RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL LOAFING IN WORK GROUPS-AN IMPERATIVE PLOY OF INDIVIDUAL VARIABLES

Dr Aditi Satija[1] and Priya Kapila[2].
1.   Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana.
2.   Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana

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Abstract

Social loafing is a group phenomenon. The coming together of people to form a group also brings along their individual differences, cultural disparities, difference in motivational aspects and their varied reactions to diverse situations. A review of literature shows enormous research on various situational and contextual factors influencing social loafing followed by studies on the role of motivational factors. However, important individual differences like personality orientations, individual beliefs and attitudes etc have always been overlooked and undermined. The present study aims to highlight these individual differences that are integral antecedents of social loafing behavior. It is an effort to gather a comprehensive view on social loafing and combine diverse connotations on part of the individual and his characteristic beliefs and orientations that collaborate and lead to the phenomena of social loafing in organizational settings.

A substantial amount of attention is shifting towards the study of the manifestation of social loafing behavior in modern organizational settings. Working in groups does not always mean better output. The coming together of people to form a group also brings along their individual differences, cultural disparities, difference in motivational aspects and their varied reactions to diverse situations. According to Hagen(2015), "over 100 years of research have shown that social loafing is a real and material psychological phenomenon that reduces performance among humans in groups. Latan, Williams & Harkins (1979) elaborated upon Max Ringelmann's well documented explanation for productivity losses in groups as Social Loafing - the tendency for individual effort to decrease when people work in groups rather than individually. Research indicated that there is some degree of social loafing within every group, whether high functioning or dysfunctioning. Karau &Williams(1993) have defined Social loafing "as the reduction in a person's motivation and effort that occurs when an individual works collectively on a task compared to when the same person works alone or coactively on the task". Studies also indicates that social loafing occurs for wide variety of tasks (Earley,1989;). Since Ringlemann's observation, social loafing has been identified in numerous studies.

Extensive research has yielded well documented evidence for various causal factors as well as methods for dealing with social loafing in order to promote more effective group work. A review of literature shows enormous research on various situational and contextual factors followed by studies the role motivational factors .However, important individual differences like personality traits of an individual, his beliefs and attitudes etc have always been overlooked and undermined. The present study aims to highlight these individual differences that are integral antecedents of social behavior.

Corresponding Author: Dr Aditi Satija.
Address: Head, Department of Psychology, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana.

Personality and its dimensions:-
According to Khanifer et al.(2008), "Individuals' personality difference can be the source of creativity development or the root of many organizational problems affecting performance, behavior and decisions". However, most of the studies conducted to investigate the role of personality explain the causes of Social loafing at individual level have not focused on personality but on the influence of differences in individual motivation within the group (Ulke & Bilgic,2011). Moreover, though there are various studies that investigate the role of personality on individual and group performance (Barrick and Mount,1991;Schmidt and Hunter,1992;Visweswaran and Ones, 2000), yet very few studies have been conducted to investigate the role of personality on Social Loafing.

Highlighting the role of personality factors as the facets for determination of behavior, Zhang and Bruning(2011),in a study of personality characteristics and strategic orientation amongst the Canadian manufacturing companies assert that knowing the personality of individuals can help organizational management to use qualified staff in different organizational positions. This in turn will decrease the staff displacement and increase organizational commitment. The results of a study by Vaartstra, M. (2012) examining the relationships between multidimensional perfectionism trait of personality and perceptions of social loafing in sports reinforce the need to consider personality as an important variable when examining factors that potentially influence social loafing. Studies like Linden et.al.,(2004) have consistently reported social loafing to be negatively correlated with performance.

An early study by Bouchard (1972) found that **extraverts** are vulnerable to social loafing, maybe if they are not motivated to perform at high levels. Other studies observed that extraversion is related to success (Kichuk and Weisner,1997);extraverts have been perceived to have a greater impact on group outcomes (Barry and Stewart,1997).Ulke and Bilgic(2015),reported a positive relationship between extraversion and social loafing. Similarly, the dimension of **Neuroticism** has been found to be related negatively to performance - emotionally stable individuals are more likely to perform better in group context (Barrick et.al.,1998; Salgado,1998). Further, Ulke and Bilgic(2015),also found Neuroticism to be a significant predictor of social Loafing in line with earlier studies by Kichuk and Weisner(1997). It is noteworthy that the Big five Model has been a relatively well accepted classification in the field of personality psychology and its dimensions have been used to describe the relationship between Social Loafing and Personality(John and Srivastva 1999; McCrae and Costa 1999). Bolin(2002) found out **conscientiousness**, **agreeableness** and **extraversion** dimensions of the personalities of group members reduced their chances of social loafing. Ferrari and Psychyl (2012) and Bolin(2002) also found out conscientiousness to be negatively correlated with social loafing.

