UPCOMING PROGRAMS

FDC-Smith Women’s Global Leaders Program
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Solving the Procrastination Puzzle

Making sense of a self-defeating coping strategy

Timothy A. Pychyl
Department of Psychology

#SmithExecEd
My research

- Goal pursuit
- Well-being
- Procrastination
- Productivity
What gets in the way?

“"We have to talk about the things that get in the way of doing what is best for us.”

Brene Brown

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Solving the Procrastination Puzzle

- Explain what procrastination is and what it’s not.
- Highlight the consequences of procrastination
- Identify key pieces of the self-regulation failure puzzle
  - It’s me
  - It’s the task
  - It’s the way I think
  - It’s my lack of willpower

- Summarize some general strategies for change
- My slides & pace . . . your questions
Latin roots

Latin verb *procrastinare*

*pro* - forward motion

*crastinus* - belonging to tomorrow

“put off or postpone until another day”

That’s not so bad, it’s about belonging to tomorrow.
Tomorrow

- A mystical land where 98% of all human productivity, motivation, and achievement are stored. (Unknown)
How do psychologists define procrastination?

- Gap between intention and action
- Voluntary, irrational delay, despite the expectation of a potential negative outcome

All procrastination is delay, but not all delay is procrastination

Types of Delay

- Purposeful
- Inevitable
- Irrational
- Hedonistic
- Arousal
- Delay due to Emotional Problems

The costs of procrastination

- Performance
- Well-being
- Health
- Relationships
- Regrets & bereavement

"... procrastination is usually harmful, sometimes harmless, but never helpful" (Steel, 2007; p. 80).

Procrastination – it’s not about time

The Procrastinator’s Clock?

I HAVE WAY TOO MUCH TO DO!

You need to make a schedule.

I'll make a daily planner.

Later, when to schedule TV?

Much later, and on Thursday.

Finally finished my planner, everything is under control.

I thought you were busy, what are you doing?

My planner says I don't start until tomorrow.

Isn't it wonderful how we keep fooling ourselves?! The thing is, procrastination is not about time management in this traditional sense. Tune into the podcasts to learn more.

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What just happened here?
The procrastination puzzle
The nature of our goals & intentions

Personality

Self-Regulation Failure

Self-Control & Willpower

Cognitions & Beliefs
It’s that gap between intention and action. It’s weakness of will.

SELF-REGULATION FAILURE
Short-term mood repair
“Giving in to feel good”

The nature of our goals & intentions
What makes a task aversive?

- Boredom, frustration, resentment at every stage
- **Inception & Planning Phase** = LACK OF MEANING (enjoyment, fun, pleasure, passion, self-identity)
- **Action Phase** = LACK OF STRUCTURE (lack of autonomy, control, initiation, uncertainty)

Implementation Intentions

- In situation X, I will do behaviour Y to achieve subgoal Z.
- External cue for behaviour
- 40% increase in attendance on second experiment

It’s the way I think!

- Irrational beliefs
- Downward Counterfactuals

Cognitions & Beliefs
Irrational beliefs

- “I’m thinking now that I’m simply too stupid to benefit from more studying, so I’ll just hang out on Facebook.”
- “I’m too smart for this assignment I don’t need it.”
- “That would ruin my evening”

We depreciate self and the world, and we can’t tolerate frustration very well.


I’ll feel more like it tomorrow.
You know, some day these kids will be out of the house and you'll regret not spending more time with them.

That's a problem for Future Homer. Man, I don't envy that guy.


fMRI Studies

Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex? What is this stuff?

Hal Hershfield
UCLA

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I lack the willpower

Self-Control & Willpower
Willpower and Ego-depletion

- Willpower is like a muscle
- Self-regulatory depletion
- Implications?
  - Strategic investment of a limited resource
  - Strengthening will power


Self-affirmation – meaning and values

- Expressing one’s core values
- Puts focus on volition as opposed to habit
- Bolster’s self-regulation

Courage to be


Self-Control & Executive Function

- I have trouble waiting my turn.
- When people seem upset with me, I don't understand why.
- I say things without thinking.
- I don't plan ahead for tasks; I have trouble organizing work.
- I have trouble thinking of a different way to solve a problem when stuck.
- I have trouble with jobs or tasks that have more than one step.
- I overreact to small problems; I get emotionally upset easily.

“all of the nine clinical subscales of executive functioning were significantly related with higher academic procrastination . . . our research suggests that there may be problems within cognitively healthy individuals that contribute to a vulnerability to procrastination.”

Extended Will

- Willpower prosthetics
- Triggers, chutes and ladders - lowering the threshold for action while raising the threshold for alternatives
- Leverage self-control
- Social support, commitment contracts, scaffolding your individual effort

Just get started!

- Experience sampling
- Doing & “should be doing”
- Appraisals, emotions, thoughts
- Follow-up interviews

“I’ll feel more like it tomorrow”
“I work better under pressure”

Pre-empt that which tempts!

Self-forgiveness

- If we self-forgive after we procrastinate, do we procrastinate less the next time we face a similar task?

Structured procrastination – Harness your liabilities for motivation

John Perry
Stanford University
"The last lecture"

"Time is all you have. And you may find one day that you have less than you think."

- Time must be explicitly managed, like money.
- You can always change your plan, but only if you have one (Make manageable, concrete task lists and take one step after another.)
- Ask yourself: Are you spending your time on the right things? (Make sure your to-do-list tasks, your goals, are really worth pursuing.)
- Develop a good filing system. (Organization saves time in the long run.)
- Rethink the telephone (Don't waste time on "hold" - be prepared to do other things as you wait.)
- Delegate (Many hands make light work, and everyone needs autonomy.)
- Take time out (Everyone needs a break, and not all delay is procrastination.)
- Randy concludes his advice by writing

We will all use up all the time that is allotted to us. It is up to us how we decide to use it (Stephen Pychyl).
Since my years in the concentration camps, this pattern has changed. . . I have learned to spend my time more wisely, indeed to make every minute count. I do this so that I have time for the things that are really important" (Frankl, 2000; p. 34, emphasis added).

"Another thing: I try to do everything as soon as possible, and not at the last moment. This ensures that, when I am overburdened with work, I will not face the added pressure of knowing that something is still to be done.

There is yet a third principle that has guided my work and it is this: I do the unpleasant tasks before I do the pleasant ones.

Well, he’s finally done. Did we learn anything? Did we solve the puzzle?
The nature of our goals & intentions

Personality

Self-Regulation Failure

Cognitions & Beliefs

Self-Control & Willpower
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