Is There an Association Between Self-Regulatory Function and Preference for Directive or Advisory Leaders?

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Abstract

Individuals strive to feel effective in accomplishing their goals. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that the experience of regulatory fit has important practical consequences in organizational settings. The present between-subjects experimental study (N=99) investigates whether the interaction between a self-regulatory orientation and leadership style produces regulatory fit in a non-work setting. Our study consisted of completing anagram task and two questionnaires. Based on the regulatory fit theory, we suggest that regulatory fit is positively correlated with the experience of happiness and effectiveness. Our participants were university students, randomly assigned to either directive or advisory leader condition. While obtaining the results of our study, we controlled the variables of gender and condition. The findings showed that happiness was not influenced by leader condition but locomotors experienced higher regulatory fit compared to assessors. Besides, there were not any significance differences in task's performance between locomotors and assessors. Overall, the research reveals that there is not a significant relationship between self-regulatory mode and leadership style preference. The main implication is that regulatory fit was most likely to be experienced when participants were locomotors or spent the most time on the task. Further theoretical and practical consequences are reviewed.

Keywords: self-regulatory mode, regulatory fit, assessors versus locomotors, directive leader versus advisory leader

Is There an Association Between Self-Regulatory Function and Preference for Directive or Advisory Leaders?

Just about everybody prefers to be effective and ultimately productive in the activities they are doing. Which factors actually determine whether an individual feels and actually is effective in the endeavors he undertakes? The concept of regulatory fit essentially means that the accomplishment of certain tasks allows a person to experience full involvement with the process (Hamstra et al.,2014). In other words, the activities in which an individual participates should be in harmony with the person's regulatory mode in order for a regulatory fit to exist (Avnet & Higgins, 2006). Similarly, regulatory fit can be experienced when the behavior of other influential figures matches well with the dominant self-regulatory approach of a person (Hamstra et al.,2014). For example, some people perform and adapt better when someone else gives them directions while others prefer independence. Psychologists have studied the aforementioned phenomenon extensively in work settings (Hamstra et al.,2014; Kruglanski et al., 2007). The present study aims to investigate whether a self-regulatory mode can predict leadership style preference in a non-work setting. Based on the self-regulatory mode theory, our goal is to explore whether there is a correlation between a particular self-regulatory function and inclination to prefer either directive or advisory leaders.

Jennifer is a college student of International Business. In her program, proactivity is the most encouraged quality for aspiring entrepreneurs. In the business world, it is important that a person is brave enough to make decisions which may result in failures. In order for the businesspeople to be successful, they have to feel comfortable with uncertainty and the lack of reliance on others. However, the student has recently noticed that she is an overthinker and this mode of thinking is routinely stopping her from taking actions. Jennifer does not like to make choices on her own, rather she prefers for someone else to define the task structure and rules in advance. Before choosing the right thing to do, she has the tendency to analyze and

compare all available alternatives. Jennifer realized that she has been exhibiting this behavior all her life. In contrast, her peers look like brave people who are capable of taking risks. In line with this example, Hamstra et al. (2014) suggest that directive leaders would be an effective match for employees prone to overthinking and showing difficulty with moving from one task to another. This finding illustrates that employees who have similar tendencies as Jennifer might be assessment-oriented and need someone to motivate them when taking actions. On the other hand, individuals with locomotion orientation are highly focused on action and competitiveness (Kruglanski et al., 2000). The concepts 'locomotion' and 'assessment' are presented as the two main self-regulatory modes of thinking with their own distinctive characteristics (Kruglanski et al., 2000). More specifically, the type of people who can be categorized as locomotors prefer to be active and exhibit implemental functions while the assessors are prone to overthinking and evaluating alternatives (deliberative functions). The crucial importance of leader-employee regulatory fit in organizational settings was emphasized by Hamstra and colleagues (2011). The study showed evidence that transformational approach affected positively locomotors whereas transactional style fitted assessors more, decreasing turnover intentions (Hamstra et al., 2011). Since transactional leadership is based on directive guidance, we can infer that assessment-oriented people performed better with a directive leader. In contrast, transformational leaders apply democratic strategies which leads to the presumption that advisory leadership might be more compatible with locomotors. Due to individual differences, different people tend to prefer different ways of performing a task or work styles. Finding out more about this tendency can help individuals gain insight into the working environment that suits them and choose a compatible career option. It is important to note that research has found evidence that self-regulation orientation is a relatively stable construct throughout life (Higgins et al., 1997). However, is this personality characteristic malleable to some extent? What are the situational

factors that influence whether someone's way of thinking is similar to Jennifer's or her peers'? We sought answers to such questions in the current research.

