Masters of Fate or Victims of Circumstances? Connecting Communication Centers with Locus of Control

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Abstract

Longstanding research correlates locus of control (LOC)— the sense of self-empowerment (internal orientation) versus feeling influenced by events others control (external orientation)—with self-motivation, persistence, high academic achievement, and workplace success. In study 1, undergraduate peer tutors (n = 31) at a midsize, doctoral-granting, minority-serving university completed a variant of the teacher locus of control (TLOC) survey, which measures the degree of internal/external LOC orientation in educational settings. In study 2, communication center supervisors (n = 12) and undergraduate peer tutors (n = 13) from 14 institutions nationwide completed a qualitative survey describing how they approach consultations with student clientele.

The studies found: (1) Supervisors exhibited slightly higher external LOC than peer tutors, indicating a keener sense of restrictions on their personal agency and deferring more to specific procedures as solutions to challenging situations. (2) Small but statistically significant correlations were found between a tutor's self-identified race and LOC orientation. White tutors more readily attributed levels of achievement to the nature of the student (external LOC); non-white tutors treated achievement levels more as products of the consultation techniques (internal LOC). (3) Qualitative data show that communication center personnel must balance the tensions between different LOC orientations, perhaps by ranging across the continuum from highly internal to highly external.

Extensive research links locus of control (LOC)— the sense of self-empowerment (internal orientation) versus feeling influenced by events others control (external orientation)—with self-motivation, persistence, high academic achievement, resilience in the face of setbacks, and workplace success (Lefcourt, 2014). Communication centers seem ideally positioned to develop a sense of self-determination in their staff and users. Specifically, communication centers that focus on developing oral communication competencies through student peer tutoring can provide tangible evidence that personalized instruction makes a positive difference as the students who use the center demonstrate more skillful communication. What factors or characteristics, however, equip student tutors (also known as consultants) and staff to believe they can instigate this productive change? This investigation examines how student tutors and staff at communication centers in higher education approach the responsibilities of their positions: as events to which they react, as opportunities they create, or some combination thereof. After a brief review of the significant and diverse roles LOC plays in higher education, the focus will narrow to how LOC becomes operationalized in communication centers.

Literature Review

Initially developed and tested by Julian Rotter (1966), LOC has emerged and persisted as a fundamental psychological construct for thriving within and beyond academic environments. Half a century of educational research has consistently linked LOC to academic success in college, associating better performance with high internal LOC (Findley & Cooper, 1983; Useus, Harper, & Nichols, 2010). Indeed, studies have linked internal LOC to a litany of desirable academic characteristics: self-directed learning (Van Overwalle, Mervielde, & De Schuyter, 1995), realistic assessments of self (Hashaw, Hammond, & Rogers, 1990), better academic performance (Wilhite, 1990), and even improved physical well-being (Maddi, 2007).

In fact, LOC scores rival nationally standardized tests in their ability to predict student academic performance during the first year of college (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006). Astin (1984) noted that developing higher internal LOC could stimulate greater student involvement in their own education by empowering them to feel believe they can influence academic outcomes. Greater involvement in turn generates increased academic retention, degree completion, and improved satisfaction (Tinto, 2012). Overall, students who develop greater internal LOC as they mature can increase their sense of self-efficacy (Cassidy, 2012), enabling them to take initiatives to learn more independently, exhibit more resilience to discouragement, and continue learning.

The relationship between LOC and academic success acquires more nuanced contours. Blankstein (1984) suggested that high external locus of control might interface with learned helplessness, the self-induced inability to persist in attempting to solve problems or improve one's conditions. Although uncertainty persists regarding which condition operates as cause or effect, high external LOC could justify or induce helplessness by disqualifying the self as an effective agent of change. High external LOC also might arise from or boost the sense of entitlement among students, fueling the notion that benefits (such as high test scores) are deserved rather than earned (Anderson, Halberstadt, & Aitken, 2013).

Rotter's early research on LOC treated it as more of a generalized orientation toward life. An important distinction to make when studying LOC, however, is that no clean dichotomy separates internal versus external LOC scores (Rotter, 1966). The LOC measures are much better represented as indicative of an individual's placement on a continuum between two poles: internal and external. The present studies described below adopt an updated perspective that prioritizes how LOC operates in specific settings. Internal and external LOC also do not describe invariant personality traits, but rather refer to the tendency of individuals to assume or assign responsibility in specific circumstances. LOC scales indicate a propensity to consider self or other factors as responsible for events and outcomes. "TLOC orientation disposed teachers to have certain intentions which eventually influence their teaching practices. The word 'disposed' is deliberately used here to indicate that there is not necessarily a causal relationship between teacher perception and their classroom practices but rather a disposition to think and behave in a certain manner" (Cook, 2012, p. 294). In a similar vein, we do not seek or claim any causal relationship between communication centers and LOC. Rather, our research explores how LOC comes into play in the ways supervisors and tutors approach their roles in communication centers. Based on those

findings, we suggest several ways the organizational culture of communication centers can influence a sense of LOC that could improve teaching, learning, and operational effectiveness.

