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UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES ON PROCRASTINATION: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Abstract

This article outlines the theoretical grounds of procrastination, a widespread behavior where individuals tend to delay tasks despite negative consequences. The article analyzes procrastination in detail from the point of view of Ellis' ABC cognitive model, including a description of the key components.

Various theories, including those related to decision-making and irrational beliefs are discussed to provide a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to procrastination. The article also demonstrates the impact of emotional and motivational aspects, such as fear of failure or perfectionism on procrastination development. By reviewing classic and modern theoretical frameworks, this article aims to contribute to a wider understanding of procrastination and its consequences for personal and professional development.

Keywords: procrastination, self-regulation, cognitive processes, irrational beliefs, perfectionism, productivity.

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ПРОКРАСТИНАЦИЯ ТУРАЛЫ ЕРЕКШЕ КӨЗҚАРАС: ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ ШОЛУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада прокрастинацияның теориялық негіздері, жағымсыз салдарға қарамастан тұлғалардың тапсырмаларды кейінге қалдыруға бейім болатын кең таралған мінез-құлықтары сипатталған. Мақалада Эллистің ABC когнитивті моделі, оның ішінде негізгі компоненттердің сипаттамасы тұрғысынан прокрастинация егжей-тегжейлі талданады.

Прокрастинацияғы ықпал ететін факторларды тереңірек түсіну үшін әртүрлі теориялар, соның ішінде шешім қабылдауға және иррационалды сенімдерге қатысты теориялар талқыланады. Сондай-ақ мақалада сәтсіздіктен қорқу немесе перфекционизм сияқты эмоциялық және мотивациялық аспектілердің кейінге қалдырудың дамуына әсері көрсетіледі. Классикалық және заманауи теориялық негіздерді қарастыра отырып, бұл мақала кейінге қалдыруды және оның жеке және кәсіби даму үшін салдарын кеңірек түсінуге ықпал етуге бағытталған.

Түйін сөздер: прокрастинация, өзін-өзі реттеу, танымдық процестер, иррационалды сенімдер, перфекционизм, өнімділік.

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ОСОБЫЙ ВЗГЛЯД НА ПРОКРАСТИНАЦИЮ: ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ОБЗОР

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются теоретические основы прокрастинации - широко распространенного поведения, при котором люди склонны откладывать выполнение задач, несмотря на негативные последствия. В статье подробно анализируется прокрастинация с точки зрения когнитивной модели ABC Эллиса, включая описание ключевых компонентов.

Обсуждаются различные теории, в том числе связанные с принятием решений и иррациональными убеждениями, чтобы обеспечить более глубокое понимание факторов, способствующих прокрастинации. В статье также демонстрируется влияние эмоциональных и мотивационных аспектов, таких как страх неудачи или перфекционизм, на развитие прокрастинации. Данная статья, в которой рассматриваются классические и современные теоретические основы, призвана способствовать более широкому пониманию прокрастинации и ее последствий для личного и профессионального развития.

Ключевые слова: прокрастинация, саморегуляция, когнитивные процессы, иррациональные убеждения, перфекционизм, продуктивность.

INTRODUCTION. The issue of procrastination gains particular relevance in the context of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, specifically: Goal 3 - 'Good Health and Well-being' and Goal 8 - 'Decent Work and Economic Growth.'

We can observe that procrastination can be seen in people having high stress, increasing life quality and challenges in aspects of life, including emotional health, work, education and personal life. Therefore, coping with procrastination is essential to support individual's well-being. Although the causes of procrastination are varied, it is particularly important to examine it from the perspective of irrational beliefs. Irrational beliefs significantly influence an individual's decision-making, emotional regulation, and action planning abilities. These beliefs, such as fear of failure, perfectionism, and low self-esteem, provide the foundation for the development of procrastination. As researchers found out, self-worth concerns about individual's life and fear surrounding acceptance by society are the main predictors of perfectionism [1]. We can conclude that they base their sense of self-esteem on whether they see themselves successful or unsuccessful, perfectionists are more likely than the typical person to feel failure [2]. Cognitive behavioral psychologists have identified a few cognitive distortions that constitute erroneous and flawed thinking [3]. Studies found that psychological and/or individual characteristics are also linked to the phenomenon of procrastination, including self-control [4], self-efficacy [5], and self-compassion [6].