Researchers have conducted many studies exploring regulatory fit theory and its implications. As an example, Kruglanski et al. (2000) touch the subject of human effectivity in approaching tasks. In general, the authors state that a potential social consequence of being classified as a locomotor or assessor could be a preference for working with either directive or advisory figures. Parenthetically, different terms could be used to describe the same type of leader but the key distinction is between directive and advisory leadership. As research has shown, locomotion or assessment orientation might lead to crucial social implications in terms of organizational structure preferences. Specifically, locomotors perform more effectively in a work environment which prioritizes action while the assessors thrive in a place where thinking and comparing options are encouraged (Kruglanski et al., 2000). In a similar manner, Kunda (1990) argues that motivated reasoning processes can be divided in two groups – a motivation to reach either an accurate or a pre-determined conclusion. She proposes that being motivated to find the most accurate explanation stimulates realistic thinking. Thus, it can be logically expected that assessors (in comparison to locomotors) are more likely to set accuracy-related goals since they have the tendency to overthink and evaluate. In a work setting, Kruglanski and colleagues (2007) discuss the importance of similarity between leader and subordinates in terms of regulatory mode preferences. The authors found that the social influence of an authority figure is stronger when it is compatible with the employee's motivational orientation. The extent to which an organizational leader and their subordinates express matching regulatory modes impacts organizational effectiveness and work satisfaction (Kruglanski et al., 2007). The importance for psychological well-being of feeling right and correct about what you are doing has been emphasized before (Avnet & Higgins, 2003). Ostensibly, only when there is a psychological

fit between a person's predominant choice orientation and the strategies used to make a choice, is it possible for an individual to feel truly satisfied with the particular decision (Avnet & Higgins, 2003). This research leads to the implication that a regulatory fit match between a leader and an employee is a necessary prerequisite for experiencing job engagement.

People cannot be compatible with everyone they interact with. A study from Li and colleagues (2018) provides evidence that employees whose priority is to develop creativity might benefit more from working with advisory leader. Conversely, individuals who value productivity and effectiveness more than exploring new ideas, could connect better with directive leader (Li et al., 2018). Thus, it is instrumental for employees to work with leaders who are capable of bringing out the best version of them. We can draw the inference that regulatory fit exists if we observe that our participants with particular self-regulation function feel more satisfied with specific type of leader. Based on previous research and our expectations, we formulated the following hypotheses regarding the relationship between self-regulatory style and affinity towards directive or advisory leadership. The first hypothesis is that the people whose natural tendency is to take action will feel happier while working with directive leader whereas the reflective individuals will be more fulfilled collaborating with advisory leader. Our next hypothesis revolves around differences in participants' performance on the anagram task – we assume that assessors will spend more time on the task and will write more words compared to locomotors. On the other hand, locomotors, who tend to be impulsive, are expected to spend less time on the study's task and to write less words as opposed to assessors.

Methods

Participants

We recruited 99 (female = 79; male = 19; non-binary = 1) international students of the University of Groningen. The participants were first-year psychology students and were between 18 and 33 years old (M=19.82; SD= 2.33). The only prerequisite for participating was that people were asked to show up for the study awake and alert. Participating was voluntary and in exchange for 0.5 course credits.

Procedure, Design, and Materials

We used a laboratory with five rooms, each of them had a computer. Two rooms on the left were meant for condition 1 and two rooms on the right - for condition 2. The middle room was used by the researcher. Scripts for different condition manipulations were created based on keywords that guided the leaders for instructing the participants about the task. (see appendix).

We invited the participants to come to the laboratory for psychological research at the faculty of Psychology in Groningen. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions – authoritarian (directive) leader condition or democratic (advisory) leader condition. The study was administered by four different researchers (all female, aged 21-22). The one present at the laboratory at a given time played the role of both the directive and advisory leader in the specific condition and handled every participant on an individual basis. The difference between the two conditions is characterized by either making choices yourself or choices that are being made for you. To create this distinction in reality there were multiple steps to the manipulations in both conditions.

