

Anthony Palmer

Beulah Heights University

Ath115 Success for Life & Ministry

Final Paper

Dr. Bowens

12/09/2017

Procrastination

Procrastination is a term in psychology that denotes emotional and mental states in which person postpones important tasks for later while the time for their implementation is spent on other less important and immediate tasks. It could be assumed that such state is typical for most of the people. However, it turns into problem when procrastination becomes a way of life. People who are characterized by high level of procrastination delay almost all tasks and, when the deadline is close, complete them in unrealistic short term or refuse to do them at all. In such situation, the price of procrastination is low quality of the performed works and overdue deadlines. In fact, procrastination is rarely connected to person's laziness, and it is rather explained by personal fears of success and failure, unrealistic self-assessment or feeling of losing control. To reduce the level of procrastination, it is first of all necessary to define psychological problem that encourages person to procrastinate.

Considering procrastination, it is important to note that this habit could have negative effect on person's physical, emotional and social well-being. In most of the cases, procrastination has negative effect on education, work, financial state, relationship, and reputation. According to Frode Svartdal (2016), "procrastination leads to health related or academic achievement-related negative consequences" (p. 103). Also, procrastination usually leads to the intensive stress which, in turn, results in the problems with physical and mental health. Among negative consequences of procrastination are increased anxiety, insomnia, chronic fatigue, eating disorders and addictions (Musolino, 2007). As Evanya Musolino (2007) notes, "procrastinators are more likely to report test anxiety, weekly state anxiety, and anxiety-related physical symptoms" (p. 225). That is why in long-term perspective procrastination could negatively affect physical and mental states.

Talking about the reason why people procrastinate it is necessary to consider Temporal Motivation Theory (TMT) proposed by Piers Steel and Peter Gröppel. The main

aim of TMT is to assess utility of specific action on the base of four variables. In such situation, Piers Steel and Peter Gröpela (2008) believe that the expectancy from the action is multiplied by the value of the action and divided by individual's impulsiveness and delay results in motivation. In this formula expectancy means probability of success, the value of action is expected reward, impulsiveness is person's sensitivity to delays, and delay means the time left for realization of the task. According to this theory, "incentive value increases with amount and decreases with delay ... [while] the effect of delay depends upon individual differences" (Deckers, 2016, p. 44). As a result, Steel and Gröpela (2008) conclude that the higher the person's expectations and values, the higher his motivation for action. On the other hand, the more person delays the task and the higher his sensitivity to delays, the lower his level of motivation (p. 407). In fact, probability of procrastination is not only explained by the level of expectancy, value, impulsiveness, and delay, but also by person's fears and psychological blocks.

The fears that encourage person to procrastinate are most often explained by personal characteristics, tendency to neuroses, low self-esteem, and psychological blocking. According to Clarissa Richardson and Dustin Clark (2012), procrastination results from the "concerns about making mistakes, pernicious self-doubt, harsh self-criticism, impossibly high standards or expectations for performance" (p. 288). Based on Tension Reduction Theory it could be stated that self-doubt, low self-esteem, and experience of past failures in the performance of the similar work cause anxiety and fear, especially if the result of the work would be evaluated by others. In such situation, person tries to avoid the tension associated with the performance of the task that is unpleasant, uninteresting and stressful by procrastinating with it (p. 288). To find the way that is less associated with stress person begins to work on the task when the level of fear of consequences of non-fulfillment of the assignment is higher than the fear of failure. According to this theory, it could be assumed

that people who are more prone to stress are more likely procrastinate. As a result, the roots of procrastination are almost always based on the specific fear and figuring out what person is afraid of is the key to reduce procrastination.

One of the most common fears that results in procrastination is a fear of success. There are several reasons why people are afraid of success and try to avoid it by procrastination. First of all, the low self-esteem could lead to the unwillingness to stand out of others less successful people. The person's self-restraining is a "subconscious fear of becoming successful, stand out from the masses and show oneself better than others" (Richardson & Clark, 2012, p. 301). In this case, person is especially worried about being misunderstood by friends and close surrounding. Secondly, success is usually connected with certain difficulties with which person may face on his/her way to it. In this situation, person may fear to be out of the comfort zone. For example, people may fear to change job, to move to a different place or to reduce the amount of free time. Thirdly, people who are afraid of the success believe that they would be punished, criticized or accused of being selfish by others. According to Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen (2008), "many people procrastinate to avoid success expect to be punished for their desire to win" (p. 92). Fourth, people tend to believe that in the case of their success someone ends up feeling hurt and left behind. As a result, person who fears of success believe that he will hurt someone and after "they would get what they want – they would be attacked" (p. 92). Finally, people subconsciously avoid success since they want to punish themselves for being unethical and hurtful. In fact, in most cases, "people feel guilty for actions that are really not very serious, or for situations that aren't truly their responsibility" (p. 92). As a result, it could be assumed that procrastination is a way to avoid jealousy and criticism and to punish oneself.