Locus of control operates as a continuous variable best measured by observing the relative scores within and across populations studied (Lu, Wu, & Cooper, 1999). Thus the assignment of "external" or "internal" LOC designates the positioning of subjects toward situations or conditions, and not an absolute bifurcation. There is no consistent quantifiable boundary separating internal from external LOC, and the same individual can approach some situations with a more internal orientation while encountering others with a more external mindset. For example, a worker may exhibit highly internal LOC characteristics in her work at a communication center, but then revert to a more external LOC mode within a family environment whose relational dynamic seems immune to her influence.

Although LOC emerges as foundational for academic, professional, and personal success, no studies thus far have connected this construct to communication centers. This absence of linkage seems surprising given the central function that communication centers serve in providing educational services that supplement curricular offerings, developing instructional skills of student tutors, and offering safe spaces for students to explore and express their personal identities (Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016).

Research Questions

Having reviewed the connections between LOC and higher education, attention now turns to the interface between LOC and communication centers. To explore these connections, a pair of studies—one quantitative and one qualitative—were conducted to illuminate how practitioners at communication centers (student peer tutors and supervisory staff) exhibit internal and external LOC. The quantitative study (Study 1) concentrated on approaches to communication among student peer tutors within one communication center. The qualitative study (Study 2) was conducted nationally to gain an overall picture of how LOC gets operationalized across the pedagogical environments of communication centers.

The following questions guided the research:

RQ1: In what ways does the level of internal or external LOC correlate with student peer tutor demographics and work experience? [Study 1]

RQ2: How do the attitudes and practices of communication center personnel reflect internal and external LOC orientations, as well as demonstrate their interplay? [Study 2]

RQ3: How could locus of control enrich the understanding and implementation of peer tutoring in communication centers? [Study 2]

The subsequent sections engage these questions by detailing the procedures and findings of the two studies.

Study 1: Quantitative Investigation

The first study was a quantitative investigation focusing on student peer tutors. This study sought to discover linkages between LOC and tutor characteristics such as demographics and work experience.

Study 1 Participants

Study 1 was conducted at a mid-size (enrollment = ~18,500), research-intensive, doctoral granting university in the southeastern United States. The site is a minority serving institution, with an undergraduate student body comprised of approximately 27% African Americans and 7% Hispanic or Latino Americans. Participants consisted of 31 undergraduate tutors working in a communication center focused on oral communication competencies such as public speaking and group presentations. Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 26 (mean = 20.9) years old, with self-declared racial identity of 55% white, 29% African American, 3% Arab/Middle Eastern, 3% Native American or Pacific Islander, and 3% other. For statistical calculations, the non-white respondents were aggregated into a single category. Respondents had worked an average of 2.94 semesters (~1.5 academic years) in the communication center, for four to 25 (mean = 10.2) hours weekly. Participants were recruited via email circulated to all student tutors, which contained a link to an online survey administered anonymously through a secure server.

Study 1 Method

Bandura (1997) criticized Rotter's original LOC scale for its decontextualized and generic questions. Bandura recommended that surveys provide task-specific scenarios to gauge locus of control in relevant domains of action. In keeping with these observations, the current study's quantitative survey was based on Rose and Medway's (1981a, 1981b) Teacher Locus of Control (TLOC) scale, with questions specific to educational settings. TLOC "is defined as teachers' perception of their personal control and responsibility for students' academic and behavioral outcomes" (Cook, 2012, p. 285). The TLOC instrument was developed from the recognition that Rotter's LOC scale "was designed to measure generalized perception of personal control" rather than LOC "associated with a specific professional context such as classroom teaching" (Cook, 2012, p. 285). The TLOC instrument has particular relevance for communication centers. Tutors in communication centers instruct their peers; the supervisors instruct the student tutors. Teachers who register a higher internal LOC feel more responsible for the quality of instruction, so they tend to use more effective instructional techniques and elicit higher achievement from their students (Cook, 2012).

The TLOC assessment is a widely used measure for gauging locus of control orientation of educators (Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Haase, 2001). The TLOC scale consists of forced-choice questions which describe student successes or student failures. The two response options to each question, one coded as internal and one coded as external, offer explanations for the results described. To adapt the TLOC scale specifically to communication centers, the scenarios within the TLOC were slightly revised to refer to analogous situations in a communication center. For example, the original TLOC question:

> Suppose you had difficulties in setting up learning centers for students in your classroom. Would this probably happen
>
> a. because you lacked the appropriate materials, or
> b. because you didn't spend enough time in developing activities to go into the center?

was revised to read:

> Suppose you had difficulties in setting up resources for the speaker in your consultation.
> Would this probably happen
> a. because you lacked the appropriate materials, or
> b. because you didn't spend enough time in preparing resources to use in the consultation?