Our study was an experimental study, manipulating the conditions assigned to the participants. We used a between-subjects design, namely two conditions for the type of

leadership (directive vs advisory) and two orientations (locomotion vs assessment). The independent variables were the types of leadership condition and the orientations. The dependent variables were the level of satisfaction and effectiveness of the participants.

Condition 1 was the directive condition. The leader followed the authoritarian script. In this condition there were multiple components to the manipulation. The first component was the leader choosing the room the participant was going to be in. The second component was choosing the condition for the participant on the computer, while the participant watched the leader make the choice for them. The leader chose between the numbers 1,3,4,5 and 6. The numbers represented a different version of the task. In reality, all those numbers led to the same task, the participant only thought they were getting a certain version. The leader told the participants about their task and told them they could receive points for each correct answer, and if they ended among our top performers they would receive extra course credits. They were also told that the items varied in difficulty. Both statements were untrue and part of the manipulation. Encouragement of keeping the time in mind was expressed.

Condition 2 was the advisory condition. The leader, in this condition, used the democratic script. First, the leader on the forehand chose task number 2, so the participant would not see that a choice was made for them when entering the room. The participants in this condition were also allowed to choose their room themselves after the leader told them so. The next component is another choice: the leader explained the task, telling them that they could make a choice between hard or easy anagrams. The easy anagrams would give them 1 point per correct answer while the hard anagrams would give them two. In truth, there was no difference between the easy or hard choice. They were also told they would receive extra course credits if they made it to the top performers, which was also a manipulation. Encouragement of choosing wisely was expressed.

The goal of both conditions was for the participants to complete a word anagram task. The word anagram task consists of six items in total. After this task, the participants completed a short questionnaire about their feelings of satisfaction, effectiveness, enjoyment, the difficulty of the task, an evaluation of the leader and their personal importance of a good performance. Finally, they filled in the Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (RMQ; Kruglanski et al., 2000) to assess individual differences in locomotion and assessment orientations. On average, the participants spent 17,9 minutes in the room to complete the whole study.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed. Concerning the assumption of normality, we examined the variables of locomotion, assessment, and log time average. Using the Shapiro Wilk test, we found out that locomotion scores were not normally distributed with $W(99)= 0.973$, $p= 0.041$. Additionally, the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that assessment scores were normally distributed ($W(99)= 0.986$, $p=0.40$). Nevertheless, we reported evidence of non-normality for the "LogTimeAverage" scores ($W(99)= 0.932$, $p<0.001$). We also examined the assumption of homoscedasticity by using the Levene's test. For the Assessment scores ($F=0.062$, $p=0.804$) and the Locomotion scores ($F=0.160$, $p=0.690$), we concluded that the homoscedasticity assumption was met. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met both for the assessment and locomotion variables ($p>0.5$), as well as the linearity assumption which was checked with the Q-Q plots. While running the analysis, we observed an effect of the conditions on the assessment and locomotion scores. Participants assigned to the advisory condition scored significantly higher on assessment scores compared to locomotion scores ($F(1)= 6.975$, $p<0.05$). Figure 1 illustrates this. Thus, being assigned to the advisory condition might have elicited an

assessment orientation. Therefore, we must interpret the next results with caution, and with this thought in mind.

Hypothesis Testing

The aim of this experiment was to investigate the effect of regulatory fit by assessing whether a leadership style matches individuals' regulatory orientations. Hypotheses were drawn up. When we take the first and second hypotheses together, our first expectation was that assessors would feel more effective, satisfied, and happy with advisory leader, whereas locomotors would feel more effective, satisfied, and happy with directive leader. In other words, if these hypotheses are found in the results, regulatory fit can be inferred. We also hypothesized that assessors would write down more words and spend more time on the anagram task compared to the locomotors. Our dependent variables involved the level of satisfaction, effectiveness, enjoyment, and importance regarding the task as measures that relate to regulatory fit. Cronbach's alpha was high enough to summarize the measures as one "regulatory fit" variable (α=0.759). One important point is that for all the results found, we controlled the variables of gender and condition.

