

INFLUENCE OF WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL AND PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT ON EMPLOYEES' WORK ATTITUDE AND ORGANIZATIONALLY BENEFICIAL BEHAVIOUR

Ademola B. Owolabi

Ekiti State University

Correspondence: Ademola B. Owolabi (PhD), Department of Psychology, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. E-mail: labdem2005@yahoo.ca Phone: +2348066708016.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which work locus of control and perceived environmental support influence employees' work attitude and organizationally beneficial behaviour. A total of 181 employees (105 females; 76 males), selected from private and public sector organizations, participated in the study. Results indicated that employees who held internal locus of control had better work attitude than those who held external locus of control. Though perceived environmental support did not influence employees' work attitude, results revealed that when employees perceived supportive work environment they tended to engage in organizationally beneficial behaviour, compared with when the work environment was perceived as less supportive. Finally, there were no sex and sectoral differences in employees' work attitude, organizationally beneficial behaviour, perceived environmental support, and locus of control.

Key words: Locus of control, support, work attitude

INTRODUCTION

Advancement in one's job means a lot to the individual's either in the form of more pay, in – service training, steady work, promotion, fringe benefits, and long services award (Wiss, 2002). Lack of job prospects and advancement generates a climate which may dampen the spirit of workers and thus lead to poor work attitude and work behaviour. It kills the morale of workers, reduces their enthusiasm and psychological state

(Udoh & Ajala, 1986). The provision of good environmental support especially for junior workers such as transport allowance and medical allowance may go a long way in making an individual to be ready to put more effort in his/her work.

In the world of work today, a number of factors are influencing individual attitude and behaviour towards their work. These factors are either internal, external or both. The influence could either result in positive attitude and behaviour or negative

attitude and behaviour (Judge, Thoresen & Bono, 2001). It may be beneficial to examine the connection among perceived environmental support, locus of control, and organizationally beneficial behaviour.

Work attitude relates to how employees feel about their work and their attitudes to work. Hence, work attitude is intangible. You cannot see it. Your colleagues cannot see it. But people can feel it. People whom you work with can feel your work attitude. It relates to how self or the amount of you feels about your work and your approach towards work. Attitudes are steady quality about a person that affects his/her behaviour. It is usually formed by repeated perception of events and people. Work attitude can be defined as the degree of positive or negative feelings a person has towards certain aspects of his/her job (Judge et al., 2001). These may include the perception of justice, which include the level of dignity and self respect offered by the job (McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993).

Work behaviour refers to the 'do' part of a work. According to Hogg and Vaughan (2005), attitude and behavior are not related in a simple one-to-one fashion. Work behaviour refers to how an individual does his work and gets his work done (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). It's a term used in describing the behaviour one uses in employment and is normally more formal than other types of human behaviour. It varies from profession to profession; some are usually more casual than others. Individual behaviour towards his work could either be good or bad.

Bad behaviour comes not from what an individual person does or doesn't do, but from the overall impact that their behaviour has on the team's mission and on its effectiveness. A behaviour can be said to be bad when it harms the team's ability to deliver to its clients, damage the cohesion of the team, has an unnecessary adverse impact on one or more individuals within the team. Bad behaviour can have a tangible impact on profitability, missed objectives and declining productivity, diminished profitability and led to high staff turnover.

Work locus of control is a sense of psychological control that is regarded as an important dispositional factor in work behaviour (Whitney & Cooper, 1989). Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. The concept was developed by Rotter (1954, 1966) and has since become an important aspect of personality studies. Individuals who are internal in control orientation believe that events result primarily from their own behaviour and actions.

An internal person believes that he is in control of his life and that work and effort will result in reward while an external person believes that his life is determined by chance, fate or powerful others (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000). According to them, such individuals have better control of their behaviour, tend to exhibit more political behaviour and are more likely to attempt to influence other people than those with high external locus of control. They are also more likely to assume that their efforts will be successful and are more active in

seeking information and knowledge concerning their situation. An individual with an external locus of control believe that powerful other, fate or chance primarily determine events.

Workers with an external work locus of control tend to report more burnout, job dissatisfaction, stress and lower self-esteem than those with internal locus of control (Kasi, 1989). Previous studies (e.g. Chen & Wang, 2007; Hyatt & Prawitt, 2001) reveal that differences existed between internal and externals in their behaviour. This finding supported the work of Judge (1998) who argues that having an internal locus of control leads to higher job satisfaction. Mark (1998) also submitted that an individual with an external locus of control beliefs that outcomes are not related to his or her behaviour but to external forces beyond his or her control.

