

A STUDY ON PROCRASTINATION: CORRELATION WITH LOCUS OF CONTROL AND HIERARCHICAL POSITION

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ABSTRACT

Procrastination has been and is a major concern in the organizations. In Indian context this problem is more prevalent in the public sector units, the frequency and intensity of procrastination might vary but is present and hence cannot be ignored. Present study attempts to replicate the relation of personality trait of locus of control and procrastination. Is this relationship mediated by the hierarchical position of the individual? Is there any significant relation between age and procrastination to extend the research on procrastination; the interrelationships among these variables were examined. One hundred participants completed a measure of locus of control and procrastination. Results revealed the existence of relation among age and procrastination scores and also indicated no significant relation between procrastination scores and hierarchical position. However, in this study, other causes of procrastination such as competency of employees, leadership style were not measured. There are many aspects of personality that can influence the way people make and enact decisions, and how their decisions help or hinder performance. This study was intended to replicate past research on procrastination and inspire more research on procrastination and related topics.

Keywords: Procrastination, Locus of Control, Hierarchical Positions, Age

1. INTRODUCTION

Procrastination often hurts people in their work and in their lives. There can be little doubt that procrastination causes difficulties and hurts the opportunities of organizations. The reality is that nothing good comes out of procrastination because it wastes time and often wastes opportunities. There are times when delayed action is the best course of action but when delay becomes the norm, procrastination has set in.

In psychology, procrastination refers to the act of replacing high-priority actions with tasks of lower priority, and thus putting off important tasks to a later time. Some psychologists cite such behavior as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision. Other psychologists indicate that anxiety is just as likely to get people to start working early as late and the focus should be impulsiveness. That is, anxiety will cause people to delay only if they are impulsive.

A lot of people believe that lethargy is the origin of procrastination; however, procrastination can come in many forms, like decisional procrastination, which is taking a certain amount of time to make a decision about whether or not to do something, or task avoidant procrastination, which is deciding to do a task at a time when the task would increase stress (Milgram & Tenne, 2000). Milgram and Tenne (2000) found that personality, specifically the personality trait of locus of control, affects how much a person procrastinates. This study replicates and extends the research by Milgram and Tenne (2000).

Procrastination is a delayed desire to make a decision or complete a task that increases unnecessary pressure (Prohaska, Morrill, Atilas, & Perez, 2000). Tice and Baumeister (1997) argued that there is not a difference between procrastination and not procrastinating, the stress of completing a task is just felt at different times. Non-procrastinators experience stress at the beginning of a project when they feel that they need to get started on the project, and procrastinators experience stress in the end when the deadline is approaching. In addition to the stress of working on the task, procrastinators experience the added stress of knowing they may not make the deadline. According to Haycock, McCarthy, Skay (2001), "Internal consequences of procrastination may incorporate irritation, regret, despair, and self-blame... external consequences may be costly and can include impaired work performance, lost opportunities, and strained relationships". In addition to the consequences of procrastination causing anxiety, "individuals with higher anxiety are also more likely to procrastinate".

When people complete a task in a short amount of time they generalize this to other tasks. This can cause a person to plan to complete a task later rather than sooner. In the end, procrastinators end up promoting themselves short by submitting work that is below their true ability. This is better known as the Planning Fallacy (Pychyl, Morin, & Salmon, 2000). For example, an employee may procrastinate and get a project done at the last minute and receive a good grade for the project. The fallacy occurs when, on subsequent task, the individual repeats the process of waiting and obtains a less significant rating. Individuals generalize the fallacy to other work areas and underestimate the time needed for preparation, research, etc., which can lead to meager performance because of inadequate ratings and a weak immune system from the stress of approaching deadlines (Kanaus, 2000). This becomes a vicious cycle because a weaker immune system leads to more stress, which further affects performance – not knowing how to manage stress can also lead to sickness. Methods of coping with stressors can predict illness and identify the way a person deals with illness (Lefcourt & Davidson-Katz, 1991).

Locus of control can moderate stress through optimism (Jackson, Weiss, & Lundquist, 2000). Locus of control is, "a generalized expectancy reflecting the degree to which individuals perceive consequences as contingent on their own behavior and abilities (internal control) rather than on some external force such as luck, chance, fate, or powerful others (external control)" (Janssen & Carton, 1999). Internal locus of control is when a person believes that he or she is in control, and is liable for his or her own actions. On the other hand, external locus of control is when someone believes that the environment or other person outside of himself or herself controls everything. Thus, an individual with an internal locus of control believes that he or she can succeed and therefore, is optimistic. This optimism further improves the likelihood of success, which decreases stress.

People with an external locus of control will procrastinate more because they think outside people or the environment control their destiny. In turn, they perceive little value in

attempting a task and procrastinate more. There is also a strong possibility that a person with an internal locus of control will procrastinate less because feeling in control leads to feeling more confident.

In some cases, procrastinators make themselves follow a certain schedule to try and overcome their procrastination. Self-imposed deadlines can make performance better (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002). With a self-imposed deadline, an individual may wait on information believed to be necessary for making a good decision or completing a task. Waiting for information can be a form of procrastination and can result in a positive outcome if the information leads to a better decision (Tykocinski & Ruffle, 2003). Other variables are related to locus of control. For example, Mayo and Chistenfeld (1999) examined gender, race, and performance expectations of college students and found some shocking results:

"Men from non-minority racial groups... predicted that they would do as well as other members of their group and that this would be the same level of performance as the average undergraduate; ...women from non-minority racial groups predicted... 'we can, but I can't'; ...men from minority racial groups believed... other members of their group would do poorly and that they individually would do even worse; ...woman from racial minority groups... reflected the racial minority male, 'we can't and I really can't'".