Preservation of the exact phrasing of the original TLOC questions and responses, substituting only terminology referring to communication center contexts, kept the scale's design intact while providing task-specific contexts for locus of control. This retention of the precise LOC question and answer structure with context-specific verbal substitution preserved the scale's integrity and validity while rendering t relevant to communication centers. Cook's (2012) study of high school teachers also used a modified version of the TLOC, in her case altering the structure of response options and omitting questions irrelevant to the specific teaching context. Many other adaptations of the more generic existing LOC scales, particularly Rotter's, have been developed using exactly the same technique: identifying context-specific scenarios to elicit a more internally or externally focused response. These situationally targeted instruments include LOC measures in contexts such as: seeking health care (Winefield, 1982), eating healthy foods (Reicks, Mills, & Henry, 2004), and job performance (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006). In accordance with convention scoring protocol for this type of instrument, responses to the 25 objective questions were assigned a value of one (1) if the internal LOC option was selected, and a value of two (2) if the external option was chosen. This scoring yielded possible cumulative scores ranging from 25 (most internal LOC) to 50 (most external LOC).

Table 1: Cumulative Results by Self-identified Demographics

Student Peer Consultants	**Mean Cumulative Score on Modified TLOC (lower score = more internal)**	**t Values**
Overall (n = 31)	41.04 (SD = .18)	
Self-identified race White (n = 17) Non-White (n = 14)	 42.84 (SD = .18) 39.15 (SD = .20)	t = .008 (p < .01)
Work experience in center ≤ 1 semester (n = 12) ≥ 2 semesters (n = 19)	 42.44 (SD = .18) 41.23 (SD = .17)	t = .322 (p > .05)

Study 1 Results and Discussion

The most notable quantitative findings pertain to self-declared racial identity. Table 1 lists the overall and racially specific TLOC scores for the participants. When filtered by self-identified racial identity, participants' overall mean TLOC scores were 42.84 for whites and 39.15 for non-whites. Although there was a very small difference between intra-group and inter-group variance, two-tailed t-tests revealed that the 15 percent racial differential on cumulative scores was statistically significant at p < .01.

Results related to the length of time consultants had worked in the communication center were far more mixed. The mean cumulative score for newer consultants (one semester or less work experience) was 42.44 compared to 41.23 for more experienced workers (two or more semesters experience). Two-tailed t-tests indicated that this difference was not statistically significant. On the seven individual questions registering statistically significant (p < .05) differences based on work experience, four showed LOC becoming more internal with greater experience while three recorded more

external LOC for the more experienced respondents. These findings do not clearly support or refute previous research on teachers that correlated experience with increasingly internal LOC (Cook, 2012).

Rose and Medway (1981a) note that each item on the TLOC scale has equivalent strength, making an analysis of individual item responses worthwhile. Drilling down into response patterns for individual questions, seven of the eight hypothetical scenarios producing a statistically significant (p [Symbol] .02) difference in response based on racial identity registered more

Table 2: Demographic Differentials in Responses to Specific TLOC-Derived Scenarios

Question Scenario	**Mean Item Score** (lower score = more internal)	**t value**
6. When the grades of your speakers improve, it is more likely: ❍ Because you found ways to motivate the speakers ❍ Because the speakers were trying harder to do well	Whites = 1.59 Non-Whites = 1.29	4.78**
10. If the speaker became disruptive and noisy when you left them alone in the room, would this happen: ❍ Because you didn't leave them interesting work to do while you were gone ❍ Because the students were more noisy that day than they usually are	Whites = 1.75 Non-Whites = 1.43	6.71**
17. Suppose a speech performed by your speakers was voted the "Best Speech of the Year" by students and faculty in your school. Would it be: ❍ Because you put in a lot of time and effort as the consultant ❍ Because the speakers were cooperative	Whites = 1.92 Non-Whites = 1.77	12.0**
24. If the speakers in your consultations perform better than they usually do on a speeches, would this happen: ❍ Because the speakers practiced a lot for their speeches ❍ Because you did a good job of teaching the speakers the skills they needed to succeed	Whites = 1.54 Non-Whites = 1.31	3.74**
27. If the speakers in your consultations performed better overall in their classes, compared to speakers you had last semester, it would probably be: ❍ Because you put more effort into consulting this semester ❍ Because this semester's speakers were somewhat smarter than last semester's	Whites = 1.38 Non-Whites = 1.15	2.74*
29. Suppose one of the public speaking underachievers performs his or her speech better than usual. This would probably happen: ❍ Because the speaker tried hard to do the speech properly ❍ Because you tried hard to explain how to do the speech properly in the consultation	Whites = 1.77 Non-Whites = 1.54	6.32**
30. Suppose one of your speakers began to do better on speeches than he or she usually does. Would this happen: ❍ Because you put much effort into helping the speaker do better ❍ Because the speaker was trying harder to do well	Whites = 1.77 Non-Whites = 1.69	6.32**

*p [Symbol] .02
**p < .005
Note: Shaded cells designate a student failure scenario.

internal LOC scores for non-whites. These questions and the racial demographic responses appear in Table 2.

A noteworthy pattern in the item analysis is the prevalence of more internal LOC orientation scores among non-whites in scenarios describing student success. Apparently when non-white peer tutors encountered positive student outcomes, they were more likely than white tutors to assume personal responsibility for that result.