The relevance of the article lies in the fact that procrastination has negative consequences not only for individuals but also for organizations and society as a whole. Finding effective ways to overcome it and transforming irrational beliefs are crucial aspects of increasing productivity, improving psychological well-being, and reducing negative emotions. The phenomenon of "procrastination" is relatively new to psychology science, however the psychological meaning of the phenomenon it describes is universally familiar to most of people. Derived from the Latin words *pro*, which stands for "in favor of" and *crastinus* "tomorrow", procrastination means the tendency to postpone important tasks, often specified by a behavioral pattern where people consciously delay their important tasks. While remaining active, their efforts are diverted to irrelevant, insignificant, or even trivial tasks [7].

In modern scientific sources, other definitions of procrastination are available. For example, procrastination is defined as specified in Figure 1:

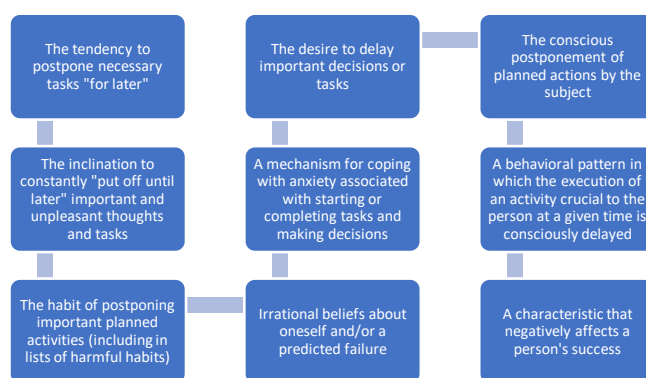


Figure 1. – A Definition Model for Procrastination

Based on the modern scientific literature review of the phenomenon of procrastination, we propose a Definition Model for Procrastination, which is based on the analysis of modern research on the phenomenon of procrastination and reflects the overall concept of definitions of procrastination. Based on this model, we consider it advisable to further study the cognitive aspect of irrational personality beliefs.

Nowadays, many educational institutions suggest certain trainings or courses on how to resolve procrastination issues providing methods on effective scheduling, time management skills, coping strategies and techniques that help academic people address their issues related to procrastination.

As research review shows, the early signs of studying procrastination started in early 90th by Noach Milgram in his so-called work *Procrastination: A Malady of Modern Time*. However, deep research on this subject was initiated earlier.

N. Milgram and his co-authors initially identified five types of procrastination [8]



Figure 2. - Types of procrastination by N. Milgram

In our research, we rely on the N. Milgram's concept, which identifies 5 main types of procrastination, which we propose in the form of a radial diagram. This diagram shows how procrastination has a relationship with all aspects of human life, which makes further study of it very relevant.

1. Daily procrastination is manifested in delaying every-day tasks that an individual tends to postpone for later

2. Decision making procrastination can be manifested when an individual postpones decisions whether they are small or large

3. Neurotic procrastination can be characterized by postponing important life decisions that an individual casts for later such as making family, starting education or hobbies

4. Compulsive procrastination is observed when an individual tends to have both behavioral and decision-making procrastination types

5. Academic procrastination is characterized by postponing academic tasks such as preparing for exams, completing different tasks given by professors, making presentation, etc.

These types were later merged into two by Milgram and Tenne: procrastination in completing tasks and procrastination in decision-making.

Additionally, two types of procrastinators are distinguished: passive and active as a result of linking procrastination to the desire to avoid unpleasant tasks and to the experience of intense emotions under time pressure has been identified.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. A meta-analytical review of studies on procrastination was conducted by P. Steel, where he identified the key distinctive features of the phenomenon.

From his perspective, procrastination is seen in activities where an individual is numb to start certain tasks and make decisions. This act of postponement is very painful for an individual and he/she can experience guilt and shame when deadlines are not met and promises are not fulfilled. In this regard, an individual experiences negative emotion and may have negative cognitions about himself/herself as procrastination leads to negative consequences which negatively affects life. These consequences are accumulated and lead to bigger problems where an individual is exposed to high stress, depression or even worse mental issues. Understanding the root causes of procrastination is essential to develop treatment strategies and cope with consequences [9].

Initially, “procrastination” was viewed from an ethical and philosophical perspective as synonymous with the concept of “laziness.” It was understood as a mental state characterized by a lack of desire to engage in activities that require willpower [10].

K. Lay introduced a new dimension to the understanding of this phenomenon, highlighting the voluntary, irrational postponement of planned tasks, even when it leads to unfavorable consequences for the individual [11].

P. Steel, in turn, emphasized that procrastination is a kind of avoidance strategy aimed at evading tasks that provoke unpleasant emotions [12].

J. Ferrari considered procrastination to be a pursuit of “thrill-seeking” sensations that arise from completing tasks within extremely tight deadlines [13].

