

Everyday mistakes: confidence or cognition?

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Abstract

This study focuses on why some individuals report having a higher propensity for making everyday mistakes than others. These lapses in otherwise skilled behaviour have been related to less efficient basic attention mechanisms in laboratory tasks. Three hypotheses were tested by comparing objective task performance level with self rating of performance and invested effort. First, the identified attention deficit may be too small in grain size to have an impact on complex task performance. Second, the attention deficit may be successfully compensated at the expense of more invested effort. Third, making more everyday mistakes may be related to a lower confidence and self image. This should become visible as a consistently lower self assessment of performance level. To test these hypotheses, participants were divided in two groups on the basis of their score on the cognitive failures questionnaire (CFQ), a frequently applied instrument to measure the tendency of making everyday mistakes. The results show that individuals with high CFQ scores systematically rate their performance level on two tasks as lower, while they do not differ regarding the actual performance level and the invested effort. These outcomes show that the effect of a stronger tendency toward making mistakes on behaviour in everyday task situations is related to confidence and self image.

Introduction

Making mistakes is an individual's everyday experience. Everyone knows daily examples of mistakes such as forgetting appointments, inadvertently dropping things, or overlooking traffic signs. When people are questioned regarding these everyday failures, they typically differ as to the frequency of these types of everyday mistakes. It is unresolved how this self perception of making more everyday mistakes relates to an individual's behaviour at home and at work. For example, individuals who report relatively more everyday errors may also show generally lower performance levels. In addition, these individuals may rate their performance as lower and possibly experience that they have to invest more effort to successfully complete the task at hand. The present study appraises how the self report of making more everyday mistakes relates to the way tasks are performed and experienced.

Everyday mistakes are frequently viewed as lapses in cognitive mechanisms including perception, memory and handling. An often used instrument to determine the perceived frequency of everyday mistakes is the cognitive failures questionnaire

In D. de Waard, F.O. Flemisch, B. Lorenz, H. Oberheid, and K.A. Brookhuis (Eds.) (2008), *Human Factors for assistance and automation* (pp. 389 - 400). Maastricht, the Netherlands: Shaker Publishing.