The more internal LOC for non-whites challenges previous research that found non-whites registering somewhat greater external locus of control than their white counterparts (Tashakkori & Thompson, 1991; Zahodne et al., 2015). Some research also indicates that African-American college students exhibit higher external locus of control that their white counterparts (Ayalon & Young, 2005). Specifically, the findings of the present study run counter to a long line of research that has found African Americans tend to exhibit more external LOC when correlations between race and LOC are observed. A meta-analysis of the literature on locus of control notes that research does not consistently find relationships between LOC and race. When differences are observed, however, African Americans regularly report more external locus of control (Lefcourt, 2014). Notably, this pattern persists despite improvements in civil rights since the early studies conducted in the 1960s.

Several possible explanations for this study's anomalous findings merit attention. Generally, comfort in a social domain has been linked to greater internal LOC (Garza et al., 1982). Given that this study took place at a minority-serving institution, students of color might have more internal LOC regardless of their experiences at the communication center. To more clearly isolate the communication center as an independent or contributory variable affecting LOC, broader baseline data on LOC based on race or ethnicity could provide useful comparative benchmarks. Various confounding variables might have affected the reported LOC. Some of these variables include the types of student clientele who gravitated to consultants of particular races, self-selection of more internal LOC students of color choosing to work as consultants, or self-selection of more external LOC white students employed at the center.

The surprisingly internal LOC of non-white participants compared to their white counterparts also invites further reflection. One potential explanation deserving further study is that the African American students felt particularly empowered in an atmosphere that focuses on oral communication. The legacy of a rich oral tradition plus the ongoing vibrancy of African American oratory—especially among clergy—could render an oral communication center an attractive venue for these students (Hamlet, 2011). Future studies could test whether African Americans and other students of color or various ethnicities register equally high internal LOC scores when working in less oral contexts, such as writing centers.

Study 2: Qualitative Investigation

The second study was an open-ended survey that asked respondents to explain how they addressed different aspects of consulting with students who interface with the communication center. Respondents were asked about how they approached the following tasks: alter existing instructional resources to adapt to individual student needs, conduct conversations during consultations with student clients, and handle unexpected consultation situations.

Study 2 Participants

This study involved 25 participants (12 female, 13 male), comprised of student peer tutors (n = 12) and supervisory staff (n = 13) employed at 14 different college and university communication centers across the United States. The questionnaires were administered as hard copies during the 2015 National Association of Communication Centers Conference. No time limit was specified or enforced, anonymity of each respondent was assured, and respondents received no compensation or incentives for participating. Nineteen participants self-identified as white/Caucasian, four as multi-racial, and two as African American. The presence of only four self-identified non-white participants providing codable responses rendered any racially based comparisons dubious. Student tutor age ranged from 18 to 25 (mean = 20.7) years old, averaging 2.58 semesters (~1.25 academic years) of work experience at a communication center. Supervisors ranged from 23 to 64 (mean = 40.1) years old, averaging 3.5 years of work experience at a communication center.

Study 2 Method

In addition to demographic questions, the survey instrument contained six open-ended questions modeled after the Teacher Locus of Control (TLOC) measure (Rose & Medway, 1981b). In accordance with the measure, items were equally divided between positive and negative situations to account for LOC differences when dealing with adversity versus success. Because the original TLOC measure dealt with teacher/student dialogues, the questions were adapted to better resemble communication centers' consultation environments. These modifications were geared to portray typical actions and situations that the participants would encounter while working in communication centers, making the measure more immediately relatable to the respondents. Focus on the communication center context allowed for more detailed responses than would emerge from generic questions about when the respondents felt controlled or in control. Open-ended questions were used to encourage more detailed, descriptive responses that could give a richer perspective of how LOC was operationalized in practice at communication centers (Patton, 2002). Asking participants how they would deal with specific situations furnished data that gave a more *in vivo* picture of student interactions than would a standardized questionnaire.

Similar qualitative approaches have been used extensively in the LOC literature, especially in educational contexts. Rather than simply indicate how internal or external a participant's LOC orientation registered in a communication center setting, qualitative responses can demonstrate how and why that orientation is implemented in practice (Cook, 2012). Several recent qualitative studies of LOC directed toward teachers (Akkaya & Akyol, 2016) and students (Cavazos et al., 2010; Di Tommaso, 2010) developed questions designed to elicit responses that the coders identified as predominantly internally or externally oriented.

The present study's overall design was patterned after the qualitative component of Gray and Dentsen's (1998) study of the relationship between LOC and business success. As in that study, the basic classification of categories stemmed from the theoretical framework of the quantitative study, which was Rotter's internal/external LOC scale. Acknowledging the multidimensional aspect of LOC, the external LOC content category was