Concerning the first hypothesis, no significant results were discovered. Indeed, we speculated that participants categorized as assessors would feel more satisfied with advisory leader. Our results suggest that no difference exists between the level of satisfaction of an assessor in condition 1 or 2 ($F(1, 88)$=2.110, p=0.150). Additionally, we found the same result regarding the variable locomotor $(F(1, 88)$=0.025, p=0.876$)$. It was not statistically significant, thus there exists no statistical difference between the level of satisfaction of a participant who is locomotor in the advisory or the directive condition ($F(1)$=0.024, p=0.876). We conclude that taking into account these regulatory fit scores, no difference was found between the regulatory orientations and the leadership style. However, one interesting

finding emerged: we found evidence that a higher score on the variable locomotion increased the variable of Regulatory Fit significantly ($F(1)$=7.306, p<0.05). In other words, the task might have been more suited to locomotors overall, independent of the condition they were in. We also postulated that locomotors would prefer the absence of choice whereas assessors would prefer the presence of choice, which was not supported because there were no distinct regulatory fit experience scores.

We also hypothesized that assessors, due to their focus to do the "right" thing, will write down more words compared to locomotors. We found no results that were statistically significant between the number of words written by participants high in locomotion or assessment regulatory mode ($F(1)$=0.245, p=0.622). Another hypothesis concerned the time spent on the word anagram task. We posited that assessors, due to their high involvement, will spend more time on the tasks compared to locomotors. Contrary to our speculation, the data suggests that there exists no evidence of a difference between locomotors and assessors in terms of the amount of time they spent on a task ($F(1)$= 0.679, p=0.412). However, when we focused on the variable "LogTimeAvg", we identified that when this variable increases, the scores on Regulatory Fit increases as well. The results were significant ($F(1)$=4.121, p<0.05). In other words, people that genuinely enjoyed the task thus had a high score on regulatory fit, spent more time on the task.

Exploratory Analyses

In general, we did not find any significant results supporting our hypotheses. Therefore, we decided to look into more details at our data set and additional findings were discovered. Indeed, we manipulated the variable "condition" (advisory vs directive) and found that this manipulation had an influence on the participants. First of all, we looked at the condition of the participants and the time spent on the word anagram task. Interestingly,

participants assigned to the directive condition spent significantly less time on the task ($M =$ 4.25, $SD = 0.253$) compared to participants allocated to the advisory condition ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.244$). In other words, the difference between the two conditions is significant regarding the average time spent ($F(1)=4.427$, $p<0.05$).

Discussion

In the present study, we explored whether there is a connection between person's self-regulatory approach and their preference for a leadership style. We also investigated the role of the previously mentioned relationship in promoting regulatory fit. At the beginning of our research, we formulated a number of hypotheses revolving around effectivity, performance on the study's task and subjective state of happiness of the participants. In congruence with past empirical evidence (Kruglanski et al., 2000), locomotors should feel better collaborating with directive leaders while assessors are supposed to be more compatible with advisory figures. In accordance with the distinction between the two self-regulatory modes (Kruglanski et al., 2000), we hypothesized that locomotors as opposed to assessors should, in general, spend less time on the anagram task and write less words.

None of our hypotheses were supported. Whereas past researchers have found that locomotors tend to prefer directive leaders while assessors - advisory leaders (Li et al., 2018), the present study has shown that the subjective happiness of our participants was not impacted by the kind of leader they collaborated with. An interesting result from this study merits comment – students assigned to the advisory condition had higher scores on the assessment variable in comparison to participants in directive condition. We cannot say assuredly why assessment scores were higher in the advisory condition since there is evidence that self-regulation orientation is, in principle, steady throughout life (Higgins et al., 1997). Thus, we do not know whether the assessment scores are reliable, rendering the results inconclusive. We discovered that there were no significant differences between locomotors and assessors in terms of how they proceeded with the task. Specifically, we did not find support for our hypotheses concerning time spent on the anagram assignment and number of written words. Unexpectedly, our study yielded evidence that locomotors as opposed to assessors might have experienced a higher degree of regulatory fit during the experiment.

