



The Malediction Of Procrastination: Examining The Possible Causes Of This Curse

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Abstract: Procrastination is the irrational behaviour of delaying important tasks without any valid reasons that has afflicted mankind since antiquity. An enormous body of literature on procrastination has accumulated in the past many decades, expounding the nature, causes, consequences, and treatment of procrastination. The authors aim to focus on reviewing some of the most relevant literature pertaining to two approaches to understanding procrastination, namely personality and motivation. An overview of the available literature underscored the importance of investigating personality traits and motivational factors in relation to procrastination.

Keywords: Malediction, Procrastination, Personality approach, Motivational approach

INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is a complex cognitive, emotional and behavioural phenomenon. In “Practical Thoughts,” William Nevins wrote, “Procrastination has been called a thief – a thief of time. I wish it were no worse than a thief. It is a murderer and that which it kills is not time merely, but the immortal soul” (D.D, 2011). The phenomenon of procrastination has afflicted the human species since antiquity, and its dysfunctional effects have been studied extensively. This peculiar human behaviour of delaying necessary or important tasks without any rational reason, notwithstanding being abjectly aware of its negative consequences, has been the cause of many individuals not reaching their highest potential (Steel, 2007). Procrastinatory behaviour can be seen across age groups, gender, profession, lifestyle, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and time. However, its inclusive omnipresent nature has caused nothing but frustration, anxiety, self-doubt, and misery, to name a few. In fact, most individuals seem to have their own “cycle of procrastination” which they eventually fall into, no matter how hard they try to escape from it (Burka & Yuen, 2007). The vicious cycle of procrastination seems to have a life and will of its own and creates a sense of powerlessness in individuals afflicted by it (Walker, 2004).

Although procrastination is a phenomenon as old as time, our understanding of it is not comprehensive or conclusive. The reality is that most individuals struggle to understand why it occurs, and trying to overcome it seems to be by far, a losing battle. This is, although there has been a flood of research in the field of procrastination in recent times (Klingsieck, 2013). The main cause for our flippant relationship with procrastination is probably because it does not appear serious enough to be considered a malady categorised in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) despite the heavy toll it takes on our physical and mental well-being (Wilson & Nguyen, 2012). Its behavioural manifestation and corresponding repercussions exhibit similar ways, yet the underlying causal factors attributing to its existence are complex and convoluted (Andreou, 2007). To date, several theoretical approaches have been advocated to understand the nature and causes of procrastination (Klingsieck, 2013). Some of these include the personality approach, which studies procrastination as a personality trait and the motivational approach, which views procrastination as a failure in motivation. Closely related to the motivational perspective is the volitional approach, where procrastination is considered the outcome of failure in self-regulation. Another approach is the situational approach, in which procrastination is believed to be caused by the characteristics of the task. However, for the present paper, the researchers are solely focused on the perspectives of personality and motivational factors in understanding procrastination. Therefore, the research aims to wade through the immense flux of literature which exist on understanding the relationship of procrastination with personality and motivation and attempt to present a concise overview.

Understanding Procrastination

A) Personality Approach

Extensive research links personality traits to procrastination. Low conscientiousness reflecting reduced diligence and vigilance, strongly predicts procrastination (Lee et al., 2006; Van Eerde, 2003, Schouwenburg & Lay, 1995). High neuroticism, associated with anxiety and depression, also fosters avoidance behaviour (Özer & Saçkes, 2011). Perfectionism – demanding unrealistically high standards – correlates positively with procrastination and undermines both academic and workplace performance (Flett et al. 1995; Hollender, 1965; Jadidi et al. 2011; Steinert et al., 2021). Moreover, procrastination is linked to low optimism and self-esteem, alongside negative self-concepts (Jackson et al., 2000; Hajloo, 2014; Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007). Promoting optimism has been shown to reduce procrastination while enhancing overall well-being (Soofi et al. 2023).