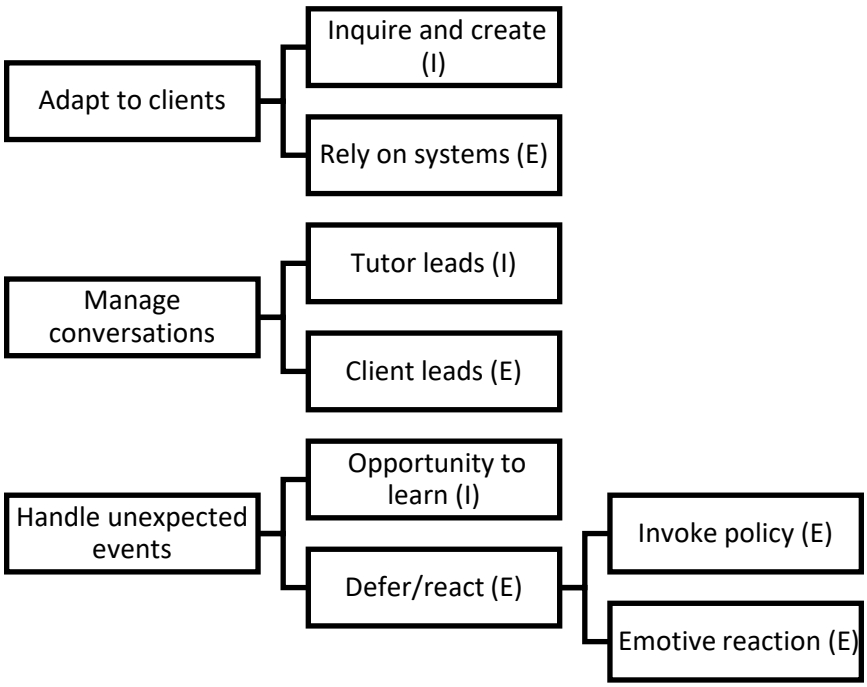
subdivided into two subcategories: fate/luck and powerful others. These dimensions of LOC, following Levenson's (1974, 1981) work, have been the two most widely documented and validated (Hyman & Stanley, 1991; Wilkinson, 2007). This category assignment followed the protocols used in Gray and Dentsen's (1998) study, replicating their classificatory scheme as depicted in Table 3.

In the first stage of data analysis, coders independently conducted a thematic content analysis of the participants' responses. One coder had worked as a consultant at a communication center for more than three years and had been a managing consultant for a year. The second coder had researched communication center operations for ten years and had directed a Communication Across the Curriculum program that included a speaking-intensive component. An overall intercoder reliability of .93 was achieved; discrepantly coded responses were excluded from the study.

In the second stage of qualitative analysis, the same coders independently used emergent thematic coding (Neuendorf, 2002) to identify recurrent patterns within the content that had been categorized in stage one. In accordance with grounded theory (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), each set of categories was compared to the survey responses and revised until the coders mutually agreed that the classifications accounted for the maximum amount of content. The final classification scheme assigned 92 percent of the available content to the categories listed in Figure 1. The content analysis from stage two yielded three dialectically paired sets of themes corresponding with the communication center operations described in the three pairs of open-ended questions.
emotive statements without noting any subsequent actions that they would take.

Study 2 Results and Discussion

The student tutors produced 70 responses, yielding 68 (97.1%) codable responses. From these responses, 39 (57.4%) were classified as internal LOC, 29 (42.6%) as external. The supervisory staff provided 57 total qualitative responses, with 50 (87.7%) codable using the categories specified in Table 3. Of the codable responses, 26 (52%) qualified as internal LOC, 24 (48%) as external LOC. Surprisingly, the supervisors offered cumulative responses that reflected a slightly lower sense of self-direction than the student tutors. Although their positions enable them to exercise a greater range of influence, supervisors also bear direct accountability to various administrators for the operations of communication centers. Unlike the student tutors, supervisors must constantly advocate on behalf of the center, frequently encountering bureaucratic barriers or resource limitations beyond their own ability to control. As a result, supervisors may experience more frequent overt resistance to their plans or goals Futhermore, administrators shoulder responsibility for compliance with various employment regulations and university policies that students tend to encounter only rarely or indirectly. More finely granulated results arose from the second stage of thematic content analysis, with results clustering around each of the three question areas.



Note: The first level indicates the types of scenarios described in the stimulus questions. The derivative levels identify the emergent themes in the responses.
(I) = higher internal locus of control orientation
(E) = higher external locus of control orientation

Figure 1. *Context-Specific Thematic Content Categories*

Table 3: Initial Thematic Content Categories

Locus of Control		**Operational Definition**	**Example**
Internal		Expression of belief in personal responsibility for events or outcomes	"If I research and organize my speech better, I will get a better grade."
External	Fate/Chance/ "The System"	Attribution of causes or outcomes to destiny, luck, or "the way things are"	"I'm a naturally gifted speaker, so I get good grades on speeches." "The grading system is rigged against me."
	Powerful Others	Attribution of causes or outcomes to other people	"The teacher loves/hates me, so I get good/bad grades."

Resources and Resourcefulness: Bounded Creativity.

The first pair of questions asked what, if any, measures the participant would take to adapt to a speaker's individual needs or to customize existing resources. These questions probed the willingness to go beyond standardized instructional practices and prefabricated resources. Surprisingly, 95 percent of the student peer tutors' answers identified ways that they made original contributions to existing materials and processes. These responses exhibited a drive

to craft pedagogical tools customized to the particular situation rather than rely on resources "as is." The most frequently used verb in these responses was "ask," with a focus on creating whatever kinds of resources would meet the client's needs. The prevalence of first-person pronouns, action verbs, and active voice signaled a more internally LOC oriented approach. Respondents expressed their willingness to intervene rather than simply react to a client's needs. Responses included phrases such as: "I determine" which combinations of resources to use; "I position" myself physically to show receptiveness; "I create…an open safe space" for instruction; "I create an example" that fits each case. Only one tutor's response took a more passive approach, listing the various technologies the center had available for students to practice their speeches. Overall, the peer tutors expressed the importance of active inquiry and creativity.