This result is consistent with the claim that locomotors express intrinsic motivational orientation (Pierro et al., 2006). In line with the paper from Avnet and Higgins (2003), we interpreted this finding to demonstrate that the anagram task might have been more suitable for locomotors' approach. Another result that we observed is that the indicators of regulatory fit were highest when the participants spent the most time on the study's task. This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature on interpersonal regulatory complementarity (Hamstra et al., 2014). We believe this finding to illustrate that the participants who were fully involved with the activity spent significantly more time on it as opposed to the unenthusiastic participants. In addition, we obtained evidence that time spent on the task was connected to leader condition. More concretely, when the students were assigned to the advisory leader condition, they spent more time on the task. In my view, the most compelling explanation for the aforementioned set of findings is that independent of self-regulatory function, participants felt more comfortable in the presence of a democratic figure.

Limitations and Future Directions

Particular limitations of this study could be addressed in a future research. For instance, since our participants were university students, we cannot generalize the findings to all populations. Moreover, the sample size of our study was relatively small and the language which we used throughout the research was not native for most of the participants. Due to these weaknesses, I would suggest for a future study to employ the mother language of the respective residents. A field study, in which employees team up with the different types of leaders, might be conducted for a more precise examination of the impact of self-regulatory approach on leadership style preference. Besides, it is appropriate to recognize another potential limitation – there were four different leaders with their own unique personalities. It would be interesting to investigate whether the performance of participants would differ in the case of only one leader conducting the experiment. We suggest that further research

might employ a task which suits well both locomotors and assessors. This may shed light on the circumstances under which locomotors experience higher regulatory fit.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Despite the mentioned limitations, the present study has enhanced our understanding of the relationship between self-regulatory mode and leadership style. Contrary to the current psychological thought that regulatory fit is contingent upon the match between particular self-regulatory orientation and leadership style, our data has shown that other factors might play a role in eliciting the experience of regulatory fit. We hope that the current research will stimulate further investigation of this important area. Our study has important theoretical and practical implications. For example, in work settings where assessment traits would be more advantageous for the successful completion of job tasks, employers might consider to hire advisory leader. Due to distinct motivational orientations, locomotors and assessors might have differential preferences in the types of tasks they find enjoyable and psychologically rewarding. Stemming from this observation, an employer might enhance regulatory fit in his employees by assigning tasks compatible with the specific motivational orientations.

Conclusions

In conclusion, since we cannot say anything definitive about the obtained results, interpretations of our findings should be regarded with caution. There is a possibility that we might have manipulated a construct that we did not plan to. Another potential explanation for the uncertainty of our results could be the difference in instructions between directive and advisory conditions.

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1.

Assessment score difference between authoritarian and democratic conditions

AsScore

○ Mean (95% CI)
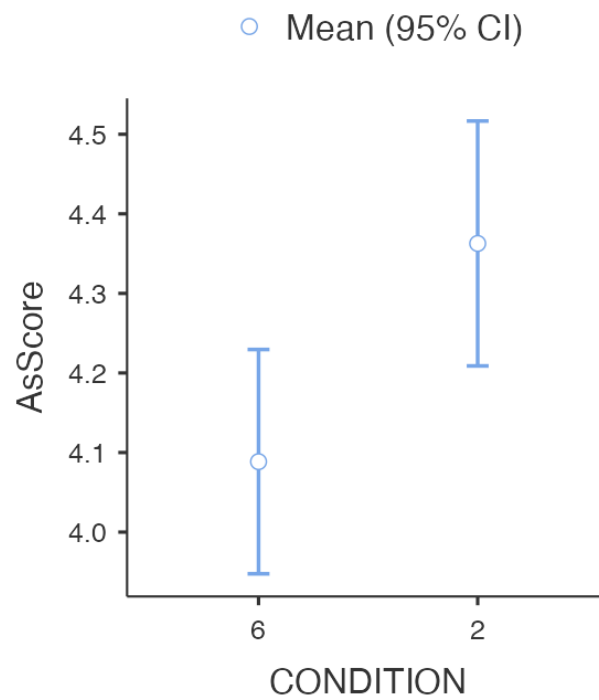
Note. Condition 6 represents authoritarian condition, condition 2 represents democratic condition.

