

An enhanced view on procrastination

What holds people back: A study.

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Procrastination is the human tendency to postpone important tasks or delay addressing issues that may need immediate attention. This behavior, in turn, affects more than just one's productivity but also can significantly impact their confidence, mental well-being, and memory over time. Commonly it is said to be a product of laziness or poor time management techniques, but in reality, it is also affected by psychological and evolutionary factors. Overcoming this habit is very essential to improve productivity and breed success.

A deep study and understanding of this condition is necessary to overcome it, and thus we must first understand the whys and hows of it.

Diving deeper into the psychology behind procrastination

Evolutionary perspective

This perspective links procrastination to our inner nature. The primitive nature of a living being is exhibiting a fight-or-flight response when faced with any kind of obstacle. This means that when our brains are confronted with a vast amount of work they have to finish and the efforts they need to put into it, immediate escape is chosen rather than long-term planning. In a modern context, it means that most of the time, a common man will end up choosing denial and escape over actually putting in the effort to take responsibility. In the age of media and entertainment, there are plenty of distractions waiting for us to turn our heads towards, and they will keep us busy for as long as possible.

Sometimes stress is also a valid factor that flames the fire of procrastination. It starts when the pending work starts to pile up. Our natural response to this situation is feeling guilt and stress, which are the two most common negative emotions that further hinder our ability to catch up on lost time. Guilt alone is a catalyst for motivation, but combined with stress, it becomes a boundary one needs to overcome.

Psychological perspective

Factors like fear of failure, anxiety, lack of planning and motivation, and the brain's desire for an instant reward all affect our habits. And once unhealthy habits are developed, they are very hard to get rid of.

Individuals who seek perfectionism are motivated, but they wait for the ideal condition to start working; thus, rather than also focusing on the results, they are solely focused on the process. This leads them to trap their own minds into the delusion that if the conditions are ideal, only then will they have the best outcomes. These types of people never put in their full effort and end up blaming their environment for it, thus harboring wasted potential.

There are also certain people who harbor too great a fear of failure, which completely overshadows their motivations to finish the work. They are too focused on the results and not on the process at all, so they stay in denial for as long as possible. Such people look for shortcuts or copy others' works because

they never felt they were capable enough to put in effort. In fact, they fear putting in effort and just focus solely on results, producing hollowness in their talents.

The pleasure principle explains both these aspects as humans avoiding stressful tasks to avoid negative emotions. Researchers have associated anxiety with impulsiveness and stated only impulsive people let their anxiety control their procrastinating tendencies.

Cultural and Social Perspective for western and non-western students

The cultural perspective on time management also plays a crucial role in understanding procrastination behaviors among both Western and non-Western students. In cultures with a multi-active view of time, individuals prioritize completing tasks accurately and thoroughly, focusing on the quality of their work rather than meeting specific deadlines. This approach may lead to procrastination as individuals take the time needed to ensure tasks are done well. Conversely, in cultures that follow a linear view of time, people are more likely to allocate specific time limits to tasks and adhere strictly to deadlines. Procrastination in these cultures may occur when individuals struggle to adhere to these set time constraints or feel overwhelmed by the pressure of meeting rigid deadlines.

For Western students, academic procrastination often stems from a fear of failure and not meeting expectations. They may delay starting tasks due to a perfectionist mindset that leads them to believe that they need to excel in everything they do. This fear of falling short in their performance can result in putting off tasks until the last minute or avoiding starting them altogether. On the other hand, non-Western students may procrastinate out of a concern for how they are perceived by their peers. In many non-Western cultures, there is a strong emphasis on saving face and avoiding shame, which can lead students to delay tasks to ensure they do not appear incompetent or less capable in front of others.

Scientific perspective

Scientific understanding explains procrastination as a struggle between two brain regions faced with an unwelcome task or activity. This conflict occurs between the limbic system, which governs unconscious processes like experiencing pleasure, and the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for planning and decision-making, having evolved more recently. Procrastination typically

happens when the limbic system dominates, causing the postponement of immediate tasks, offering short-term relief from the unease linked with the task.

Chronic Procrastination

Chronic procrastination, often seen as a persistent tendency to delay starting or completing tasks, transcends occasional procrastination experienced by almost everyone at some point. Unlike everyday procrastination that can be a normal response to stress, boredom, or a busy schedule, chronic procrastination is more deeply ingrained and persists over time. It can significantly impair an individual's functioning in various life areas, including academic, personal, and professional settings.

While chronic procrastination itself is not classified as a distinct mental health diagnosis in major diagnostic manuals such as the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) or the ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision), it often occurs in conjunction with or as a symptom of other mental health issues. For instance, it may be associated with conditions like attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The relationship with these conditions can be complex, with chronic procrastination sometimes serving as a coping mechanism for underlying stress, fear of failure, perfectionism, or low self-esteem.

Understanding chronic procrastination as a mental health issue involves recognizing the negative impact it has on emotional well-being, self-efficacy, and daily functioning. Individuals dealing with chronic procrastination often experience increased stress, guilt, a sense of inadequacy, and lowered productivity, which can exacerbate symptoms of co-occurring mental health conditions. Given its potential consequences, chronic procrastination warrants professional attention when it significantly hinders an individual's quality of life.

Treatment or management strategies may include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps individuals recognize and change thought patterns and behaviors contributing to procrastination, as well as techniques for improving time management, setting realistic goals, and enhancing motivation. In cases where procrastination is linked to other mental health issues, treating those underlying conditions can also help alleviate the procrastination.

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