Both the physical and social environments in the workplace may have impact an employee's attitude and behaviour. Increasing knowledge and helping employee build skills are necessary steps in promoting positive behaviour and attitude. Supportive environments that facilitate and encourage living well at work help employees sustain or keep that healthy behaviour. Environments support could either be physical or social (Britton, 1997). Physical environment include tangible services made available to employees such as comfortable office, and cafeteria. Social environment are such as work schedules, quality of interpersonal relationship at work, availability of training and support.

Environmental support may bring about a work/ life balance. It may reduce employee's work-related health risk. It may also be connected with how an employee feels about his work and his approach towards work. Jurik (1985) submitted that work factors were more important than demographic characteristics. Britton (1997) reported that work environment is more important in shaping employee's views and attitude than are demographic characteristics including sex. Similarly, Cohen (1976) found that no significant gender difference in the effect of work-related stress on employees' work attitude.

Considering the assumption of the theory of planned behaviour that perceived behavioural control and other subjective norms as combined to predict attitude and behaviour, the aim of this work is to investigate the influence of work locus of control and perceived environmental support on work attitude and work behaviour.

Hypotheses

1. Employees who hold internal locus of control and who perceived the environment to be supportive will be positive in their work attitude than those who hold external locus of control and perceive the work environment as less supportive.
2. Employees who hold internal locus of control and who perceive the environment to be supportive will be positive in their work behaviour than those who hold external locus of control and perceive the work environment as less supportive.

3. There will be a significant sex differences in employees' locus of control, perceived environmental support, work attitude and work behaviour
4. There will be significant differences in the locus of control, perceived environmental support, work attitude, and work behaviour of public and private sector employees.

items), and interactional justice (8 items). Participants rated their feelings about how just their job environment was on a 6- point scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 6 = Strongly agree). Nichoff and Moorman (1993) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .95 for the scale.

Organizationally beneficial behaviour was assessed with Williams and Anderson's (1991) Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. It was a 14-item instrument predicated on a 5-point scale (1 = Disagree; 5 = Agree) such that high score reflected organizationally beneficial behaviour. Sample item included: "I am a person who help others who have been absent". The scale had a reliability coefficient of .89 (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Perceived environmental support was measured with Ryan and Deci's (2000) Basic Psychological Needs Scale designed to assess perceived environmental support in the work-domain. It was 21- item scale rated on 3-point scale (No = 1; Yes = 3). Ryan and Deci (2000) reported a reliability coefficient of .88 for the scale. High scores indicated high level of perceived environmental support.

METHODS

Design and Participants

This was a cross-sectional survey that adopted a factorial design. Participants were 181 employees (105 females; 76 males) drawn from public and private organizations in the capital of Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Measures

Work locus of control was measured using Work Locus Scale (WLC) developed by Spector, (1988). It was designed to assess locus of control in the work domain. The 16- item scale was rated on a 6-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 6 = Strongly agree) such that higher scores indicated external locus of control while low scores indicated internal locus of control. Spector (1988) reported that the scale had an internal consistency reliability coefficient of .82.

Work attitude was measured using Justice Perception Scale developed by Nichoff and Moorman (1993). The 18-item scale had 3 subscales: distributive justice (5 items), procedural justice (5

Procedure

The researcher visited each of the organizations selected for the study and established rapport with participants after permission had been obtained from the management. The participants were informed that the research was designed to evaluate how they felt about their jobs. Confidentiality of responses was guaranteed and

participants were informed that participation was voluntary. Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 181 were duly completed and, therefore, used for analysis.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested with 2 sets of 2 x 2 ANOVA. To test hypotheses 3 and 4, t test were conducted.

RESULTS

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, the participants were divided into 4 groups based on their scores in the measures of locus of control and perceived environmental support. A 2 x 2 ANOVA was used to test hypothesis 1, which expected employees who had internal locus of control and perceived a supportive work environment to hold a better work attitude than those who held external locus of control and perceived a less supportive work environment. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of 2 x 2 ANOVA on Locus of Control and Perceived Environmental Support on Work Attitude

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Locus of control	141.15	1	141.15	10.94	< .01
Perceived environmental support	156.31	1	156.31	1.21	> .05
Locus of control x perceived environmental support	155.53	1	155.53	.89	> .05
Error	22949.34	177	129.66		
Total	25028.45	180			

Table 1 shows that employees who held internal locus of control had a significantly better work attitude than those who held external locus of control [$F(1,177) = 10.94, p < .01$]. However, perceived environmental support had no significant influence on employees' work attitude. As shown in Table 1, locus of control and perceived environmental support did exert a significant joint influence on employ-

ees' work attitude. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported by these results.