Albert Ellis, who is the founder of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, suggested a cognitive approach with a view to understanding and coping with irrational beliefs. Ellis stated that irrational beliefs are often deeply held and rigid thoughts by nature that are not logical, unhelpful, and often tend to be self-defeating. These irrational beliefs can lead to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviors of an individual.

Ellis introduced the ABC model to illustrate how irrational beliefs have an impact on emotions and behaviors of an individual:

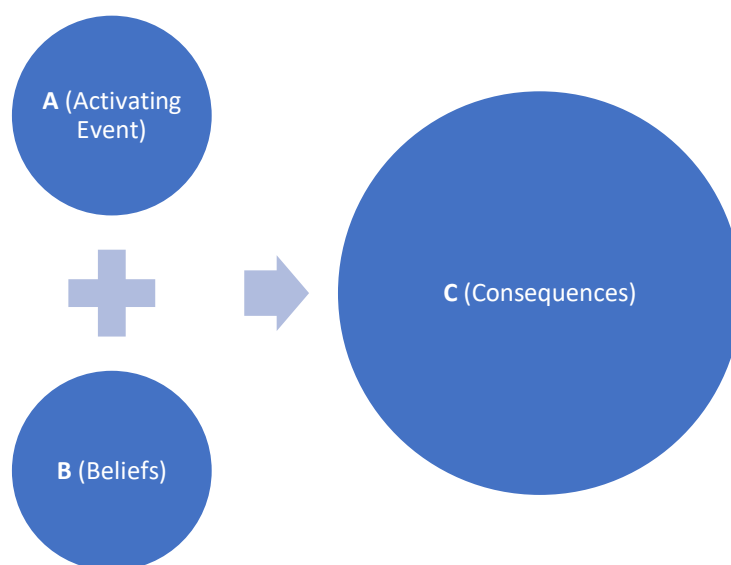


Figure 3. – Ellis' ABC model

Based on Ellis' ABC-model, we designed a schematic model that reflects the components and triggers of irrational beliefs. As we can see, it is necessary to identify irrational beliefs and replace them with logical and useful ones. This model can be used for further research on procrastination to propose a model for transforming irrational beliefs and overcoming procrastination.

- **A** stands for an Activating Event that is a situation or event that occurs.
- **B** stands for Beliefs, which are individual's interpretation or thoughts about the event.
- **C** stands for Consequences, which are emotional and behavioral responses resulting from the belief.

As a result, Ellis identified common irrational beliefs, such as perfectionism, which is seen in “I must always succeed”, catastrophizing “If I fail, it's the end of the world”, and low frustration tolerance “I can't stand discomfort”.

Ellis and Knaus described procrastination where certain important tasks for life are delayed or postponed. In this regard, there is another component that needs to be considered – it is avoiding negative consequences, which means that a person may think that his/her decisions or actions may lead to improper results and they can be painful for an individual which is characterized by negative cognitions. Another aspect lays in avoiding a predicted pain or a predicted failure that can be a barrier for making certain decisions or completing tasks. Another aspect is in responsibilities for making decisions and completing tasks when individuals lose their motivations.

The therapy to cope with procrastination focuses on helping individuals identify, challenge, and replace irrational beliefs with rational alternatives. This process involves questioning the evidence for irrational thoughts, reframing situations, and adopting more adaptive perspectives.

Ellis's contribution emphasizes the role of cognition in emotional health and serves as a foundation for cognitive-behavioral interventions to cope with procrastination.

Cognitive aspect is considered another type of phenomenon of procrastination and it is of importance when we try to analyze and explain human behavior. In this regard, we can consider three aspects to explain the root causes of procrastination. They are irrational beliefs, where an individual has not rational view of his/her life, increased self-esteem and person's numbness to make certain life important decisions.

Many researchers demonstrated that there are similarities between the cognitive perspective on procrastination and the psychodynamic theory, which also views procrastination as a defense mechanism of the Ego. However, a key difference between them lies in the fact that the cognitive

approach does not focus on the anxiety that disrupts the functioning of the Ego, as we see in psychodynamic theory.

It is clear that irrational beliefs can significantly undermine emotional well-being and life satisfaction, but they are not permanent in life. By special interventions and applying certain techniques, individuals can transform these irrational beliefs, reduce distress, and develop a more empowering mindset. Ellis's approach has proven to be a powerful tool for fostering resilience and psychological flexibility.

