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Evidence Summary

Relationship Between Academic Library Workers' Outlooks on Life, Personality, and Goal-Setting Behavior and Achievement

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To identify a correlation between academic library employees who set New Year's resolutions and goal-setting behavior in professional contexts, and to explore practices, personal attitudes, and outlooks that influence goal-setting and goal-achievement

Design – Non-experimental multiple choice questionnaire

Setting – Online

Subjects – 308 adult participants (over 21 years old) who work in academic library settings including staff, librarians, and administration

Methods – The authors designed an online, non-experimental multiple choice questionnaire through Qualtrics. The authors distributed study invitations to multiple professional library listservs, though it is unclear which listservs were included and what geographic location was covered. The survey was available for roughly a month from February 1-26, 2016. The survey screened participant demographics to omit those under

21 years of age and all identifying information was removed in order to protect participant privacy. All participation was voluntary and participants who were interested in contributing to a follow-up research study were asked to share their contact emails.

Main Results – Most participants (n=182, 59%) set no New Year's resolutions in 2015 and half (n=155, 50%) set no resolutions in 2016. When asked to explain, 23% noted that they hadn't considered setting resolutions in 2016, 9% did not prioritize setting goals, and 5% felt that they could not achieve their goals. Additionally, over 50% articulated other reasons including not prioritizing goal-setting for New Year's, noting that setting goals around the academic year was timelier, and that some participants already had enough goals to achieve. In 2016, half of participants (n=153, 50%) set New Year's resolutions. By far the most common resolution was physical fitness and healthy eating (n=64, 42%). About 19% set occupational goals including skill building, and 15% set emotional goals including cultivating optimism and mindfulness. When asked about goal-setting practices, 36% of the 2016 resolution setters described writing or typing out their goals, 59% shared their goals with others, and nearly 90% enacted changes in their daily routines in order to achieve their goals. 26 participants used all of the goal setting practices above. This group prioritized their top goals and felt confident about reaching those goals. Four participants did not practice goal-setting techniques, and also felt less confident about achieving their goals. 49% of 2016 resolution setters had somewhat optimistic outlooks, and 24% had very optimistic life outlooks. Of those with pessimistic life outlooks, nearly all believed it would be difficult to accomplish goals. Respondents who claimed to be very ambitious were likely to set occupational goals as their top goal. 81% of those in dean and director positions reported being very ambitious and 85% also reported being optimistic. All deans and directors felt confident about accomplishing their goals. For middle managers, 75% felt ambitious and 72% felt optimistic. Professional librarians were 66% ambitious and 72% optimistic.

Conclusions – This study's findings align closely with United States national averages about the percentage of Americans who set New Year's resolutions and achieve their goals. Data suggests some relationship between academic library workers' outlooks on life and confidence in achieving their goals, as well as a correlation between goal setting strategies and achieving goals. The authors express optimism that 20% of participants who set New Year's resolutions chose to list occupational goals as their top goals, especially considering that resolution-setting comprises an incredibly broad array of options. The authors suggest that data can be used by academic library administrators to increase worker job performance, improve worker wellness, establish mentorship programs, and train workers to set attainable goals.

Commentary

This research builds off of the authors' previous work on the correlations between setting New Year's resolutions, outlook on life, and professional goal setting among a general population of library employees (Anderson & Lo, 2019) and focuses on a target population of academic library workers. Dai et al. (2014) underscore the "fresh start effect" which suggests that people tend to undertake new goals most commonly during "temporal landmarks" such as New Year's. In a study about New Year's resolutions, Oscarsson et al. (2020) identified a correlation between level of support with behavior change and goal-achievement. Furthermore, Locke and Latham (1990) note the importance of leadership support and worker self-management on positive performance. The "fresh start effect" may kick off a desire to undertake new goals, which may lead to success in part through internal and external support and clarity.

This publication was appraised using the "EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist" (Glynn, 2006). The methodology is appropriate for the identified outcomes, though it is unclear whether the questionnaire was validated. The method is not rigorous with little explanation of methodology, ethics or validity of survey

instrument. The authors do not explicitly state whether Institutional Review Board approval was obtained nor if participant informed consent was provided. Though the authors include all of the questionnaire items in the study, more clarity around the research methodology is needed including details about how the questionnaire was distributed, and how data was collected, stored, and analyzed. Aside from age and academic library setting, the authors did not identify any other inclusion or exclusion criteria. It is unclear what geographic locations the population sample was recruited from, though it might be assumed that the study was conducted in the United States since the authors work in the US and cite data from the US. Exact study replication without these full details may be difficult.

In the limitations, the authors are clear that data from this research are self-reported and likely to be inflated. Though the study population size is large, the authors note that results are not generalizable to a broader academic library population since participation was self-selected and not randomized. The authors' conclusions accurately reflect their analysis and they were able to address the objectives of the study. However, the authors do not suggest future areas of research.

This study provides a unique exploration of goal setting in academic library spaces, a significantly understudied area of research. However, the authors do not discuss how setting resolutions relates to professional goal-setting and how different contexts may impact goal-setting behavior and achievement. In professional contexts, achieving goals may have time constraints and significant implications such as promotions and annual review reports. Personal goals may vary significantly and have fewer time constraints and repercussions. Nonetheless, the results of this research could help inform library leaders and administrators on goal-setting best practices, but also encourage organizations to investigate other variables that might impact goal-setting behaviors such as workplace morale, alignment of worker responsibilities with the greater library mission and vision,

and the impact of leadership support on worker outlooks and goal achievement.

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