B) Motivational Approach

Motivational variables play a significant role in procrastination. Achievement motivation shows a moderate negative correlation, with low drive leading to greater procrastination (Steel, 2007). Low intrinsic motivation combined with high perfectionism further increases procrastination (Brownlow & Reasinger, 2000). Both internal and external motivation influence procrastination, shaped by personality and situational factors (Gröpel & Steel, 2008). In academic contexts, achievement-oriented students procrastinate less than those students who are more well-being oriented (Grund & Fries, 2018). Higher self-efficacy and an internal locus of control consistently predict lower procrastination (Waschle et al., 2014; Klassen et al. 2008; Janssen & Carton, 1999; Sari & Fakhruddina, 2019). Procrastinators also display a wider intention-action gap, reflecting discrepancies between planned and actual behaviour (Steel et al., 2001).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lay (1997) argued that from a personality perspective, procrastination can be conceptualized as a paucity of conscientiousness, including traits such as dutifulness, self-discipline, and deliberativeness. Understanding procrastination as part of one's personality has received attention as an alternative way to address maladaptive ways of living and operating in the world.

Ariely (2002) conducted a study on procrastination, deadlines, and performance: self-control by precommitment. People have self-control problems, they recognize them, and they try to control them by self-imposing costly deadlines. These deadlines help people control procrastination, but they are not as effective as some externally imposed deadlines in improving task performance

Singh et al. (2015) revealed that Perfectionists often experience procrastination due to their high standards. Many people delay starting or finishing duties due to feelings of inadequacy and failure. Procrastination has a major impact on psychological performance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it examines procrastination through motivational and personality perspectives, highlighting how individuals' traits and levels of motivation contribute to persistent delay behaviour. Understanding these factors can help students, educators and professionals develop targeted strategies that enhance self-regulation, strengthen motivation and reduce the negative effects of procrastination. Overall, the study contributes to deeper understanding of procrastination as a complex behavioural issue rather than a mere lack of discipline.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the major factors that contribute to procrastination
2. To examine the possible causes of procrastination among individuals
3. To determine the role of psychological factors such as fear of failure, anxiety and self-esteem in procrastination

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does poor time management contribute to procrastination?
2. How does a lack of motivation influence procrastination behaviour?
3. What role do psychological factors such as fear of failure, anxiety or low self-esteem play in procrastination?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigators used an exploratory approach method by using secondary data to identify causes, relationships between procrastination and other factors such as motivation, anxiety, time management, self-regulation and environmental pressures.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The studies pointed out that some personality traits are more significant and reliable than others when it comes to predicting procrastination, like conscientiousness and perfectionism. Although the directions in which their relationship with procrastination unfolds are opposite in nature, as it is evident that conscientiousness is inversely correlated and perfectionism is positively correlated (Özer & Saçkes, 2011; Schouwenburg & Lay, 1995). Another interesting observation is that all the different aspects of the "self", such as self-esteem, self-concept, and self-identity, are shown to decrease procrastination when they are measured highly in individuals (Ferrari et al., 2007; Hajloo, 2014). Whereas for the motivational attributes in relation to procrastination, it can be observed from the studies that the stronger the intrinsic motivation and the internal locus of control, the less likely the individual is to procrastinate (Brownlow & Reasinger, 2000; Sari & Fakhruddiana, 2019). This implies that cultivating the habit of enjoying a task for its own sake and not for any external reward, as well as a stronger sense of self-agency, could be conducive to reducing avoidance behaviour.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Counselling services or stress management workshops can help individuals cope with performance anxiety that leads to procrastination.
2. Institutions should strengthen mental health services to address anxiety, fear of failure, perfectionism and low self-esteem.
3. Introduce mandatory time management and study skills programs at the early stages of education.
4. Promote active learning strategies that reduce disengagement and task avoidance.
5. Encourage organizations to implement structured accountability systems such as progress reports and milestone reviews.

CONCLUSION

At present, we seem to be acknowledging the extent of maladaptive impact procrastination can have on our lives. Personality traits like conscientiousness, neuroticism, perfectionism, optimism, and all identity aspects of the self-give a clearer perspective on why we procrastinate. The motivational approach to procrastination pointed out the importance of different types of motives in predicting procrastination. The present study took only two variables to study their relationship with procrastination; therefore, it is grossly limited and cannot be generalised to any kind of population. Most available literature on procrastination is on the nature, characteristics, causal factors, and consequences of procrastination. Perhaps future investigation in the direction of formulating preventive measures and treatment would be more beneficial. In addition, an in-depth study on task and situational characteristics would further our understanding of procrastination.

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