Figure 2.
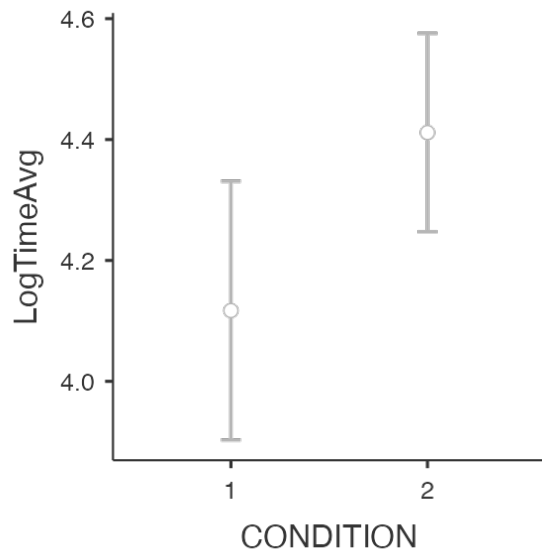
Difference between conditions on time spent on task
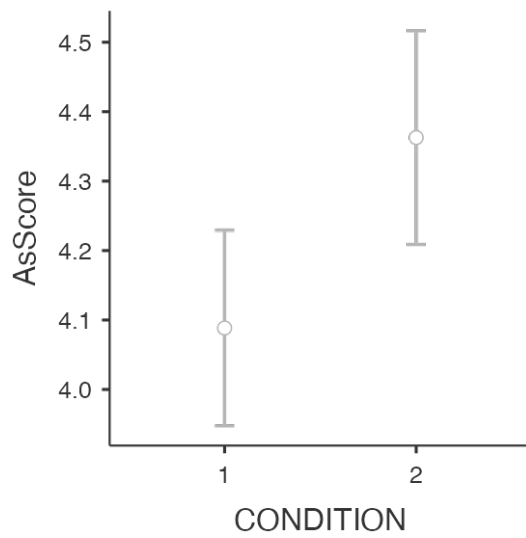

Figure 3.

Difference between conditions (AsScore)
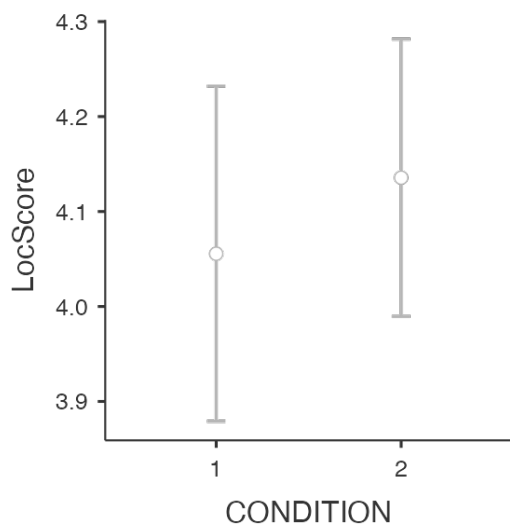
Figure 4.

Difference between conditions (LocScore)

Figure 5.

RegFit (AsScore)
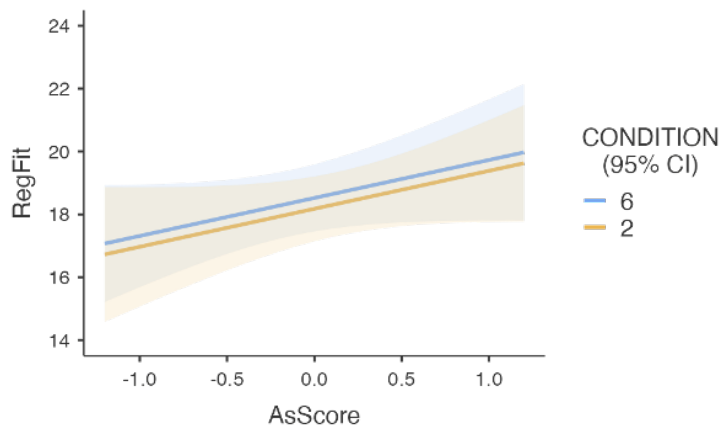
Figure 6.