Another common fear that facilitates procrastination is perfectionism and fear of failure. It could be stated that, in the case of procrastination, perfectionism is an attempt to

achieve perfection, excessive concentration on details and ignorance of timeframes. When person's perfectionism reaches the high level, he/she fears possible imperfection, non-ideality of the results of the work that needs to be done. In addition, people who are inclined to perfectionism associate themselves with the task or project. It could be assumed that "in the eyes of a person, the bad results will mean that "I'm bad"" (Richardson & Clark, 2012, p. 301). In such situation, perfectionists do not see the difference between negative assessment of their work and assessment of themselves as individuals. As a result, the only way to avoid criticism and negative comments about perfectionists is to procrastinate or not to do work at all.

It is important to note that some perfectionists create unrealistic standards for themselves and tend to believe that if they are talented then it would be easy for them to complete anything without effort. The prime examples of such people are "women who haven't exercised in years wants to be in top physical condition in two weeks" or "A college freshman who has not mastered time management or study skills expects to get all As his first semester" (Burka & Yuen, 2008, p. 102). According to Jane Burka and Yuen Leonora, the perfectionists believe that if they are outstanding and talented then difficult things should be easy for them (p. 103). One such perfectionist states: "If I can't solve the problem instantly, I feel stupid... I should be able to see the answer right away – I get so mad at myself that I can't stand sitting there. I play video games" (p. 103). It could be assumed that disappointment of perfectionists prevents them from the making efforts to reach something and force them to avoid it by delaying.

Sometimes, people procrastinate since they feel that they are losing control when following someone else's rules. Most often such behavior could be observed among students in college and high school. According to research conducted by Kathrin Krause (2016), the more details and restrictions are in the tasks the higher the level of procrastination in students

who have to complete this task. That is why it could be stated that sometimes the reasons for procrastination are both internal and external.

Based on the consideration of the causes that lead to delay of the tasks it is possible to create a plan to reduce the level of procrastination. First of all, it is necessary to “let go needs for perfection at each step and be able to accomplish a lot more in the long run” (Burka & Yuen, 2008, p. 192). Secondly, it is advisable to choose realistic goals then break them into small manageable tasks and accomplish each of them in a small amount of time (p. 190). Thirdly, to be more encouraged to work, people should reward themselves on each step and to remind themselves about the importance of a long-term goal. These three conditions are necessary for the reduction of procrastination for people who have unrealistic standards, inclined to procrastination and fear of success.

Overall, it could be stated that procrastination is a serious problem that could cause mental, physical and social problems. There are different reasons that encourage people to procrastinate such as fear of success or failure, feeling of losing control and lack of motivation. In fact, after revealing what cause people to delay important tasks, it is possible to take certain steps to reduce the level of procrastination.

References

- Burka, J. B. & Yuen, L. M. (2008). *Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It Now*. Cambridge: Lifelong Books.
- Deckers, L. (2016) *Motivation: Biological, Psychological, and Environmental, Fourth Edition*. Routledge: New York.
- Groepel, P. & Steel, P. (2008) A Mega-Trial Investigation of Goal Setting, Interest Enhancement, and Energy on Procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45 (5), 406-411
- Krause, K. (2016). It's in the means: Process focus helps against procrastination in the academic context. *Motivation and Emotion*, 40(3), 422-437
- Musolino, E. (2007) "The Effect of Procrastination and Stress on Low Effort and High Effort Tasks" *The Huron University College Journal of Learning and Motivation*, 45(1), 220- 230
- Richardson, C. & Clark, D. (2012) Perfectionism, Procrastination, and Psychological Distress. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59(2), 288-302
- Svartdal, F. (2016) "On the Measurement of Procrastination: Comparing Two Scales in Six European Countries" *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 104-110