Attributes of Success and Failure – A Students Perspective

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ABSTRACT *Attribution theory, proposed by Heider (1958) and developed by Weiner (1985) is used to explain the difference between high and low achievers. High achievers will approach rather than avoid tasks related to succeeding, because they believe success is due to high ability and effort, which they are confident of. Failure is thought to be caused by bad luck and is not their fault.*
Despite some uncertainty regarding the dimensions underlying people's unitary attributions, the evidence is clear concerning one point: after failure people generally under score the importance of external causes, while after success, they tend to emphasize the causal impact of internal factor. The competent person not only wants to have control over the outcome, they should take responsibility for their success and failure.
The present study is an attempt to find the factors (internal/external and stability and variability) being chosen by young students responsible for success and failure.

Introduction

Attribution is the process through which we seek to identify the causes of others behaviour and so gain knowledge of their stable traits and their dispositions. Heider (1948) was the first to propose a psychological theory on attribution, but Weiner and colleagues developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology. In his view people are like amateur scientist, trying to understand other people's behaviour by piecing together information until they arrived at a reasonable explanation or cause.

According to Heider, a person can make 2 attributions:
1. Internal Attribution: The inference that a person is behaving in a certain way, because of something about the person, such as attitude, character or personality.

2. External Attribution: The inference that a person is behaving in a certain way, because of something about the situation he or she is in.

Our attributions are also significantly driven by our emotional and motivational drives. Blaming other people and avoiding personal recrimination are very real self-servicing attributions. We will also make attributions to defend what we perceive as attacks. We will point to injustice in an unfair world. We will even tend to blame victims (of us and of others) for their fate as we seek to distance ourselves from thoughts of suffering the same plight. We will also tend to ascribe less variability to other people than ourselves, seeing ourselves as more multifaceted and less predictable than others. This may well be because we see more of what is inside ourselves (and spend more time doing this).

Various methods have been employed in the measurement and categorization of attributions. Open ended methods involve the researcher categorizing the oral replies of the participants to open ended questions. The direct method requires the participant to state his/her reasons for the event and map those reasons onto items referring to attribution dimensions.

Attribution theory has been used to explain the difference between high and low achievers. According to attribution theory, high achievers will approach rather than avoid tasks related to succeeding, because they believe success is due to high ability and effort, which they are confident of. Failure is thought to be caused by bad luck or by poor exam and is not their fault. Thus, failure doesn't affect their self esteem but success builds pride and confidence. On the other hand, low achievers avoid success related chores because they tend to doubt their ability and/or assume success is related to luck or to other factors beyond their control. Thus, even when successful, it isn't as rewarding to the low achievers because he/she doesn't feel responsible. It doesn't increase his/her pride and confidence.

Despite some uncertainty regarding the dimensions underlying people's unitary attributions, the evidence is clear concerning one point: after failure people generally under score the importance of external causes, while after success, they tend to emphasize the causal impact of internal factor. The competent person not only wants to have control over the outcome, they should take responsibility for their success and failure. In other words, they attribute the outcome to themselves- their activities and effort. This is called internal locus of control, or internality. Less competent persons attribute the out come to the external factors, called external locus of control, or externality.

Scope of the Research- Data of 100 under graduate students gathered during a competitive management fest collected for the study. The students gathered were from in and around the city of Pune.

Research Methodology- The ASUFA questionnaire used for testing the attribution has been taken from the one used by Weiner (1974).

Description of the Test- Attribution of success and failure inventory assesses the respondents' attribution thinking- to what extent they attribute success and failure (internal or external, and stable and variable)

The inventory contains 12 items for success and 12 items for failure with 2 open ended questions. The respondents check each item by choosing one of the two alternatives given. Each of the four factors (ability, effort, opportunity and luck) has been paired with each other, thus producing 6 pairs, repeated twice and giving 12 items. The respondents also write down the factors to which they attribute their own success and failure.

Objective of the study
1. To determine internal or external locus of control to attribute success or failure by students
2. To determine the Stability and Variability of the attributes

The present study is an attempt to find the factors (internal/external and stability and variability) being chosen by young students (UG) responsible for their success and failure.

Research Methodology:
Weiner (1974) has added a new dimension to the locus of control paradigm. He has suggested that the locus of control interacts with stability-variability. Internality can be perceived as related to either the stable (ability) or variable factor (luck or chance).

Although the relationships are not clear, we can summarize the effect of attribution as follows: persistence in achievement related activity is likely to be result of (1) attribution of success to fixed internal (ability), fixed external (task difficulty and opportunity), and variable internal (effort) factors and (2) Attribution of failure to variable internal (effort) and variable external (luck or chance) factors.

We then get both locus of control and attribution of outcome as two important variables. If the feeling of internality is higher than that of externality, we may say that the locus of control will result in effectiveness. The term locus of competence is defined as the potential of effectiveness of the feeling that the causation of outcome is by internal or external factors, and is the ratio of internality and externality scores. Attributional competence is defined as the potential effectiveness of the tendency to attribute failure or success to fixed or variable factors, and is the ratio of variable or stable scores.

Operational definitions of variables-
1. Internality/Internal Locus of Control: It refers to the general orientation of people to attribute the outcomes to their activities and effort or lack of it.
2. Externality/External Locus of control: It refers to the general orientation of people to attribute the outcomes to the external factors.
3. Variability: It refers to how a person varies while attributing the causes. Internal Variability (effort), External variability (luck or chance).
4. Stability: It refers to how stable a person is while attributing the causes. Internal Stability(ability); external stability (task difficulty or opportunity)

Materials used
1. ASUFA inventory test booklet.
2. ASUFA inventory scoring sheet

Instructions given with the test - "Many factors contribute to the success or lack of success of people. Some of these are given below in pairs. Please tick, in each pair, the factor to which you think success can be attributed more, although both factors may contribute to success or failure, which factor in your opinion, contributes more than the other in each pair. There is no right or wrong answers; we are only interested in your personal opinion."

