.¹⁶

¹² Grantz, "Power to Succeed."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bernardi, "The Relationships Among Locus of Control, Perceptions of Stress, and Performance."

¹⁵ Grantz, "Power to Succeed."

¹⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

The wide body of research on the locus of control suggests that individuals who generally believe they have the ability to control their own environments are more likely to be aware of actions and information that will help them achieve their successes. They tend to work towards improving their situations and to place higher value on their own skills. Knowing whether employees possess internal or external locus of control traits is useful in helping them develop. For example, stress management workshops would be useful, by helping externals build up better coping skills, to positively affect job satisfaction and retention levels within the organization. Gaining insight into one's own personality traits can lead to positive changes at play as well as at work.

As you reflect on your LOC score, jot down your answers to these questions:

1. What are the implications of my LOC score for the kind of work I should be seeking?

2. Does my LOC score ring true to me, given the tendencies listed above? Why or why not?

3. How did my LOC affect my ability to succeed in my last job and the demands it made of me? What kind of LOC score would have been well suited to my last job? Why?

4. How could one determine the LOC score that would be demanded of a job opportunity?