Thus, there are a vast array of personality factors that can play a decisive role in task performance or, the prevalence and extent of Social Loafing - keeping in mind the fact that Social loafing can be regarded as negative individual performance.

Personal Beliefs and Orientations:-
External vs Internal Locus of Control (LOC): Locus of Control is a personality orientation.. A person's "loci" is conceptualized as internal -a belief that one's life can be controlled; or external - a belief that life is controlled by outside factors which they cannot influence, or that chance or fate controls their lives (Rotter,1966).Carlson et.al.,(2007) have observed that individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe events in their life derive primarily from their own actions while people with a strong external locus of control tend to praise or blame external factors.

The concept of LOC being a part of core self-evaluations was first examined by Judge et.al.,(1997), and since has proven to have the ability to predict several work outcomes, specifically, job satisfaction and job performance (Dormann et al,2006). Other than that, Judge et. al., (2003) also found that the locus of control is important element towards job satisfaction and job performance. Shin(2015), observes that many studies have shown that people exert less effort on a task if they believe that their effort is less instrumental in accomplishing a task. Thus, individuals with external LOC are likely to perform less well on goal pursuit task than those with internal LOC. There are differences between internals and externals in terms of their achievement motivation, suggesting that internal locus is linked with higher levels of need for achievement. Due to their locating control outside themselves, externals tend to feel they have less control over their fate (Benassi,1988). Studies by Laurin et. al., (2012) and Laurin et. al., (2011), further substantiated that Individuals who perceived god as omnipotent were less likely to engage in active goal pursuit. According to them, "Individuals who believed that external factors could influence their future

performed less well on goal pursuit tasks than those who rejected the influence of external factors". Karau and Williams (1993); Shepperd, (1993) call such behaviors the ultimate form of social loafing.

Individualist vs Collectivist Orientation:-
Individualist Orientation is concerned with development of autonomous, unique and separate individuals whereas collectivist orientation focuses on fostering independence of individuals within a group. Early (1993) suggested that performance of people with individualistic orientations is lower when working in group setting than working alone, independent of group membership. Studies thus suggest that collectivists performed better in an ingroup context than in individual or outgroup context. This phenomenon was observed in a study comparing American managers (individualistic values) to Chinese managers (collectivistic values). It was found that social loafing occurred with the American managers while there was no such occurrence with the Chinese managers. Aguinis and Henle (2003) and Panina and Aiello(2004) also found Social Loafing to be more prevalent in cultures with individualist orientations i.e., western cultures. Ulke and Bilgic (2011) further concluded that "individualists are more inclined to social loafing than collectivists". This was explained through a comparison between collectivistic and individualistic orientations. People with collectivist orientation prefer group goals and collective action more than self-interests. They are wired to work for the greater goals that benefit the group on the whole. Such people believe that their role makes a valuable contribution to the group goals. As discussed earlier, it is an established fact that people who who value the work they are doing and think that they are making a unique contribution and that their effort is more instrumental in accomplishing a task are less likely to indulge in social loafing(Simms and Nichols,2014).

Thus, collectivist orientation has an inherent preference for group work. Stark et al.,(2007)also observed that preference for group work was consistently and negatively related to social loafing. Similarly, Kleh Anderson(2005) emphasized that the more the individuals express an individualistic cultural orientation, the more their reported motivation will depend on social loafing potential inherent in the situation. Earlier, Karau & Williams (1993) suggested that individuals with a collectivistic orientation would continue to exhibit efforts even in situations that would otherwise offer themselves for social loafing. Thus, a collectivist orientation might insure the members of the group from a tendency to social loaf.

