

Antecedents of Unfinished Tasks: The Role of Workload and Unfinished Tasks

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Abstract

Unfinished tasks are a relevant yet often overlooked factor in declining productivity and impaired well-being in contemporary work environments. This study aimed to understand the relationship between workload, self-leadership, and their impact on unfinished tasks at the end of the workweek. Drawing on control and social cognitive theories, we propose that workload is positively associated with unfinished tasks and that self-leadership moderates the workload-unfinished tasks association. Using a cross-sectional self-report survey of working adults ($N= 113$), our results indeed found a positive association between unfinished tasks and workload. However, SL did not moderate the relationship between workload and unfinished tasks nor had a direct effect on unfinished tasks. While SL helps manage tasks, it may fall short under excessive workloads. Therefore, our study proposes that decreasing workload may be one of the beneficial ways to reduce unfinished tasks. Adjusting job roles to match employees' skills, fostering a supportive work environment, and offering flexible work schedules might mitigate the antecedents of unfinished tasks, such as workload. Despite limitations like the cross-sectional design and self-report measures, the study's use of validated measures and theoretical frameworks provides robust insights. Future research should incorporate objective, rather than self-report measures and focus on incorporating environmental and behavioral factors from social cognitive theory in the study workload and unfinished tasks.

Antecedents of Unfinished Tasks: The Impact of Workload and Self-Leadership

Unfinished tasks (UT) are the hidden culprits behind declining productivity and impaired well-being in today's work environments (Syrek et al., 2017). Defined as tasks an employee intended to finish but left unfinished or in an unsatisfactory state (Syrek et al., 2017), UT can lead to increased tension, continuous mental preoccupation, and poor sleep quality (Zeigarnik, 1927; Syrek & Antoni, 2014; Syrek et al., 2017). The persistent focus on incomplete work hinders relaxation and psychological detachment over the weekend, affecting overall job satisfaction and work-life balance (Weigelt et al., 2019).

Understanding the antecedents of UT is essential for developing effective strategies to enhance task completion. One prominent factor is *workload* (WL), defined as any variable reflecting the amount or difficulty of work assigned to an employee (Bowling et al., 2015). High WL is often associated with increased stress and strain (Bowling et al., 2015), so it presents a relevant factor to examine as a potential antecedent of UT.

Self-leadership (SL), rooted in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), involves self-regulation strategies such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-rewarding (Neck & Houghton, 2006). These strategies enable employees to manage their WL effectively, potentially reducing the accumulation of UT (Harari et al., 2021). Despite the established interest in how individual behaviors influence workplace performance (Harari et al., 2021), the specific impact of SL on task completion remains underexplored.

The hypotheses proposed in this study are relevant because they address a significant gap in existing literature regarding the interplay between WL, SL, and UT. While previous research has examined the impact of WL on employee stress and productivity (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Bowling et al., 2015), and the benefits of SL strategies on individual performance (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Stewart et al., 2011), there is a lack of studies

investigating the role of SL in the relationship between WL and UT. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring whether SL can mitigate the effects of high WL on task completion at the end of the workweek.

UT and Their Consequences

Research indicates that UT often lead to feelings of incomplete achievement, rumination, and continuous mental preoccupation, hindering relaxation and disengagement from work-related activities during the weekend (Weigelt et al., 2019). Syrek et al., (2017) provide empirical evidence supporting the WL-UT link by demonstrating that time pressure, used as a proxy for WL, correlates with an increase in UT. Although the study does not discuss the direct impact of UT on psychological needs such as autonomy and competence, their findings suggest a significant relationship between high WL and UT (Syrek et al., 2017). To investigate the relationship between these variables further, it is necessary to base them on established theoretical frameworks.