RegFit (LocScore)
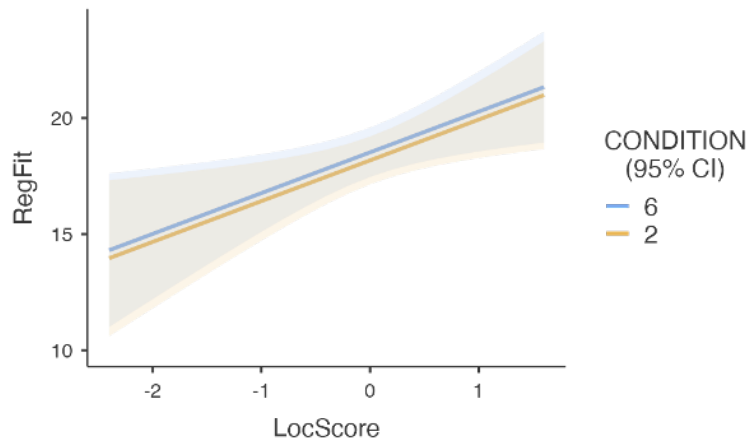
Table 1.

ANOVA Omnibus tests; DV = RegFit.

	SS	df	F	p	η²p
Model	228.7713	10	2.65059	0.007	0.231
LogTimeAvg	51.5427	1	4.12054	0.045	0.046
AsScore	30.0912	1	2.40561	0.124	0.054
LocScore	91.3874	1	7.30589	0.008	0.075
CONDITION	-4.55e−13	0	NaN	NaN	0.002
Gender	28.6726	1	2.29221	0.134	0.080

AsScore ✳ CONDITION	26.3971	1	2.11029	0.150	0.024
LocScore ✳ CONDITION	0.3065	1	0.02450	0.876	0.000
AsScore ✳ LocScore	0.0158	1	0.00126	0.972	0.000
CONDITION ✳ Gender	0.3581	1	0.02863	0.866	0.000
Residuals	1100.7681	88			
Total	1329.5394	96			

Table 2.

One-Way ANOVA table.

	F	df1	df2	p
LocScore	0.494	1	92.7	0.484
AsScore	6.975	1	96.7	0.010
LogTimeAvg	4.820	1	89.5	0.031
RegFit	0.361	1	95.3	0.549
WordsTot	1.053	1	95.5	0.308

Table 3.

ANOVA Omnibus tests; DV = WordsTotal.

	SS	df	F	p	η^2p
Model	1798.1	6	0.672	0.672	0.042
LocScore	392.3	1	0.717	0.399	0.006
AsScore	78.9	1	0.144	0.705	0.010
CONDITION	405.0	1	0.741	0.392	0.008
Gender	201.6	2	0.184	0.832	0.005
LocScore ✳ AsScore	720.3	1	1.317	0.254	0.014
Residuals	50306.9	92			
Total	69400.3	99			

	SS	df	F	p	η²p

Table 4.

ANOVA Omnibus tests; DV = LogTimeAV.

	SS	df	F	p	η²p
Model	2.9685	6	1.2686	0.280	0.076
LocScore	0.2383	1	0.5311	0.468	0.004
AsScore	0.0127	1	0.0282	0.867	0.012
CONDITION	1.8570	1	4.1383	0.045	0.043
Gender	0.3795	2	0.4229	0.656	0.010
LocScore ✶ AsScore	0.4811	1	1.0720	0.303	0.012
Residuals	41.2830	92			
Total	205.3804	99			

Appendix

Leader Scripts:

- *Advisory condition*

"Welcome! Thanks for participating in this study. You will get a seat in one of the rooms here. Your goal is to complete a word anagram task. You may choose between two different tasks: 1) an easier one that earns one point for every correct solution and 2) a harder one that earns two points for every correct solution. You will receive a bonus of 0.3 additional SONA credits if you are among the top performers, so choose your task wisely. Finally, when you are done with the tasks, two more questionnaires will follow on the screen. After that, you are done and you can call me. Good luck!"

- *Directive condition*

"Welcome! Thanks for participating in this study. I would want you to take place in this room. Your goal is to complete a word anagram from a list of different versions. I am going to choose your version when we enter the room. For every correct solution you find, you will receive one point. The items vary in difficulty - you will start with easier ones and then move on to more difficult ones. You will receive a bonus of 0.3 additional SONA credits if you are among the top performers, so don't forget about the time limit you have. Finally, when you

are done with the tasks, two more questionnaires will follow on the screen. After that, you are

done and you can call me. Good luck!''

After the time limit runs out: "I will tabulate your results and let you know later

whether you met the goal and earned the bonus…"