Trait and context specific Procrastination vs Social Loafing:-
 Procrastination has been defined as voluntary delay of an individual's intended action towards some task despite foreseeable negative consequences & a potentially overall worse outcome (Ferrari, 2010; Pschyl,2010; Steel, 2007). Both procrastination and social loafing might seem similar in some contexts. According to Blunt and Psychyl (2000), both involve task aversiveness . Accordingly, procrastination may have negative consequence for only one individual while social loafing has adverse consequences for the group. Ferrari and Psychl (2012) found that academic procrastination was significantly positively correlated with Social Loafing, and both the scores for academic procrastination and perceived Social Loafing were significantly negatively correlated with personality trait of Conscientiousness. Various studies by Watson,(2001);Lay (1997);Schouwenburg and Lay,(1995) also found procrastinators to be low on conscientiousness. Thus, we observe that people who have a trait of procrastination are also likely to be low on conscientiousness and are more likely to indulge in Social Loafing and as observed by Ferrari and Psychl (2012), " conscientiousness may as well be a source trait for these maladaptive behaviors."
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Intrinsic Involvement:-
An individual's personality characteristics, interests and beliefs might make a task appealing or un alluring to a person. Intrinsic Involvement involves the feeling of inner pleasure in the activity itself. George (1992) defines Intrinsic Involvement as the belief of an individual that his work is meaningful and significant & that his own effort is a crucial contributor to the employing organization. Harkens and Petty's (1982) laboratory finding stated that social loafing did not happen in task in which people could make a unique contribution. Similarly George (1992) found out that Intrinsic involvement was associated with low social loafing. According to him, when intrinsic involvement is high, people are less likely to indulge in Social loafing even if their task visibility was low. His finding is also consistent with results of laboratory studies suggesting that various types of Intrinsic involvement leads to lower level of social loafing (e.g. Brickner et. al., 1986, Harkens & Petty 1982)

Narcissist Personality:-
Narcissism is an individual differences variable that can be measured in the general population, which is frequently referred to as "grandiose narcissism" (Miller et al.,2012). According to *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013), "Narcissists are individuals with an inflated self-image but who are emotionally unstable and

vulnerable, which makes it difficult for narcissists to handle threats to their self-image". Studies suggest that narcissists are self-centered, self-focused, and self-serving (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1988) which implies possible decreases in overall group performance when a narcissist's efforts are diffused among group members.

Since long, research has demonstrated that narcissist individuals possess traits that may impede effective team functioning (Felty, 2012)). Carroll (1987) found narcissism to be positively related to a need for power; Emmons (1987) found the same for self-focused attention. Zhou et.al.,(2010) found negative relationships between narcissism and perspective taking and empathetic concern. Woodman et al.,(2013) investigated narcissism as a moderator of social loafing on a physical performance task and found that narcissists performed better when identifiability was high and socially loafed when no such opportunity was available . Earlier, Wallace and Baumeister (2002) observed that cognitive performance results demonstrated that narcissists perform very well when given the opportunity to publicize their individual performance and loaf when faced with a situation that does not provide such an opportunity.

Perfectionism:-
Stoeber et.al.,(2010) define Perfectionism as a personality trait where a person strives for flawlessness, setting high performance standards, along with critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.. Sorotzkin, (2006) states that if a perceived state of perfection isn't reached, it can lead to guilt, shame, anger or anxiety because of the perfectionist's belief of losing the imagined love and admiration from other people if he or she is not perfect. Yang et.al.,(2012) conceptualize it   as a multidimensional characteristic. In its maladaptive form, perfectionism drives people to attempt to achieve an unattainable ideal while their adaptive perfectionism can sometimes motivate them to reach their goals.

Various studies (McArdle, 2010; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Sturman et al., 2009), have repeatedly found that the self-worth of maladaptive perfectionists is often highly contingent upon the accomplishment of successful performance and/or the avoidance of negative social evaluation therefore, maladaptive perfectionists (in comparison to adaptive perfectionists) may be more inclined to engage in social loafing behaviors (i.e., hide in the crowd) in group settings where group failure appears likely (Vaartstra,2012). Consequently, adaptive perfectionists would likely be less inclined to engage in or endorse social-loafing behaviours because such behaviours go against their motivation to improve, succeed, and achieve the highest possible standards of personal performance.

Moreover, Cooper,(2006) considers narcissism as a self-perceived form of perfectionism. Narcissists often are pseudo-perfectionists and require being the center of attention and create situations where they will receive attention. According Hardy (1990), another reason why people engage in social-loafing behaviors in group settings is to manage their effort for times when they believe that the potential for positive social evaluation and praise is highest. In other words, people may conserve their effort (i.e., socially loaf) until they feel that there is a time when giving maximal effort will increase the likelihood of receiving praise in the social environment.

Conclusion and Implications:-
Social Loafing is a group phenomena which ultimately affects the collective performance of the group. Thus, it is imperative to realize that the inclination to social loaf is an individual behavior in group settings which is influenced by the nature of one's personality, one's intrests and beliefs. The analysis of the vast array of personality factors that can play a decisive role in the prevalence and extent of Social Loafing can become a useful guiding tool for eliminating   Social Loafing and increasing group productivity and efficiency. Moreover, during personnel selection, considering the personality backgrounds of persons while employing them for team work in organizations can also help curtail social loafing behavior in work settings.

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