Control Theory as a Theoretical Framework

Control theory focuses on a feedback loop between goals and behaviors, providing a valuable framework for examining the link between WL and UT (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Employees continuously compare their current state (incomplete tasks) with their desired state (finished tasks) and take action to reduce discrepancies (Carver & Scheier, 1998). For instance, setting daily goals helps reduce the gap between current and desired outcomes. A high WL can increase this discrepancy, as employees have more tasks to complete, leading to heightened efforts to achieve the desired state. However, if the gap becomes too large, it can cause tension and stress, impairing employees' focus and efficiency. This overwhelmed state can result in more UT as employees struggle with excessive demands (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Antecedents of UT and the Role of WL

It is plausible that employees handling identical WL levels face different levels of UT (Leiter & Maslach, 2017), suggesting factors other than WL play a role in the emergence of UT at the end of the workweek. When employees are overwhelmed by excessive tasks or lack the necessary support and resources, their ability to complete work efficiently might diminish (Bowling et al., 2015). Addressing organizational factors, such as ensuring adequate staffing and optimizing resource allocation might alleviate the occurrence of UT (Demerouti et al., 2001).

However, organizational factors might not explain UT's emergence fully. For example, a study by Bakker et al., (2014) found that employees who report struggling with their WL often face difficulties in organizing and prioritizing their responsibilities, which may lead to delaying or neglecting tasks, indicating individual differences in the approach to dealing with WL play a role too. Consequently, tasks may accumulate and remain unfinished, contributing to an increase of perceived WL and a higher rate of UT at the end of the workweek.

Although WL may foster a sense of challenge and engagement (Crawford et al., 2010), Pindek et al., (2024) found that WL impacts well-being and strain through challenge and hindrance stressors. Challenge stressors, such as high WL and tight deadlines, can lead to positive outcomes like personal growth and engagement (Pindek et al., 2024). However, when these stressors become overwhelming, they can cause strain and reduce job satisfaction (Pindek et al., 2024). These hindrance stressors might exacerbate the difficulty in coping with WL, possibly leading to a higher incidence of UT.

The Link Between WL and UT

The existence of UT is inherently linked to WL, as UT are essentially portions of the WL that are not completed. Without any WL, there would be no tasks to remain unfinished. This study investigates whether WL is indeed a prominent antecedent of UT. A

high WL reflects having a lot to do, which increases the likelihood of UT. When employees have more tasks they can handle within a given period, it becomes more challenging to complete all tasks (Bowling et al., 2015). As a result, the number of UT by the end of the workweek might increase.

Hypothesis 1: WL is positively correlated with UT at the end of the workweek.

Role of SL in Task Completion

However, if an employee successfully self-manages their WL, fewer tasks remain unfinished and the employee will get satisfaction from adequate performance (Rombe-Mogga, 2016). One form of self-management is SL, a strategy that enables employees to cope effectively with a high WL by managing their actions, thoughts, and emotions to finish tasks (Harari et al., 2021). SL involves strategies, which help employees stay focused and motivated without external supervision (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), SL emphasizes personal agency and the interaction between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors.

Despite the established interest in understanding how individual behaviors and skills influence workplace performance (Bandura, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006; Harari et al., 2021), the specific impact of SL on task completion remains unexplored. Investigating this interplay is important because, fundamentally, SL is about dealing with tasks effectively and efficiently. High levels of SL might imply that employees have developed strategies that allow them to work on tasks more productively and complete them faster (Harari et al., 2021). The increased efficiency means they may end up with fewer UT compared to those with lower levels of SL.

Given these characteristics, SL might play a moderating role in the relationship between WL and UT. SL may weaken the relationship between WL and UT, and reduce the negative impact of high WL on task completion. It is important to note that if SL and UT are

highly correlated, the direct relationship may overshadow the moderating effect. Despite this, the unique strategies involved in SL may mitigate the adverse effects of high WL, leading to fewer UT.

Hypothesis 2: SL moderates the relationship between WL and UT by weakening the positive association for employees with higher levels of SL.

Given the potential for SL to enhance task completion, considering its direct impact on the occurrence of UT is worth considering too. Employees with higher levels of SL are likely to employ effective self-regulation strategies that help them finish tasks more efficiently.

Hypothesis 3: SL is negatively associated with the number of UT at the end of the workweek.