The supervisory staff responses to the same pair of questions presented a more moderated approach to creativity. Only 65 percent of the supervisors' responses focused entirely on the novelty of instructional resources. This result may seem somewhat surprising given that these staff members have greater authority to devise instructional resources than do the student tutors. The responses that did not center on innovations tended to defer to pre-existing structures and methods, a reliance on existing systems or "The System" that qualifies as a variant of Levenson's (1981) external LOC dimension of fate or destiny. Several respondents used passive voice when describing these systemic resources, grammatically indicating their subjection to external processes. Responses in this category included terminology such as:

"We are connected to our academic program" and "serve" their needs; Student "mentors are trained in a peer-to-peer formula"; The "intake form" provides information and "we follow this lead" in adapting to clients. The supervisors' responses did emphasize active probing of student needs and creating appropriate resources, but less robustly than the student tutors. The supervisors noted that creativity occurs within bounds, obeying methods that enable consistent instructional practices to emerge. Ideally, these systems can foster creativity without giving license for "anything goes."

Shifting Locus of Control to Student Clientele.

The second pair of questions asked whether and how the communication student tutor and the student client led or controlled conversations during consultations. The responses offer a nuanced view of how LOC operates within a communication center setting.

The responses regarding conversational control suggest that, in consultative settings, internal and external LOC may operate dialectically rather than dichotomously. The interplay mentor and learner control has affinities with what Baxter terms "contrapuntal analysis" of relational discourse, defined as examination of "the interplay of contrasting discourses" and how the tensions between them are (or are not) reconciled (p. 152). As Schwartzman and Ellis (2011) observe, clientele may seek out consultations at the communication center because they want additional assistance to improve (internal initiative) or because "it's required" (external mandate). To equip clients to continuously improve as communicators, communication centers must create environments that develop the capacity for self-improvement. Eventually the student clients will not face external pressures to get communication tutelage; they will have to

create ways to prepare and practice in a professional setting without the support system of a communication center. Essentially the communication center becomes a site for activating the client's perceived capacity to develop into a better communicator ("I'll always find ways to improve") rather than to treat communication ability as innately limited ("I'm not designed to be a speaker").

The responses from consultants and supervisors reveal a complex movement along the internal-external LOC continuum. Several respondents noted that they employ a strategy of leading by following. As one student consultant summarized, "I allow them to ask questions and lead where the appointment goes." The consultant empowered clients by giving them permission to guide instruction. Particularly when clients arrive ill-prepared, staff must diagnose what expectations and objectives those clients have. The consultants and supervisors mentioned ways that they seem to cede control to the clients to set the agenda, in effect acknowledging the client's role as the powerful other. Instead of this constituting a worldview, it operates as a diagnostic tool that in turn empowers the consultant to intervene with appropriate help. Active listening plays a crucial role in this reciprocal empowerment. Several consultants enumerated principles of active listening in their responses: "ask follow-up questions," "give them feedback," "ask probing questions." One supervisor noted that consultants "are trained to listen, [to] encourage the student [client] to talk."

One consultant stated, "I ask them to describe their assignment and listen to their responses," which in turn equips the consultant to identify "some elements we may work on in our consultation." The interactions between consultants and clients often become an oscillation between more internal and more external LOC as a way to instigate deeper involvement and participation from both interlocutors. As one student consultant observed, "It is more of a back and forth" wherein the participants ideally remain flexible in their willingness to control outcomes. Other consultants and supervisors, however, portrayed themselves as entirely responsive to the client, who bore responsibility for leading consultations: "They explain what they need help with [or] don't understand." "They articulate their goals for the session…." "They tell me their needs and what they want to get out of the session." Far from passive spectatorship, this less directive approach presumes the client respects and trusts the tutor. A supervisor explained that "they value my input and therefore give me control."

Communication centers constantly confront what could be called the "tutor's dilemma": how to maximize the help given to students without doing their work for them. LOC provides a useful conceptual framework for addressing this quandary. While the control of conversation within consultations seems to fluctuate, a core latent theme related to LOC emerges from the respondents. Some communication center personnel take a low- or non-interventionist approach, with the client responsible for driving the agenda and approach. Although this technique may register as more external LOC, that externality proves instrumental in empowering the client to assume more self-direction as a learner. By ceding control, the mentor accelerates learning by serving as a "guide on the side" who can shape educational outcomes with the learner. Other personnel articulate more directive techniques, such as one supervisor who stressed the need to "raise concerns/problems" and "return conversation to provided topics." Throughout consultations with clientele, these different levels of perceived personal

control over outcomes serve a larger objective related to LOC: to activate the ongoing capacity to improve as a speaker rather than simply to rely on someone who can generate a higher grade on the next assignment.