It is worth noting that procrastination, in many ways, reflects an emotional reaction to planned or required tasks. Based on the nature of these emotions, procrastination can be categorized into two main types described in Figure 4 below:

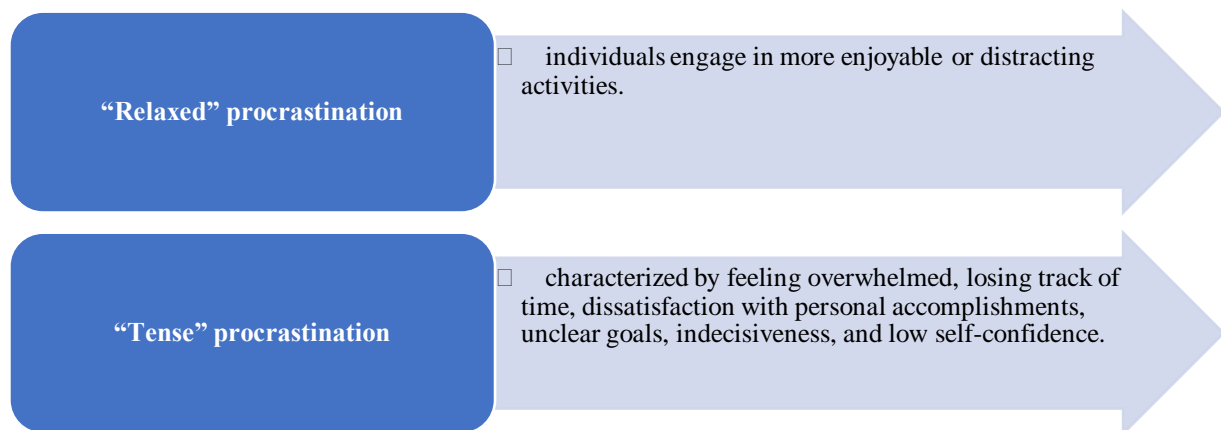


Figure 4. – Categories of procrastination

Based on the study of different types of procrastination, we propose a model of procrastination categories that identifies two main categories reflecting an emotional reaction to planned or required tasks. Highlighting these two main categories of procrastination will help us choose effective interventions to overcome procrastination.

In the process of describing procrastination, we can encounter definitions such as adaptation to certain situations or circumstances and inadaptation where a person is unable to adapt to life situations. It can be very dysfunctional to person's well-being and development, that is why it is of high importance to understand the nature of procrastination. It is not about being bias but seeing the reality where procrastination may destroy person's well-being and further development. Understanding the root causes can be very instrumental to develop coping strategies in this perspective. As Amy Lilas Gendron emphasized, procrastination has been studying deeply in terms of revealing root causes and developing coping strategies comparing to investigations made earlier. Nevertheless, many insights are to be made further on to enlighten the phenomenon of procrastination and develop working coping methods that help individuals to cope with procrastination. Further empirical studies are required.

After analyzing and summarizing foreign research on procrastination, three main components of this phenomenon can be identified: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional.

Procrastination is a complex, heterogeneous psychological phenomenon, encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components that are closely linked to the motivational sphere of an individual. It manifests primarily in behavior: the delay in completing necessary activities and the postponement of decision-making. Other forms of this psychological phenomenon also include fear of risk, fear of failure, making grand plans that are never executed, etc.

The primary areas where procrastination manifests are professional activity and academic procrastination. These issues are not related to abilities or intelligence levels, but procrastinators often face difficulties in perceiving and adequately assessing time as described by Aitken [15].

Another aspect that some research identify is the subconscious component. Procrastination can sometimes signal deeper intra-psychic conflicts. A person might unconsciously avoid or delay tasks that hold symbolic significance for them, for instance, by engaging in prolonged rituals before starting such activities. At the subconscious level, the activity is associated with past conflicts and perceived as a threat. For example, a boss may remind a procrastinator of a significant figure from the past, with whom they had unresolved conflicts. These figures are often parental figures, and the associated conflicts can have roots in childhood trauma caused by different parenting styles, from permissive to authoritarian. Such individuals may be hypersensitive to judgments from authoritarian figures and try to delay completing tasks or reporting on their completion [16].

Currently, there are many theories in the West attempting to explain procrastination, but none of them is universal. Overall, procrastination has been one of the most studied phenomena of recent decades, attracting attention from researchers across various fields. As described above, the nature of procrastination is reflected in psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive psychological theories, and the integrative temporal motivation theory.

