

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (TYBA)

Subject: Psychology

Course Code: PSC 107

Course Title: Positive Psychology

Unit: 3-- Positive Cognitive States & Processes

Module Name: Self Control and Self Regulation: meaning, theories, and explanation for self-control failure

Module No: 14

Name of the Presenter: Dr. Eulalia Fernandes

**Associate Professor & Head,
Department of Psychology,
St. Xavier's College-Mapusa, Goa**

Notes

CONTROL THEORY

Control theory provides a somewhat idealized model of self-regulation based on “feedback loops” that are used to control some process relative to a given reference point . The feedback loop is often referred to as “TOTE,” which stands for test, operate, test, and exit.

According to control theory, when people pursue positive goals, their self-regulation efforts are focused on reducing the discrepancy between the current state and a future goal. Control theory predicts that the emotions experienced during goal-directed actions depend on the person’s rate of progress toward future goals. Positive emotions result when people make greater-than-expected progress in achieving their goals. Negative emotions result from less-than-expected progress. These emotional consequences are independent of the amount of actual discrepancy between where we are now and where we want to go. According to control theory, it is one’s rate of progress toward the goal that is critical.

SELF-DISCREPANCY THEORY

According to self-discrepancy theory, self-regulation is directed by “self-guides,” which involve comparisons between the actual self, the ideal self, and “ought self”. The actual self

represents a person's beliefs about the qualities he or she actually possesses in the present. The ideal self defines our ultimate goals in terms of the abilities and qualities we would ideally like to possess. The "ought self" refers to social obligations, responsibilities, moral convictions, and duties that define who we think we ought to be (e.g., a good parent or employee).

In contrast to control theory, self-discrepancy theory views the magnitude of the discrepancies between our actual self, ideal self, and ought self as the bases for positive and negative emotions. When there is no discrepancy between the current actual self and the ought or ideal self, people experience positive emotions and are motivated to maintain this congruence. However, when people fall short of their ideals and "oughts" (their moral convictions or obligations), they experience negative emotions.

EVERYDAY EXPLANATIONS FOR SELF-CONTROL FAILURE

Excuses - When stated plans are not completed, goals not achieved, or self-control fails, people may look bad in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Laziness, self-indulgence, impulsiveness, lack of discipline, disorganization, procrastination, and untrustworthiness all come to mind as possible explanations for failure. To avoid these negative inferences, people often offer explanations for why they did not keep their commitments, follow through with plans, or meet personal goals. Excuses are defined as "self-serving explanations or accounts, that aim to reduce personal responsibility for questionable events, thereby disengaging core components of the self from the incident". The purpose of giving an excuse is to reduce personal responsibility and fault for a negative event by providing reasons that attribute the cause of the event to something or someone else, or to less central and more peripheral features of the self.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD EXCUSE?

Schlenker and his colleagues use a triangle model of responsibility to describe how we evaluate the legitimacy of excuses. The model focuses on our judgments of responsibility. Because excuses deny or soften responsibility, how we assign personal responsibility for negative events is critical to evaluating excuses.

The three components of the model are: prescriptive clarity, personal obligation, and personal control. Prescriptive clarity refers to the rules, goals, procedures, and standards that are relevant to the event, which describe what should be done, and how. Personal obligation describes the extent to which a person is required, expected, or dutybound to follow the prescriptions or rules of conduct. Personal control is the final component, and refers to the amount of control a person has over the outcome of the event in question. In this model, excuses are aimed at diminishing one or more of the three components of personal responsibility.

ADVANTAGES OF EXCUSES

Excuse-making can have positive benefits by protecting self-esteem, motivating enhanced performance, and helping to preserve harmony in relationships. Providing ourselves with a reasonable excuse for failure helps maintain our esteem and confidence . Taking full responsibility for negative events, while necessary and appropriate in some cases, can also overwhelm people with incapacitating guilt and self-blame. Lifting some of the responsibility, by pointing to extenuating circumstances or the actions of others, helps us distance ourselves from the event and reduce the potentially debilitating effects of negative emotions such as depression and anxiety. Many studies show how excuses contribute to social harmony by smoothing over potential disruptions in relationships.

DISADVANTAGES OF EXCUSES

As you might guess, excuses can come with a price tag, especially if they are used excessively or are transparently false. Any excuse may lead to speculation concerning its truth or falsity and raise questions about the motives that lie behind it and the character of the person who provides it. Further, excuses may undermine the excuse-giver's self-regulation abilities, confidence, and effectiveness. The effects of habitual excuse-making are potentially quite damaging to the reputation and performance of the excuse-giver. Continual use of excuses may also reduce an individual's self-control and performance. An important component of self-control and self-discipline involves our responsibility to others. Knowing that we will be accountable to others provides an important source of motivation that encourages us to stay on task and fulfil our obligations. When people fail to meet their obligations, they may offer excuses to disengage and distance themselves from responsibility for their actions. If this distancing includes decreased feelings of responsibility to others, or if excuses lead to strong perceptions of unreliability so that others no longer give much responsibility to the excuse-giver, then an important mechanism of self-regulation is also diminished. Overall, the most general and detrimental effect of excuses may be the disengagement of the self from tasks.
