

## Definition: Locus of Control

# Locus of Control

- A locus of control orientation is a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation)

## Historical Background

- In 1954, psychologist Julian Rotter suggested that our behavior was controlled by rewards and punishments and that it was these consequences for our actions that determined our beliefs about the underlying causes of these actions.
- In 1966, Rotter published a scale designed to measure and assess external and internal locus of control. The scale utilizes a forced-choice between two alternatives, requiring respondents to choose just one of two possibilities for each item.

## Internal and External Locus of Control

- Internal Locus of Control: A belief that reinforcement is brought about by one's own behavior.
- External Locus of control: belief that reinforcement is under the control of other people, fate or Luck.
- It is important to note that locus of control is a continuum. No one has a 100 percent external or internal locus of control. Instead, most people lie somewhere on the continuum between the two extremes.

# Internal vs External Locus of Control

## Internal Locus of Control

- Are more likely to take responsibility for their actions
- Tend to be less influenced by the opinions of other people
- Often do better at tasks when they are allowed to work at their own pace
- Usually, have a strong sense of self-efficacy
- Tend to work hard to achieve the things they want
- Feel confident in the face of challenges
- Tend to be physically healthier
- Report being happier and more independent
- Often achieve greater success in the workplace

## External Locus of Control

- Blame outside forces for their circumstances
- Often credit luck or chance for any successes
- Don't believe that they can change their situation through their own efforts
- Frequently feel hopeless or powerless in the face of difficult situations
- Are more prone to experiencing learned helplessness.



# Examples

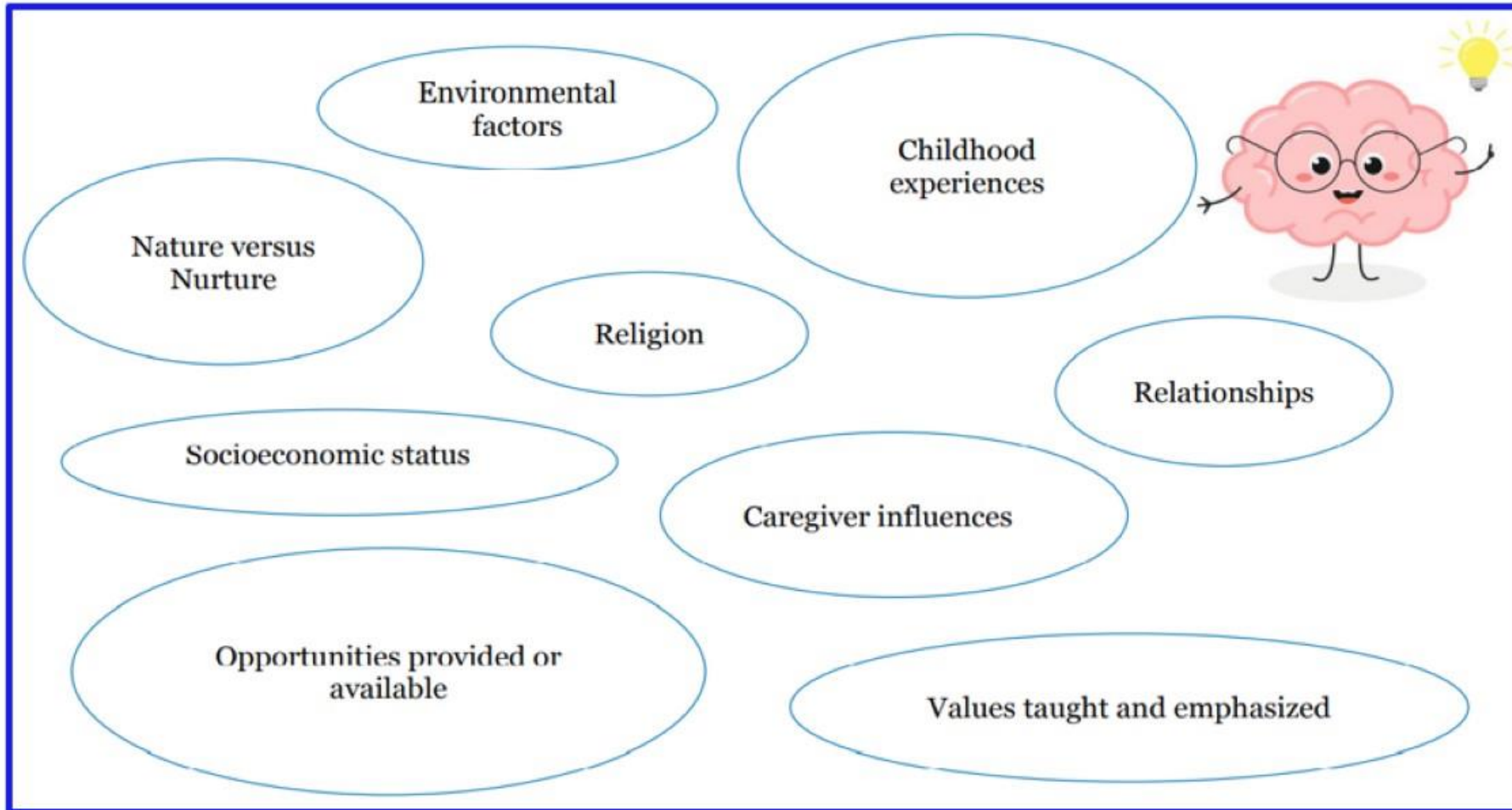
- My assignments are submitted late in class.
  - Internal: I could have planned my time better and submitted them before.
  - External: The internet was slow and my computer doesn't work well.
- I was eligible for a promotion at work and was selected to be the new manager.
  - Internal: All my projects were submitted before their deadlines, I came in early every day, and I mentored a new employee. All my hard work paid off!
  - External: It was so lucky I applied for this job a few years ago. It seems like fate that a promotion appeared around my 2 year anniversary.

