

# Locus of Control Theory, Productivity, Job Satisfaction, and Procrastination: A Systematic Literature Review in the Organizational Context of the 21st Century

Eleni Spyridaki, Michael Galanakis  
The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece

Locus of control theory, which was developed by Rotter, suggests that there are two main types of peoples' behaviors when attributing their failure or success of their life events: external locus of control and internal. The way that individuals act is determined by their expectations of their specific behaviors and the value that they add to these expectations. For instance, people who fit in the internal category are more likely to attribute their life events to their own behaviors, skills, and attitudes, while people who fit in the external category, tend to attribute their acts to fate, chance, and other exterior factors that are out of their control. The aim of this systematic literature review was to define the fundamental concept of LOC theory, to investigate major findings of the theory in accordance with LOC and procrastination, job satisfaction, and performance and lastly, to discuss the practical use of the theory in the organizational context.

*Keywords:* locus of control theory, internal, external, procrastination, job satisfaction, performance, systematic literature review, organizational context

## Introduction

Among many personality theories, one of the most well-known is the locus of control theory. It was initially introduced by Rotter, in the foundation of the expectancy value theory. It is stated that peoples' behaviors are determined by their expectations of that particular behavior and their values of their expectations. There are two types of locus of control: internal and external. People who fit in the first category tend to attribute their success or failure to their own skills and abilities or the efforts put in a certain behavior. In contrast, people who fit in the second category, tend to see their failure or success as an outcome of external factors (Woolfolk, 2012, as cited in Dervishaliaj & Xhelili, 2014). An example to better understand the theory, is that students may attribute their academic achievements to themselves and their own personal characteristics (internal locus of control), whereas when they experience a failure, they tend to attribute it to external factors, such as bad grading on behalf of their teachers (external locus of control) (Garden et al., 2004; Ferrari et al., 1992, as cited in Dervishaliaj & Xhelili, 2014). Findings from previous research have shown that people with internal LOC, have higher linkage to organizational citizenship behavior, thus effectiveness and efficiency can be promoted at the workplace (Organ,

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Eleni Spyridaki, Master's Program in Organizational Psychology, The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece.  
Michael Galanakis, Ph.D., Post Doc, Organizational Psychologist, Psychology Professor, Deree, The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece.

1988; Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). It was also found that people with internal LOC, have higher chances of moderating their emotional intelligence, as opposed to people with external LOC, again increasing effectiveness and efficiency at the workplace. LOC according to multiple studies, can predict job performance, job satisfaction, productivity, and motivation at the workplace (Andrisani & Nestel, 1976; Nystron, 1983; Spector, 1982, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). Lastly, procrastination can be explained through the lens of LOC: it was found that people with external LOC, procrastinate more, since they do not acknowledge the consequences of their own actions as much as people with internal LOC (Janssen & Carton, 1999).

### **Locus of Control Theory**

Locus of control theory, underlines individuals' generalized expectations that are contingent with their own behaviors and capacities, in that case internal locus of control, or contingent with some external factor such as luck, fate, opportunities, or other people, in that case external locus of control (Rotter, 1990, as cited in Janssen & Carton, 1999). Locus of control refers to a continuum of internality and externality, meaning that an individual who is "externally oriented", distinguishes control of external reinforcers such as chance and powerful other individuals, whilst an individual who is "internally oriented", distinguishes her/him control over the reinforcements occurred (Carden, Bryant, & Moss, 2004). The theory consists of a relatively stable expectancy, simultaneously a more particular one according to the current situation, as it is derived from the attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967; 1973; Kelley & Michela, 1980, as cited in Johnson et al., 1984). It is based on previous rewards in certain situations in the past, but also on the frequency of previous rewards in similar situations with similar rewards (Phares, 1973, as cited in Johnson et al., 1984). Internal locus of control is activated when an individual expects results to be contingent with her/his own behaviors or traits, in the opposite case, an external locus of control is activated (Rotter, 1966, as cited in Johnson et al., 1984).