Methods

Research Design and Procedure

We conducted a cross-sectional self-report survey study in which we compiled validated measures to a questionnaire consisting of 42 items. The questionnaire was administered online through a data-collection platform (Qualtrics), with a median completion time of about nine and a half minutes. A consent form was presented to the participants at the beginning of the survey following an information page about the study. Participants were not compensated for their involvement but were offered insight into the results of the present study. Information about the study and the survey was provided in English, Dutch, and Slovenian. We validated the translations back-to-back to ensure accuracy. The study was exempt from formal ethics committee examination because the nature of our study qualified for the fast-track ethics application process as it is a thesis project involving minimal risk to participants. All ethical guidelines for conducting research with human participants were followed. The full survey can be found in Appendix A.

Participants

For this study, we recruited 113 participants (69 female [61.1 %], 44 male [38.9 %], $M_{age} = 44.21$, $SD = 13.52$) through a convenience sampling strategy. We reached out to our personal networks and shared the invitation describing the scope of the study, along with the link to the online survey. Out of the respondents who completed the survey, 73 were Slovenian, 23 were Dutch, and 17 had other nationalities. The sample consisted mainly of working adults. On average, participants worked 36.3 hours per week ($SD = 12.32$).

Measures

For the assessment of *WL*, we used the scale by Spector and Jex (1998), a self-report measure of job stressors and strain. Participants were asked to provide information on the strain that the tasks have on the employees and whether they are in situations where the job requires them to work fast or have a great number of tasks to complete. The scale consisted of five items. Questions could be answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *less than once per month or never*, 5 = *several times per day*). An example item is: “How often does your job require you to work very fast?” (see Appendix A).

We measured *SL* via the Abbreviated SL Questionnaire (ASLQ) developed by Houghton et al. (2012), which inquires if and how often participants engage in regulating the structure of their workday and regulating their time. Conceptually, the scale contains three dimensions of the *SL* construct and provides details on a) behavior-focused, b) natural reward, and c) constructive thought pattern strategies. A sample item for behavior-focused dimension is; “I establish specific goals for my performance.” A sample item for the natural rewards dimension is; “When I have successfully completed a task, I often reward myself with something I like..” Sample item for the constructive thought dimension is; “I try to mentally evaluate the accuracy of my own beliefs about situations I am having problems with.”

Participants responded using a 5-point scale with verbal anchors at endpoints 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

To assess *UT*, we used the scale by Syrek and Antoni (2014). We asked participants to rate their performance at the workplace at the end of the week. The scale consisted of six items. An example of an item is; “At the end of a working week, I have not completed important tasks that I wanted to do.” Participants responded to statements on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The primary aim was to investigate the relationship between WL, SL, and UT. WL was treated as the independent variable, SL as the moderating variable, and UT as the dependent variable. To test the hypotheses, we conducted descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to examine the relationships among WL, SL, and UT. Following this, hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the moderation effect of SL on the relationship between WL and UT. First, WL and SL were entered into the regression model. Second, we added the interaction term (WL * SL) to the model to examine the moderation effect.

Results

Assumption Checks

Firstly, an assumption check was conducted to ensure we could proceed with the data analysis. The normality assumption was assessed with a Q-Q plot, which approximated a straight line and did not indicate any severe violations. Furthermore, while the sample size is not exceedingly large, it is likely sufficiently large to expect robustness against violations due to the principles of the central limit theorem. This theorem suggests that with a reasonably