Another 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted to test hypothesis 2, which expected employees who had internal locus of control and perceived a supportive work environment to hold a better organizationally beneficial work behaviour than those who held external locus of control and perceived a less supportive work environment. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of 2 x 2 ANOVA on Locus of Control and Perceived Environmental Support on Organizationally Beneficial Work Behaviour

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Locus of control	94.99	1	94.99	4.15	<.05
Perceived environmental support	2108.92	1	2108.92	25.50	<.001
Locus of control x perceived environmental support	63.75	1	63.75	.77	>.05
Error	14637.02	177	82.69		
Total	17277.76	180			

The results in Table 2 indicated that employees who held internal locus of control had exhibited a significantly higher organizationally beneficial behaviour than those who held external locus of control [$F(1,177) = 4.15, p < .05$]. Perceived environmental support had a significant influence on organizationally beneficial behaviour such that when employees perceived a supportive work environment they tended to engage in organizationally beneficial behaviour, compared with when the work environment was perceived as less supportive [$F(1,177)$

$= 25.50, p < .001$]. But locus of control and perceived environmental support did not exert a significant joint influence on organizationally beneficial behaviour among employees. These results only provided a partial support for hypothesis 2.

The third hypothesis, which proposed significant sex differences in locus of control, perceived environmental support, work attitude and organizationally beneficial behaviour, was tested by conducting 5 sets of t test. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of t test on Sex Differences in Locus of Control, Perceived Environmental Support, Work Attitude, and Organizationally Beneficial Behaviour

Psychological variables	Sex	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Work attitude	Male	76	59.13	11.26	178	-1.24	>.05
	Female	105	61.32	12.14			
Organizationally beneficial behaviour	Male	76	47.13	10.18	178	-.94	>.05
	Female	105	48.51	9.51			
Perceived environmental support	Male	76	47.00	4.70	178	.53	>.05
	Female	105	46.62	4.75			
Locus of control	Male	76	50.97	7.62	178	.34	>.05
	Female	105	50.62	6.47			

The results in Table 3 revealed no significant sex differences in employees' work attitude, organizationally beneficial behaviour, per-

ceived environmental support, and locus of control.

Finally, hypothesis 4, which expected significant differences in the levels of locus of control, perceived

environmental support, work attitude and organizationally beneficial behaviour between employees in public and private sector organizations, was tested by conducting 5 sets of t test. The results are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of t test on Sector Differences in Locus of Control, Perceived Environmental Support, Work Attitude, and Organizationally Beneficial Behaviour

Psychological variables	Sector	N	M	SD	df	T	P
Work attitude	Public	127	60.33	1.01	178	-.70	> .05
	Private	53	60.47	1.74			
Organizationally beneficial behaviour	Public	127	48.72	.84	178	1.74	> .05
	Private	53	45.96	1.39			
Perceived environmental support	Public	127	47.01	.43	178	.99	> .05
	Private	53	46.24	.57			
Locus of control	Public	127	50.67	.65	178	-.30	> .05
	Private	53	51.02	.81			

As indicated in Table 4, no significant differences existed in the work attitude, organizationally beneficial behaviour, perceived environmental support, and locus of control of employees in public and private sectors organizations.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to examine the effect of work locus of control and environmental support on work attitude and work behaviour. The first hypothesis, which expected employees who have internal locus of control and perceived supportive work environment would hold positive work attitude than those who have external locus of control and perceived less supportive work environment, was confirmed by the results. This was in support of previous findings (e.g. Chen & Wang, 2007; Hyatt & Prawitt, 2001), which revealed significant differences between internal and externals in their behaviour. An

internal person believes that he is in control of his life and that work and effort would result in reward while an external person believes that his life is determined by chance, fate or powerful others (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000).

This finding supported the work of Judge (1998) who argues that having an internal locus of control leads to higher job satisfaction. Mark (1998) posited that an individual with an external locus of control beliefs that outcomes are not related to his or her behaviour but to external forces beyond his or her control. The belief held by an employee about life (that an effort will result in or not result in a desired outcome is an important determinant of behaviour) might have influenced the cause of action taking by the individual toward the job.

A sizable body of research (e.g. Straw & Ross, 1985) suggests that employees have stable characteristics, which might predispose them to either respond positively or negatively to a job context. In other words, some

people tend to have positive attitude and behaviour over the course of their career and other tend to have negative attitude and behaviour. The generally belief of internally control oriented individuals that they are capable of influencing events in their life is basic reason while they are positive in their job attitude. They are likely to belief that they are capable of influencing whatever aspect of their job that may not be favourable to them.