## What Influences our Locus of Control?

A thought bubble with a scalloped border and a light gray shadow on its left side. Inside the bubble, the text "What might influence or shape someone's perception of their locus of control?" is written in a black serif font.

What might influence or shape  
someone's perception of their  
locus of control?

# Influencing Factors



# Locus of Control Test

Evaluate which one of the two personalities is a closer match to yours.  
You will find yourself leaning towards the better traits, but be honest with yourself.

**Person A:**

- ☐ Success requires being at the right place at the right time
- ☐ I don't get the results I deserve
- ☐ My destiny was already decided when I was born
- ☐ Setting goals for the long term doesn't make sense because unforeseen things occur from time to time
- ☐ To attain success, a twist of fate or a stroke of luck plays a key part



# Locus of Control Test

## Person B:

- ☐ You reap what you sow
- ☐ My colleague got promoted instead of me. What can I do better the next time?
- ☐ If you try hard enough, you can achieve
- ☐ I have the potential to change the world
- ☐ Let me think how can I change that
  
- ☐ If your thoughts match that of person A, you have an external locus of control.
- ☐ If your thoughts match that of person B, you have an internal locus of control.

# Outcomes of Internal Locus of Control

Research indicates that an internal locus of control is positively associated with:

- **Favorable work outcomes**
  - More enjoyment of daily tasks
  - More positive social experiences
  - Greater job motivation
- **Favorable life outcomes**
  - Better health
  - Higher paying jobs
  - Better problem-solving skills

**Locus Of Control & Attributional Style Test ([psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com))**

# Enhancing your Internal Locus of Control

- ❑ Shifting your thought process begins and ends in your mind, but it is easier said than done. After all, you do not always have voluntary control over how your brain thinks.
- ❑ That said, you do have control over your choices, and with consistent effort, you have the power to change your mindset forever.
- ❑ No one will ever have a 100% internal locus of control.

**IF YOUR LOCUS  
OF CONTROL IS  
INTERNAL,**

THAT MEANS YOU  
BELIEVE YOU HAVE  
THE POWER TO  
INFLUENCE YOUR  
ENVIRONMENT –  
FOR THE GOOD  
OR THE BAD.

# 1. Be Accountable

- ☐ Individuals with a strong internal locus of control take responsibility for themselves regardless of external factors that may be beyond their control.
- ☐ Find strength through vulnerability by fostering authenticity in your relationships. Talk about what you can be doing differently to live a better life with those closest to you.



## 2. Watch Your Self Talk

Your brain chooses to believe what you decide to tell yourself.  
Only you can break that cycle by forcing yourself to avoid negative self-talk.

Watch out for your inner voice:

- ☐ This is too difficult for me
- ☐ I don't have the skills to do it
- ☐ That goal is impossible for people like me
- ☐ I can try but I doubt if it will work

Tweak sentences to eliminate negative intent:

- ☐ I know this is difficult, but I am capable of doing it
- ☐ I don't have the skills yet, but I can acquire them
- ☐ The goal is impossible for me at the moment, but a few years later I can achieve it too
- ☐ I will try and if it doesn't work, I'll try something else

### 3. Work on Failing Gracefully

- ☐ If you are human, failing is inevitable. When we fear failure, we become less willing to take on risk and as a result, we lose resiliency.
- ☐ Part of developing a healthy internal locus of control requires accepting that not everything is within our control; that failure is an inherent part of being human; and is almost always survivable.
- ☐ Take failure as an opportunity to learn.
- ☐ Engage in planned risk-taking: Research shows that one of the most significant factors in shifting locus of control is the extent to which an individual is willing to take risks, specifically through adventure-based activities. These types of experiences allow you to learn to regulate your own behavior and to view uncertainty as a challenge and not a threat.

## In Summary...

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**"Developing an internal locus of control helps you to build resilience and enables you to deal with the stuff life throws at you"**

— Joanna Frankham

When "stuff happens" in life, stop and ask yourself where your locus of control resides. An external locus leads to reactivity. An internal locus opens to choice.



**Thank you**