large sample size, the sampling distribution of the mean will approximate normality (Rice, 2006, p.143). Assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity were supported with a scatterplot of standardized residuals, which indicated equal spread with no specific pattern. To check for outliers, we used Cook's distance, calculated as $\frac{4}{n-k-1} = \frac{4}{113-2-1} = 0.036$. The result suggested that none of the data points are highly influential in the regression model. Overall, all examined assumptions were met.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for each variable of interest, namely WL, UT, and SL are presented in Table 1. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The mean WL score of 3.11 ($SD = 1.00$) indicates moderate levels of WL among participants. The mean score for UT was 2.11 ($SD = 0.76$), suggesting that, on average, participants had some UT at the end of the workweek. The mean score for SL was 3.71 ($SD = 0.63$), indicating a relatively high level of SL behaviors among participants. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.33, p < 0.001$) between WL and UT suggests that as WL increases, the number of UT also rises. However, the correlations between WL and SL ($r = -0.04$) and between SL and UT ($r = -0.12$) are weak and not significant. This indicates that SL does not influence either WL or the number of UT nor does it act as a moderator in this relationship in the sample studied because the interaction term between SL and WL was not statistically significant in our analysis, suggesting that the effect of workload on unfinished tasks does not vary as a function of SL. The reliability of each subscale, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was high for the WL ($\alpha = 0.879$) and UT ($\alpha = 0.902$) scale, and acceptable for SL ($\alpha = 0.703$), suggesting that the measures we used are consistent.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the three variables of interest.

Variable	M	SD	WL	UT	SL
	3.1	1.0			
WL	1	0	<i>0.88</i>	/	/
	2.1	0.7	0.330**	<i>0.90</i>	
UT	1	6	*	2	/
	3.7	0.6			<i>0.70</i>
SL	1	3	-0.041	-0.12	3

Notes:***p < 0.001. N = 113, coefficients are Pearson correlations, and reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) of the subscales are presented in italics across the correlational matrix diagonal. Abbreviations: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, WL = workload, UT = unfinished tasks, SL = self-leadership.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting UT

Mode	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
1	(Constant	2.111	0.068		31.18	<.001
)				1	1
	WL	0.248	0.068	0.326	3.638	<.001
					1	
	SL	-0.130	0.109	-0.107	-1.195	0.235
	R Square	0.120				
	Adj. R	0.104				
2	Constant	2.109	0.068		31.08	<.001
					0	1
	WL	0.247	0.068	0.325	3.629	<.001
					1	

SL	-0.12	0.10	-0.09	-1.102	0.273
	1	9	9		
WL_SL	-0.08	0.10	-0.07	-0.837	0.405
	8	6	5		
R Square	0.126				
Adj. R	0.102				

Note: All predictors were centered, WL_SL = Interaction term (WL * SL). Unstandardized coefficients (B) are reported with their standard errors. Standardized coefficients (β) are also shown. The dependent variable is UT. p values indicate the significance of each predictor in the model.

The Link Between WL and UT

Hypothesis 1 proposed that higher levels of WL are associated with a higher rate of UT at the end of the workweek. The first model (without the interaction term) examined the main effects of WL and SL on UT. The results in Table 2 indicate that WL is a significant predictor of UT ($B = 0.248, t = 3.638, p < .001$). This finding supports Hypothesis 1, suggesting that as WL increases, UT also tend to increase. The unstandardized coefficient for WL indicates that each unit increase in WL is associated with a 0.248 unit increase in UT.

The Interplay of WL and SL

Hypothesis 2 proposed that SL moderates the relationship between WL and UT in such a way that the positive association between WL and UT would be weaker for employees with higher levels of SL. To test this, multiple hierarchical regression was used. The second model added the interaction term (WL * SL) to examine whether SL moderates the relationship between WL and UT. The interaction term was not significant ($B = -0.088, t = -0.837, p = 0.405$), suggesting that SL does not alter the impact of WL on the number of UT at the end of the workweek. This finding does not support Hypothesis 2. The addition of the

interaction term in the second model resulted in a slight increase in explained variance (R Square), but this increase was not substantial, suggesting that the interaction term does not significantly improve the explanatory power of the first model.

The Link Between SL and UT

Hypothesis 3 proposed that higher levels of SL will be associated with lower levels of UT. The coefficient for SL in the first model was not significant ($B = -0.130$, $t = -1.195$, $p = 0.235$). This suggests that SL does not have a direct effect on UT, thereby not supporting Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between WL, SL, and their impact on UT in the workplace. The results indicate that WL is a significant predictor of UT, supporting the positive association between WL and UT, as proposed in Hypothesis 1. However, SL neither moderates the WL-UT link (Hypothesis 2) nor directly affects UT (Hypothesis 3). The slight increase in explained variance with the addition of the interaction term suggests that while SL strategies are beneficial, they may not be sufficient to counteract the effects of high WL on UT.