### **Characteristics of Internal and External LOC**

People with internal locus of control, who will be engaged more in leisure activities, according to the study of Kabanoff O'Brien in 1980 (Gangai, Mahakud, & Sharma, 2016), will expand their personal control. It is also believed that individuals with internal LOC, will constantly seek personal growth in terms of control and they will demonstrate less social influence than people with external LOC. In simple words, "internal" individuals, think that they are responsible for their own achievements and success, while "externals", think that external influences will decide the outcome of their personal achievements and success (Gershaw, 1989, as cited in Gangai et al., 2016).

Regarding the internal locus of control, people who fit in this category, tend to do better in jobs where they can set the pace, have a more participant management style, engage in activities that they can improve their situations, they have greater chances of influencing others, they are more active in finding information and expanding their knowledge that will help them in their current state, they emphasize striving for their achievements, they work hard to develop their skills and knowledge and lastly they try to figure out the reason behind the outcomes and take notes for future reference. In general, people as they grow older they tend to adopt a more internal locus of control, whilst studies have shown that males tend to be more internal than females, as well as people in higher positions in organizations (Gangai et al., 2016).

On the other hand, people with external locus of control tend to stay in jobs for a longer period of time, even if they are overall dissatisfied, they also tend to work better under circumstances, where the pace is predetermined and automated. They often enjoy following direction, especially if they are detailed. Additionally, “externals”, often feel as victims when they face an illness or when they are under a lot of pressure or stress. They tend to be overwhelmed and drowned by negativity, they give up easily when things start to get more difficult than usual and they are more influenced by social stimuli. A characteristic of this type, is that they believe that success or failure lies on the outcome of pure luck, chance, or fate. These people show acknowledgement and appreciation to others and they are most of the times agreeable humble, calm, and easy-going to work with and communicate (Gangai et al., 2016).

Generally speaking, locus of control responds to the question whether an individual thinks that her/his acts, skills, and behaviors predict the reinforcements s/he will get (Rotter et al., 1972, as cited in McIntyre, 1984). For instance, an individual's ability to combat stress, is highly influenced by her/his locus of control. People with external locus of control in these situations, tend to develop more neurotic symptoms, symptoms of anxiety, and irritability (Efran, 1971; Butterfield, 1964; Rotter, 1966; Tolar and Rezinkoff, 1967; Watson, 1967; Feather, 1968; Platt and Eisenman, 1968; Goss and Morisko, 1970; Hountras and Scharf, 1970, as cited in McIntyre, 1984).

### **LOC Literature Review on Productivity, Job Satisfaction, OCB, & Emotional Intelligence**

It is true that people tend to understand and justify their life events according to their locus of control type (Bickford, 2005). Locus of control can predict both motivation and belief, internal or external, in peoples' abilities regarding their potential of achievements or goals (Ng et al., 2006, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). Locus of control can be applied in almost every area of the everyday life, including the workplace. People fitting in the internal category should behave more in a way of controlling their situation and other people e.g. subordinates, whilst the external category should be more likely to try to avoid controlling their environment (Johnson et al., 1984). Additionally, job turnover and dissatisfaction can be predicted by the type of locus of control, since internal LOC, implies taking action and searching actively for opportunities, as opposed to external LOC which implies a more passive situation, thus staying in a job even though it is an unpleasant environment (Gangai et al., 2016).

Locus of control in work settings has been found to be linked with Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), meaning the desirable behavior in the workplace which is not forced or directly associated with rewards, on the contrary, it promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the organizational context (Organ, 1988; Organ et al., 2006, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). Also, individuals with inner locus of control were found to moderate their emotional intelligence, meaning the ability to understand and regulate our own and others' emotions (Mayer et al., 2008, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017), and have higher levels of OCB linkage. Research has also found that there is a correlation between internal locus of control and citizenship performance (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). People with higher internal locus of control are more likely to exceed a job's requirements and adopt an organizational citizenship behavior, as well as have better control over their work situation (Withey & Cooper, 1989; Blakely et al., 2005, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). Hence, people with internal LOC have more chances to be more productive, by engaging in more occupational tasks and putting more effort in their personal growth and development in their careers (Withey & Cooper, 1989; Blakely et al., 2005, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). Locus of control is found to be a significant factor regarding the job performance, motivation, satisfaction, and productivity in the workplace (Andrisani & Nestel,

1976; Nystron, 1983; Spector, 1982, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). People with external LOC are less likely to engage in an organizational citizenship behavior, because they might be reluctant of their ability to do so, whilst people with internal LOC, are expected to have an increased OCB. Internal locus of control implies being resourceful and resilient to controlling situations, which might result in productivity and increased job satisfaction. Work locus of control refers to the degree to which people decide to attribute their rewards in the workplace to their own behavior or not (Spector, 1988, as cited in David & Turnipseed, 2017). People with high internal locus of control are punctual, produce high quality work, with little or none organizational direction.