Scoring
Scoring sheet was used to score the inventory. 8 scores were obtained (4 for success and 4 for failure) from which scores for internality and externality were calculated. Finally, the locus of competence index and the attribution index was obtained.

Interpretation of the Test- 100 Under graduate students were tested on this inventory (ASUFA), which basically checked onto their internal/ external and stable/ variable causes of attribution. Attribution is the process through which we seek to identify the causes of others behaviour and so gain knowledge of their stable traits and dispositions. When the scores fall in internal and stability block, the attribution is towards ability. When it falls in external-stability block, it is attributed towards task difficulty. When, in the internal variable block, it is towards effort and lastly, when it in external-variable, it is attributed to luck.

Table -1
INTERNAL EXTERNAL

Stable(Ability) Total=708 (29.5%)	1a(49) 5b(65) 6a(69) 7a(50)	11b(67) 12a (70) 13a(40) 17b(58)	18a(71) 19a(39) 23b(55) 24a(75)	2a(65) 3b(40) 5a(35) 8a(64)	9b(38) 11a(33) 14a(37) 15b(32)	17a(42) 20a(57) 21b(38) 23a(45)	Stable (Task Difficulty) Total=526(21.9%)
Variable(Effort) Total=743 (30.9%)	1b(51) 3a(60) 4b(70) 7b(50)	9a(62) 10b(61) 13b(60) 15a(68)	16b(71) 19b(61) 21a(62) 22b(67)	2b(35) 4a(30) 6b(31) 8b(36)	10a(39) 12b(30) 14b(63) 16a(29)	18b(29) 20b(43) 22a(33) 24b(25)	Variable (Luck or Chance) Total=423(17.7%)
Total=1451							Total= 949

Interpretations:
According to the above table it is evident that overall, the respondents scored 1451 for internal attribution, and 949 for external and 1234 for stability and 1166 for variability, which means that they tend to attribute both success and failure of others to internal factors and are mostly stable in their attribution.

In the case of success, the respondents scored 645 for stability (Response number 1-12) and 555 for variability (Response Number 1-12), which can be interpreted thus, that the students attributing thoughts or behaviours for others are mostly stable and relatively a small extent variable across different situations. Whereas their internal score was 724, and the external score was 476, this

again means that they attributes the cause of others success mostly to internal causes, like personal involvement, hard work, efforts etc and not to external causes like luck, bad climate, and no availability of opportunity. (Refer to Annexure)

In the case of failure, their stability score (Response 13-24) was 589 and variability score (Response 13-24) was found to be 611, which means that they are more or less equally balanced. The respondents tend to be stable as well as they could vary in attributing failure as per situational demands. Their internal score was 727; where as external score was 473. Again, even here, it could be said that they attribute others failures also to internal causes as in the case of success attribution too.

It can be interpreted thus that today's generation agrees that success and failure which comes there way is due to their own attribution towards it. This means they take the responsibility on themselves for their success and failure.
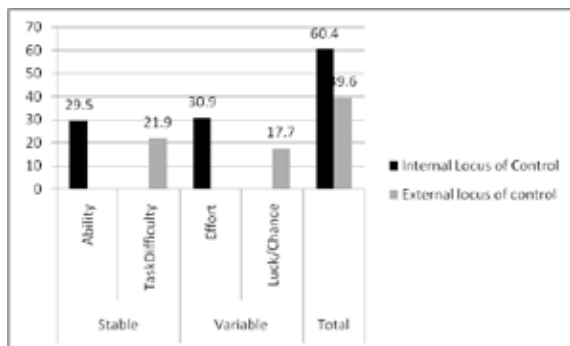

Figure 1: Locus of Control

Findings with respect to the above figure

1. 60.4% of the respondents attribute success and failure to internal factors. These factors comprise of Ability and Effort. Such students show an internal locus of control.
2. 39.6% respondents attributed success and failure to external factors. These factors comprise of task difficulty and luck or chance.
3. Out of 60.4% respondents who showed internal locus of control, 29.5% attributed ability as a component for success and failure which is a stable factor.
4. Out of 39.6% respondents who showed external locus of control only 17.7% attributed success and failure to luck or chance.
5. An alarming number (70% respondents) firmly agree to the fact that success comes only with involvement of goals and not because of good luck.
6. Also one should have the ability to take advantage of the opportunity and not wait for it to come their way as a matter of achieving the desired objective.
7. When it comes to failure, it should be noted that most of the respondents strongly believe in failure being attributed to neglecting the task and not sheer bad luck. This again shows the realization in the group about performance.
8. Also equal numbers of respondents feel failure comes their way because of lack of ability to calculate the risk and act accordingly. Both are internal factors affecting failure.

Suggestions

1. Neglecting the task at hand is a variable factor which can be improved and stressed upon for better performance in a chosen area. This can be done through counseling and guidance at relevant steps. Parents and peers can play an important role in this regard.
2. Lack of ability to calculate risk can be overcome by awareness and facilitation of promotion of ideas and initiatives. Career guidance and mentoring programme can help to solve the problem.
3. Adequate, Appropriate and consistent training and career counseling measures can help in advancement of the students.

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude by saying that the under graduate students are more or less internal in their attribution about success and failure both for others and themselves, as well as tend to be stable across situations.

Scope for research

The same research can be extended to a larger group of students and cross sections of society for knowing their orientation towards the attribution of success and failure.

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