Nowadays, many researchers try to unite different theories into a single one, but it is not that easy. To sum up, procrastination has been studying over the decades, but there is not a unique definition nor strategy to cope with it. Each research study on procrastination is unique and offers its own perspective. Many theories try to explain the nature of procrastination but they are still insufficient to explain the root causes of procrastination and how to cope with it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS. Procrastination can lead to stress, guilt, reduced productivity, and disappointment from others due to unfulfilled responsibilities. The combination of these emotions and the energy drained, which is initially spent on secondary tasks and managing mounting anxiety, and later on frantic last-minute efforts often perpetuates the cycle of procrastination.

According to studies, chronic procrastination, by nature, may stem from underlying psychological or physiological factors. Some individuals tend to be productive only under strict time limits, with their peak efficiency occurring in the final moments before a certain deadline.

As recent studies demonstrated, individuals with procrastination symptoms are depicted as lazy individuals with an inability to self-regulate, however non-procrastinators have been associated with high efficiency, productivity, and motivation. As some articles have shown, one form of procrastination is characteristic of people who do not intend to procrastinate, but do so due to a lack of time management, and that a second form of procrastination is typical of those who manage time efficiently yet choose to delay tasks to focus on more immediate, and perhaps more important tasks. These different clarifications have been labeled as passive procrastination and active procrastination respectively [17].

As described earlier, key features of procrastination include a lack of meaningful or productive engagement with tasks and the persistent delay of genuinely important and beneficial activities. To some extent, this behavior is not alarming, as no one can function like a machine. Short breaks for rest or a change in focus can positively impact overall productivity. However, a hallmark of procrastination is its negative consequences, such as missed deadlines, failed projects, dissatisfaction with professional performance, and potential personal or psychological challenges.

Bidjerano in his studies demonstrates that women tend to use rehearsal strategies and techniques more often than men. Men tend to score higher, lower, or the same as women depending on the measure. It is worth noting that meta-analytic results demonstrate that women score higher on effortful control than men [18].

Other studies have shown that age has a negative relationship with procrastination. It has been revealed that as most people become older, they tend to better evaluate the benefits of the present and future in their lives. By getting older, sensitivity to delay is meaningfully decreased, which can cause the utility of a task to increase. Hajloo in his work specified that self-esteem considerably mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and trait procrastination [19]. Rakes and Dunn in their studies evaluated the impact of internal versus external motivation on academic procrastination [20].

Many studies show that planning can significantly reduce procrastination. Researchers found that developing the time management skills has correlation with academic achievement, enhanced self-esteem, lower level of learned disability, as well as more appreciating feeling, and the state of internal control. As the axiom suggests, “old habits die hard”, the best way to avoid raising future procrastinators may. Planning is considered a well strategy to reduce distractions that occur. Normally, effective plans can include three key components: standards, monitoring, as well as strength. These plans can help structure self-control or incorporate external influences in general, such as social accountability and environmental feedback in life. In addition, awareness of time is essential to make realistic plans.

Prioritizing tasks based on their significance level and completing them in a certain order can be effective. Time management can build on planning via developing time goals, which can increase the possibility of accomplishing desired outcomes.

Overall, reducing distractions can be easier via temptation-inhibiting strategies rather than by enhancing task facilitation strategy. When distractions seem unavoidable, it would be better to focus on one alternative thought rather than being engaged in aimless distractions, as filling the avoided thought with other reduces preoccupation.

CONCLUSIONS. Procrastination is a complex phenomenon that, having considered the research on this subject, can be seen in delaying and postponing life important decisions and numbing in completing tasks. Procrastination is also observed when a person fears to start something in order to avoid negative consequences. Based on the theories that have been considered, we can state the procrastination has many components and these components should be thoroughly studied empirically to have reliable grounds for developing instruments and methods to cope with it.

Modern world places high demands on responsibility, independence, and productivity. In this regard, studying procrastination is important and relevant, especially when the emerging issues and difficulties cannot be simply attributed to an individual's laziness or lack of interest in performing required tasks. Based on the theoretical review carried out, we found out similarities on how the cognitive approach and psychodynamic theory explain procrastination and we can see similarities between the cognitive approach and psychodynamic theory in terms of considering it as a defense mechanism for the Ego. However, the cognitive approach prioritizes the existence of irrational beliefs at the heart of procrastination. Therefore, it can be concluded that overcoming procrastination is possible if irrational beliefs are transformed into rational ones. We consider it advisable to further delve into the study of this area in order to develop an effective strategy to overcome procrastination.

Thus being said, the phenomenon of procrastination is considered a comprehensive psychological phenomenon that should not be totally equated with individual's defense mechanisms or disruptions in motivational and volitional aspects. This area of psychology requires further research and deeper understanding that will make a clarity in the existing knowledge on the nature of procrastination, its different components, and potential coping strategies.

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