Adapting to Positive/Negative Expectancy Violations.

The final pair of questions addressed how the participants coped with unexpected situations in the communication center. The positive scenario asked how the respondent, just having completed a difficult consultation, would handle another consultant volunteering to take on the respondent's next consultation. The negative scenario posed the question of how to decide which consultant would assist with a client who suddenly showed up without previously scheduling an appointment.

Seventy-five percent of the codable student consultant responses to the positive scenario expressed gratitude for the reduction in their own workload or by referring to communication center policies that prevented unscheduled switching of consultations. The remaining responses used the situation to probe the rationale behind the switch, taking on a responsibility to learn. One consultant would "take the opportunity to reflect on that consultation with them [the other consultant] and look for ways to collaborate with them on what to do in the future." Another consultant declined to accept the help, preferring instead to take the upcoming consultation in a positive direction. This respondent would "most likely take my appointment. A good appointment would turn my mood around!" These responses reflect a willingness to initiate action based on the positive experience rather than simply be glad that it happened.

Similarly, 76 percent of the supervisor responses to the expectancy violations either simply expressed an emotional reaction (e.g., "Thanks!") or referred to specific policy guidelines of the communication center to handle positive or negative expectancy violations. The supervisors referenced explicit policies more frequently—in almost half (47%) of the responses to the expectancy violation scenarios, as might be expected considering that these participants bore responsibility for implementing and enforcing these procedures. All of the responses that referenced policies stated how those systems would accommodate the unforeseen situation, thereby relieving the individual from having to render a decision independently. For example, one respondent provided a bulleted list of criteria for determining the fit between consultants and clients. These criteria consisted of: "disciplinary match (if possible), perceived personality compatibility [between tutor and client], whose turn is it." Another respondent stressed the importance of evenly distributing the number of consultations across the available consultants. In this context, systems and policies controlled outcomes; the staff at the center bore responsibility for following them. Consultants and supervisors expressed their emotional reactions as reactive

Limitations

Interpretation of the results should proceed with caution. Both studies included a relatively small sample. Despite this caveat, participants in Study 2 represented broad geographic diversity, wide age range, and variance in the size and type of educational institution, ranging from small liberal arts colleges to NCAA Division I research universities. The participants in Study 1 were racially

diverse. Future research should maximize the diversity of participants and probe how culturally specific factors might affect pedagogy at communication centers.

The results of the quantitative study also might apply primarily to females. The gender distribution of the participants in Study 1 was heavily imbalanced, with 84% self-identifying as female, 10% male, and 6% other/non-binary. This gender skew prevents meaningful gender-based comparisons. Females generally tend to register more toward external LOC than males, although males and females have over time become more external LOC oriented (Sherman, Higgs, & Williams, 1997). This disparity is expected given the long history of patriarchy that designates males as authority figures and rewards female obedience. Women have traditionally been socialized to become "received knowers," deferring to authority figures, especially when they are males (Belenky et al., 1997).

More data should be gathered to compare communication center personnel and clientele to their counterparts outside of communication centers. It remains unclear what, if any, effect the communication center has as an independent variable on the development or exercise of LOC orientation. Longitudinal studies would prove especially useful in tracking how LOC might evolve, especially among clientele seeking to become more self-directed, lifelong learners.

One might object that the current studies focus on decisions and reactions in communication centers rather than revealing LOC as a personality construct. We would respond that this is precisely the point of a communication-centered study of communication centers. While a psychologically-oriented study might seek to reveal an essential an internal personality trait or the mental mechanisms that guide behaviors, communication research related to LOC has different objectives. The present studies prioritize the ways that LOC can inform the concrete human interactions that occur within communication centers. Instead of analyzing LOC solely as an internal mental construct that provides a worldview (Lu, Wu, & Cooper, 1999), these studies treat LOC as providing a repository of resources that communicators can tap into and activate as they encounter specific communication situations. Specifically, the ability to activate a more internal or more external LOC—i.e., to operate across the continuum from internal to external LOC—would constitute the practical, communication-oriented side of communication scholarship in this area.

Implications

The degree to which communication center consultants and staff assign agency to themselves or to outside forces has significant pedagogical and professional implications. Through fostering an internal LOC, communication centers may be able to encourage their tutors to do more than is minimally necessary or mandated by standard procedures. Internal LOC mindsets place importance on the ability of the individual to initiate, perform, and complete tasks and to perform them well, which could prove beneficial for the tutor, the clients, and the organization as a whole. For example, internal LOC could promote a policy of everyone continually improving and updating the materials available to student clientele. If peer tutors feel capable of generating pedagogical aids or originating innovative methods of working with students, they can enrich the depth and variety of instructional resources. While maintaining power may boost one's own internal LOC,

supervisors must also know when to put their own power aside and begin sharing it with their employees. In other words, through supervisors fostering internal LOC values (e.g., personal responsibility, willingness to innovate) in their employees, they also allow room for ingenuity and advancements within the workplace.