Theoretical Implications

The positive association between WL and UT suggests that the higher an employee's WL, the higher the number of UT by the end of the workweek. This relationship can be better understood through control theory, which provides a valuable perspective into how employees continuously compare and manage any discrepancies between their current and desired state or goals and accordingly take action to reduce discrepancies (Carver & Scheier, 1998). UT represent a 'pile' of tasks that employees need to manage. If employees behave in adaptive ways, namely employ SL strategies, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reward (Neck & Houghton, 2006) they may be better equipped to handle these tasks and minimize

the discrepancy between current (incomplete tasks) and desired (finished tasks) state (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Stewart et al., 2011). However, when WL is excessive, SL strategies may fall short in preventing the emergence of UT. As a consequence, the discrepancy between states increases, which in turn increases the perceived WL, leading to an increase in UT at the end of the workweek.

This aligns with our finding that SL did not moderate the relationship between WL and UT. One possible reason for this is that employees with higher levels of SL may already effectively manage their WL and do not perceive it as excessive. Given the nonsignificant interaction effect of SL on the WL-UT link and no main effect of SL on UT, a need to investigate whether factors other than personal strategies play a role in the emergence of UT.

According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), SL is rooted in the interaction between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. The current study mainly examined the personal factors of SL through a self-report questionnaire. Environmental factors, such as autonomy, access to information, and opportunities for professional development were shown to reduce WL demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Behavioral factors, namely observational learning, allow employees to learn from their peers how to optimally manage the ‘pile’ of tasks and which ones to prioritize (Bandura, 1986). By incorporating environmental and behavioral factors in the study of antecedents of UT in the context of social cognitive theory, one may be able to develop effective interventions to minimize their emergence. While SL did not weaken the relationship between WL and UT in our study, incorporating the environmental and behavioral factors mentioned in social cognitive theory might exhibit a different pattern, for which further research is needed.

Practical Implications

Based on our findings, increasing SL in work interventions will not result in less UT. Conversely, decreasing workload should be one of the main factors to prevent UT, as evident

in the moderate association between the two constructs. For this reason, different alternative strategies should be implemented to decrease the employees' WL. This study proposes three practical implications. First, adjusting job roles and tasks to align with employees' skills and capacities may prevent excessive WL demands on employees with tasks they are ill-equipped to handle (Hackman, 1980). Assigning tasks that employees are well-prepared to handle can reduce the likelihood of UT (Hackman, 1980).

Second, creating a work environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help and sharing best practices can enhance their ability to manage WL and reduce UT.

Environmental factors such as access to information and opportunities for professional development reduce WL demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Encouraging a culture of collaboration and support can help employees learn from each other and apply effective task management strategies. Furthermore, social support from colleagues enhances resilience (Gloria & Steinhardt, 2016) and buffers high WL demands (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2016). Collectively, these factors may create a supportive work environment that promotes efficient task completion and reduces the likelihood of UT.

Third, offering flexible work schedules allows employees to manage their time more effectively and reduce WL (Kossek & Michel, 2011). It was shown that flexibility in work hours may lead to managing WL more efficiently and give a sense of autonomy (Allen et al., 2015). By focusing on these areas, employees can mitigate the emergence of UT.

Strengths and Limitations

There are at least three potential limitations in this study. The first limitation concerns the cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time, limiting our ability to make causal inferences. This design restricts the ability to comprehensively capture the interplay between variables over time.

Second, all measures were self-reported, which might introduce biases such as social desirability or common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, the subjective nature of WL measurement, based on employees' perceptions of what constitutes a high or low WL, means we cannot definitively infer objective WL levels. This reliance on subjective perceptions may affect the accuracy of our findings, as they reflect employees' viewpoints rather than an objective standard of WL.