Another study indicated that people who adopt an internal LOC are more likely to have a positive attitude regarding their work, something that will lead to better higher job satisfaction, motivation, and participation than those with an external LOC (Knoop, 1981). The reason behind it, is that “internals” attribute the results to themselves and think that they can control them, while “externals” depend more on opportunities and chances. Enriched jobs seem to be more suitable for people with an external LOC, because the control of the actions is determined by external factors. In general, individuals with internal locus of control tend to be more autonomous, and be more motivated in their jobs (Brief & Aldag, 1975, as cited in Knoop, 1981), avoiding procrastination, as well as being more adaptable in different work environments.

### **LOC & Literature Review on Procrastination**

The term procrastination refers to the intentional behavior of delaying priorities of the everyday life (Knaus, 1998; Lay, 1986, as cited in Boysan & Kiral, 2016) and it is considered to be a form of a self-regulatory failure (Nguyen, Steel, & Ferrari, 2013). It derives from the Latin word *pro* (in favor of) and *crastinus* (tomorrow) (Steel, 2007, as cited in Dervishaliaj & Xhelili, 2014). According to Vestervelt (2000), procrastination has a dual meaning; it refers to the trait that describes the personality and the behaviors manifested in different contexts. As aforementioned, internal locus of control is positively correlated with completing a task, as opposed to external LOC (Lay, 1997, as cited in Boysan & Kiral, 2016). It is found that people with internal locus of control procrastinate less, because they know their consequences of this specific action, than people with external locus of control (Janssen & Carton, 1999). An example of a study in the academic context, was that students with external LOC took more time to hand in an assignment, than students with internal LOC, plus students with external LOC usually take more time to actually start working on an assignment than the internals (Janssen & Carton, 1999). Another study also showed that “externals” are more likely to procrastinate, without the task difficulty being a factor to this procrastination (Janssen & Carton, 1999, as cited in Boysan & Kiral, 2016). However, it should be taken into account that in some studies, the findings concerning locus of control and procrastination have been inconsistent (Ferrari et al., 1992, as cited in Boysan & Kiral, 2016). Procrastination occurs more to individuals with external locus of control, due to their inability to perceive a connection with their own actions and the consequences (Carden et al., 2004). Findings have supported that view, indicating that “externals” believe that their success depends little or none on the effort put in an assignment or a task, as a consequence they tend to postpone them as much as they can (Milgram & Tenne, 2000, as cited in Dervishaliaj & Xhelili, 2014). In the workplace, LOC differentiates people who believe that they do not have control over their own work and everything that is happening in the work environment and those who believe the opposite (Gangai et al., 2016). Obviously, their own beliefs of control in the work setting will influence their performance outcomes, with research that backs it up according to Judge (1997) and Spector (1982).

### Discussion & Practical Use of the Theory in the Organizational Context

It is evident that Locus of Control Theory (Rotter, 1990, as cited in Janssen & Carton, 1999), is a useful tool to understand and explain human behaviors, depending on the type that they fit in, external or internal locus of control. This theory can be also utilized, in order to interpret the levels of job satisfaction, performance, motivation, as well as predict the degree to which someone is more likely to procrastinate. Internal or external locus of control has an impact on peoples' general performance and work life. It is important for businesses to be prepared for both types of employees, internals and externals, as well as employees be prepared for their employers that may fit in one or the other category. It is also important for companies to provide resources that will facilitate both parties, for instance training for internals should be a more autonomous procedure, while for externals it should be a more well guided and structured one, to permit their flourish in the organizational context. Hence, alignment between the two kinds of mindsets is crucial, in order for people to be more productive, satisfied, and motivated in their workplace, similarly, acknowledging these peoples' needs and mechanisms will help employers and employees to better cope with specific behaviors, such as procrastinating.

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