LOC also holds important implications for the supervision and operation of communication centers. High internal LOC has long been identified as an entrepreneurial characteristic (Brockhaus, 1982), thus high internal LOC supervisors likely would find more innovative ways to cope with and rebound from restrictions in resources or other operational challenges (Howell & Avolio, 1993). High internal LOC would tend to stimulate adaptive responses and resilience rather than resignation to "the way things are." People with high internal LOC "cope significantly better in crises (big, stressful challenges) because their executive functions are intact and they do not appraise the situation as particularly threatening, given that they feel personally in control" (Cuddy, 2015, p. 124).

Other studies of the relationship between race and LOC in educational settings may shed some light on how demographic and cultural factors operate within communication centers. In their research concerning sex, socioeconomics, and education, Payne and Payne (1989) found that as children get older, they believe they obtain a better sense of internal control. The researchers also suspected that "teacher expectancies probably moderate the relationship between locus of control and achievement" (p. 87); however, they did not find any significant correlations with race and or sex. These findings suggest that the higher internal LOC observed among non-white communication center consultants may at least in part stem from the tutelage they receive from the director and senior staff. The influence of mentors and authority figures can operate in the opposite direction as well. McCabe, Goehring, Yeh, and Lau (2008) found that Mexican American children have less internal LOC in educational settings if their parents have a low internal LOC. Further investigation could reveal to what extent the supervisory staff could take measures to cultivate more internal LOC among workers of various demographics.

The highly internal LOC responses from the student tutors who participated in Study 2 affirmed their sense of personal agency. According to Rubin (1993), this self-determination could indicate the student tutors feel more capable and in control of these consultations that they have been trained for and repeatedly practice throughout their employment. Rubin's research claimed that a more internal LOC can be cultivated by environmental reinforcements of self-efficacy. In situations where an individual is placed in a position requiring self-control, and especially influence over others, these same individuals begin seeing themselves as having agency. Through repeated conditioning and exposure to similar situations over time, this agency is reinforced and an internal LOC begins to become more and more likely to emerge.

Considering that locus of control often varies according to cultural customs and norms, communication center supervisors and workers should tailor their approach to employees and clientele. Unqualified encouragement and unconditional rewarding of internal LOC may neglect the value some cultures place on external LOC. For example, in many traditional Mexican cultures parents cultivate external LOC, which reflects the importance of religious determinism and a healthy respect among children for divine

authority (McCabe, Goehring, Yeh, & Lau, 2008). Effective leadership and pedagogy seems to connect more closely with flexibility in fostering degrees of LOC, tailoring the level of internality or externality to the situation and the student's cultural background (Garza, Romero, Cox, & Ramirez, 1982).

Highly internal LOC presents potential challenges as well as opportunities in communication centers. Consultants (or, more generally, any students or employees) who exhibit highly internal LOC could prove difficult to supervise or enlist as equal partners in collaborations. If internal LOC becomes manifest as a belief in personal control to the exclusion or minimization of others, such an attitude may emerge as headstrong or uncollaborative behaviors. A fine line separates personal initiative from egotism. Poor decisions may ensue, especially if overconfidence in self-determination reduces consultations with others to consider a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

This pair of studies represents the first known research to investigate the relationship between communication centers and locus of control. Study 1 presented an initial foray into ground previously unexplored in research concerning communication centers: the impact of identity factors such as race on the approach to pedagogy in that environment. Study 2 offered insights regarding how locus of control is implicated in communication center operations.

Optimal communication center operations may result from a diverse range of internally and externally oriented LOC workers. Some research in business settings indicates that internal and external LOC operate synergistically (Khan, Breitenecker, & Schwarz, 2014). Workers develop greater mutual trust when each person does not always assume operational control for themselves (internal LOC) or defer responsibility to others (external LOC). Thoughtful staffing of a communication center may require balancing obedience and conformity (facilitated by external LOC) that assures consistent quality with originality and personal initiative (fueled by internal LOC).

Locus of control also provides a convenient way of mapping the relationship between responsibility and accountability in communication centers. Responsibility maps to internal locus of control. As communication center workers assume greater job responsibilities, they acquire more opportunities to demonstrate and expand their pedagogical capabilities. This amplification of perceived professional capacities may occur prior to actual performance of duties. The sheer fact that a worker is invested with more responsibility could in itself magnify a sense of personal agency. A positive form of self-justification may take effect (Tavris & Aronson, 2015). After all, why would supervisors invest a worker with greater responsibility if the worker were not capable of self-direction and initiative? To avoid cognitive dissonance, the worker enacts the role of the responsible tutor.

Accountability maps to external locus of control, as it articulates the limits of personal authority and specifies the route of answerability when things go awry. More specifically, accountability identifies the "powerful others" (Levenson, 1974) who influence the affairs of communication centers, often formalized in an organizational hierarchy. While personal accountability may demonstrate internal locus of control, in organizational settings accountability usually designates the limits to an organizational member's personal

sphere of influence. This distinction likely explains why one *exercises* personal responsibility *for* deeds while being *held* accountable *to* others for the consequences of those deeds. Although high internal LOC might trigger initiatives in communication centers, deference to decision-making authorities (external LOC's "powerful others") would increase the likelihood of those initiatives reaching fruition.

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