Third, generalizability is limited due to the use of convenience sampling. Since participants were recruited through our networks, the sample may not be representative of the broader population. This could limit the applicability of the findings to other contexts, industries, or cultural settings.

Despite these limitations, the present study has several strengths. It utilizes validated measures and a reasonable sample size, enhancing the reliability of its findings. The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks, such as control theory and social cognitive theory, provides a robust foundation for understanding the relationships between WL, SL, and UT. Moreover, the study's focus on SL adds a novel dimension to the existing literature, emphasizing its potential role in mitigating the accumulation of UT.

Directions for Future Research

To better answer our (and any future) research questions, researchers should consider incorporating objective measures of WL and task completion, such as performance metrics and time-tracking data to help mitigate biases associated with self-report data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Objective measures reduce social desirability bias by providing a more accurate account of actual performance and WL. Employees might overestimate their efficiency or underestimate their WL to align with perceived social norms or expectations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, objective measures minimize recall bias, as self-reported data relies on

participants' memory, which can be faulty or influenced by recent events (Jobe & Mingay, 1991).

Future studies should examine the interaction between SL and organizational support in finishing tasks. Examining how SL strategies interact with job and personal resources could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how employees manage their WL and complete tasks. For instance, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) found that autonomy and task variety, when combined with self-efficacy and resilience, positively influenced work engagement. Considering this, investigating how these resources complement SL strategies to prevent the accumulation of UT might yield valuable insights. Exploring how different industries and job roles impact the WL-UT relationship could provide specific and tailored interventions. By focusing on these interactions, future studies could provide a more holistic view of the factors that influence the emergence of UT.

Perhaps, reducing UT at the end of the workweek could be done alternatively by cutting down on working hours or reducing the working week to four days. Research indicates that shorter working hours can lead to increased productivity, improved work-life balance, and enhanced well-being (Sparks et al., 2011). A study done in Iceland found that reducing the workweek to four days led to maintained or increased productivity and significantly improved employee well-being (Haraldsson & Kellam, 2021). However, before implementing a four-day workweek, it is relevant to evaluate tasks, projects, and responsibilities assigned to employees to determine what can realistically be accomplished within a reduced timeframe (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Furthermore, organizations should train employees on prioritizing tasks, ensuring the most high-impact tasks are completed first (Kossek & Michel, 2011). By allowing employees more time to rest and recharge, organizations may see a stress reduction, leading to fewer UT and higher overall efficiency. Implementing a four-day workweek

requires careful planning and a supportive organizational culture, but the potential benefits make it a strategy worth considering.

Closing Statement

The present study has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between WL and UT and contributed to the body of knowledge by suggesting that perceived WL plays a significant role in task completion. We hope that the current research will stimulate further investigation into the antecedents of UT.

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Appendix A

Survey Items

Workload

1. How often does your job require you to work very fast?
2. How often does your job require you to work very hard?
3. How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?
4. How often is there a great deal to be done?
5. How often do you have to do more work than you can do well?

Unfinished tasks

1. At the end of the working week, I have not completed important tasks.
2. At the end of the working week, I have not completed the important tasks that I wanted to.
3. At the end of a work week, I haven't started on tasks that were due.
4. At the end of the working week, I did not complete a large number of tasks that were due.
5. At the end of the working week, I have not even started the important tasks that I set out to do.
6. At the end of the working week, I have to take the past-due tasks into to the next week.

Self-leadership

1. I establish specific goals for my performance.
2. I make a point to keep track of how well I am doing at work
3. I work toward specific goals I have set for myself.

4. I visualize myself successfully performing a task before I do it.
5. Sometimes I picture in my mind a successful performance before I actually do a task.
6. When I have successfully completed a task, I often reward myself with something I like.
7. Sometimes I talk to myself (out loud or in my head) to work through difficult situations.
8. I try to mentally evaluate the accuracy of my own beliefs about situations I am having problems with.
9. I think about my own beliefs and assumptions whenever I encounter a difficult situation.