Hypothesis 2 expected employees who hold internal work locus of control and perceived supportive work environment would exhibit better work behaviour than those who hold external work locus of control and perceived less supportive work environment. The result showed a significant main effect of perceived environmental support on work behaviour. However, no significant main effect of work locus of control on perceived environmental support. Work locus of control and perceived environmental support exerted no significant interaction effect of on work behaviour. These results supported the position of Hogg and Vaughan (2005) that attitudes may not always predict behaviour. Behaviour, including work behaviour, may depend on many factors in addition to attitude, which makes a single instance of behaviour an unreliable indicator of an attitude. According to Hogg and Vaughan (2005) attitude and behavior are not related in a simple one-to-one fashion. Therefore, to predict behaviour, it may be necessary to account for the interaction between attitude and behaviour.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that there would be a significant gender

differences in work locus of control, perceived environmental support, work attitude and work behaviour, was tested using independent t test. The results showed no significant gender difference in work locus of control, perceived environmental support, and work attitudes and work behaviour. Previous findings on gender differences in locus of control have varied outcomes. As Schultz and Schultz (2005) point out, significant gender differences in locus of control have not been found for adults in a U.S. population.

However, these authors also noted that there may be specific gender-based differences for specific categories of item to assess locus of control. For example, they cited evidence that men may have a greater internal locus for questions related to academic achievement (Strickland & Haley, 1980; cited in Schultz & Schultz, 2005). Shute, Howard and Steyaert (1984) found a relationship between cognitive abilities and locus of control in female but not in males.

The result also revealed that males and females were more similar than dissimilar in their work attitude and perception of work environment. This conclusion was supported by the work of Jurik and Britton. Jurik's (1985) study concluded that work factors were more important than demographic characteristics, Britton (1997) in his study also concluded that there were evidence showing that work environment was more important in shaping employee's views and attitude than demographic characteristics including gender. Cohen (1976) reported that women were twice likely

as men to experience negative attitudes towards their work, due to stress.

Hypothesis 4, which stated that there would be a significant effect of type of organization (private or public) differences on work locus of control, perceived environmental support, work attitude, and work behaviour, was not confirmed. This shows that no matter the type of organization (private or public), the employees and the prevailing work situations exert influence on work attitude and work behaviour. This might be attributed to the fact that the differences that existed in the management of private and public organizations are gradually becoming erased with so many policies such as, monetization of fringe benefit, contributory pension scheme, rewarding individual efforts and so many other policies that is shifting organizational responsibility on the individuals thereby making the private and public organizations more similar in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Britton, M. D. (1997). Perception of the work environment among correctional officers: Do race and sex matters? *Criminology*, 35, 85-105
- Cohen, A. (1992). Antecedent of organizational commitment across occupational groups: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 13, 539-558.
- Hogg, M., & Vaughan, G. (2005). *Social psychology* (4th edn.). Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Hyatt, A. T., & Prawitt, F. D. (2001). Does congruence between audit structure and auditor's locus of control affect job performance? *The Accounting Review*, 76, 263-274.
- Judge, T. A., Thoresen, C. J., Bono, J. E. (2001). The job satisfaction-job performance relationship: A qualitative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(3), 376 – 407.
- Jurik, N. C. (1985). An officer and a lady: Organization barriers to women working as correctional officers in men's prison. *Social Problems*, 32, 375-388.
- Lam, K. S. S., & Schaubroeck, J. (2000). The role of locus of control in reaction to being promoted and to being passed over: A quasi experiment. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 13, 66-78.
- Mark, L. (1998). Deconstructing locus of control: Implication for practitioners. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 76, 251-260.
- McNeely, B. L., & Meglino, B. M. (1994). The role of dispositional and situational antecedents in prosocial organizational behavior: An examination of the intended beneficiaries of prosocial behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 836-844.
- Niehoff, B. P., & Moorman, R. H. (1993). Justice as a mediator of the relationship between methods of monitoring and organizational citizenship behavior. *Academy of Management Journal*, 36, 527-556.
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies of internal versus external control of a variable. *American Psychologist*, 45, 489-493.
- Rotter, J. B. (1954). *Social learning and clinical psychology*. NY: Prentice-Hall.

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78.
- Schultz, D. P and Schultz, S. E. (2005). *Theories of personality* (8th edn.). Wadsworth: Thomson.
- Shute, G., Howard, M., & Steyaert, Y (1984). The relations among cognitive development, locus of control and gender. *Journal of Research in Personality, 18*, 335 – 341.
- Spector, P. E. (1988). Development of the work locus of control scale. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 61*, 335-340.
- Straw, B. M. & Ross, J. (1985). Stability in the midst of change: A dispositional approach to job attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 70*, 69-80.
- Udoh, C. O., & Ajala, J. A. (1986). *The concept of mental and social health*. Bodija, Ibadan: Claverianum Press.
- Williams, L. J., & Anderson, S. E. (1991). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment as predictors of organizational citizenship and in-role behaviors. *Journal of Management, 17*, 601-617.
- Wiss, H. M. (2002). Deconstructing job satisfaction: separating evaluations, beliefs and affective experience. *Human Resource Management Review, 12*, 173-194.