The women in Mayo and Chistenfeld sample exhibited the lowest performance explanations as a group, and felt inferior to their male counterparts. A performance explanation is a person's explanation about his or her abilities. Low performance explanations can lower self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to succeed, and discourage individuals from producing work. Several variables contribute to an individual's performance explanation. For example, "Disparaging comments, a lack of positive support from faculty members, a perception by faculty that female students are less serious and capable in comparison with male students, differential treatment, and sexual harassment contribute to a negative academic environment for female undergraduates," (Ancis & Phillips, 1996). This indicates a lower self-efficacy level for women as compared to men.

This study aimed to identify the association of age and procrastination, measure the relation between locus of control and procrastination and identify if there is any significant difference in the procrastination scores of employees at upper level of management and middle level of management. Based on the literature, following hypotheses were formed:

H₀₁: There is no association between the age of employees and the procrastination scores.

H₀₂: There exists no relation between Locus of control and procrastinating behavior of employees.

H₀₃: There is no difference in the procrastination scores of employees at upper level of management and middle level of management.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

The participants for this study were 100 employees from a public sector undertaking at middle level of management with different age groups.

Materials

The Loco Inventory questionnaire developed by (Udai Pareek, 2002) was used to find the type of LOC present in employees and Lay's General Procrastination Scale (Lay, 1986) were used for finding the scores for identifying the dimension of locus of control and procrastination respectively. The first scale was the procrastination scale, which consisted of twenty items. The participants were asked to respond to each question with a circled answer on a Likert scale, which measured how much they agree or disagree with each statement describing them.

2.2. Procedure

The data were collected in the participants' places of work. The purpose of questionnaire was explained the consent after of the participants was obtained. The respondents were given the instruction and they were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential. 15-20 minutes was given to the respondents to patiently complete the questionnaires.

3. RESULTS

An independent samples t-test was calculated to examine the difference between younger employee and older employees for procrastination. There was a significant difference between the employee in the age group of 25 -40 years and employees in the age group of 41-55 $t(98) = 2.63, p=.004$ the calculated value was more than the critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected that there is no association between the age and the procrastination scores of the employees. The procrastination means for younger employees and older employees were 24.94 (5.43) and 22.7 (4.48) respectively, indicating that younger employees reported more procrastination than older employees in the organization.

An independent samples t-test was used to examine the differences between upper level managerial employees and lower level managerial employee for procrastination. There was no significant difference found between them for procrastination $t(98) = 0.42, p = 1.66$. The null hypothesis was accepted as the calculated score was less than the critical value. The results suggests that hierarchical position does not impact the procrastination scores

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis and to ascertain if a relationship between procrastination and locus of control exist. The Regression results are as follows:

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .629 ^a | .396 | .390 | .379 | .396 | 64.170 | 1 | 98 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant),

LOC

This table provides the R and R² values. The R value represents the simple correlation and is 0.629 (the "R" Column), which indicates a moderate degree of correlation. The R² value (the "R Square" column) indicates how much of the total variation in the procrastination, can be explained by the independent variable, locus of control. In this case, 39.6% can be explained, which is quite less.

The next table is the ANOVA table, which reports how well the regression equation fits the data (i.e., predicts the dependent variable) and is shown below:

ANOVA^b

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 9.224 | 1 | 9.224 | 64.170 | .000 ^a |
| Residual | 14.086 | 98 | .144 | | |
| Total | 23.310 | 99 | | | |

a. Predictors: (Constant), LOC

b. Dependent Variable: Procrastination

This table indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well. The "Sig." column with .000, indicates the statistical significance of the regression model. Here, $p < 0.0005$, which is less than 0.05, and indicates that, the hypothesis that "there exists no relation between Locus of control and procrastinating behavior of employees" is rejected.

The Coefficients table provides with the necessary information to predict the fact that locus of control does impact the procrastinating behavior in the employees, statistically significantly to the model (by looking at the "Sig." column).

Coefficients^a

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------|-------|------|-------|--------|------|
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.732 | .143 | | 19.146 | .000 |
| | LOC | -.510 | .064 | -.629 | -8.011 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable:

Procrastination

3.1. DISCUSSION

Steel (2007) who states that “people should procrastinate less as they age and learn” and notes that “it is evident that people can learn to avoid procrastination. Ainslie (1992) reviewed considerable research showing that people tend to procrastinate less with repeated practice (cited in Steel, 2007). Rachlin (1990) concluded, “Many people who procrastinate only moderately do so not because of intrinsic self-control, but because they have developed schemes to overcome procrastination” (as cited in Steel, 2007, p. 71). So, it appears the problem of procrastination may lessen with age.

A person that has an external locus of control will be more likely to procrastinate; this replicates the research by Milgram and Tenne (2000). This can be made relevant by knowing that individuals that believe that exterior forces control situations more than internal forces are also more likely to procrastinate. Having an external locus of control can also causes a person to have a low level of determination (Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002). A lack of success can make a person not want to take initiative and complete a task. Individuals with an internal locus of control may feel more confident and in control and will procrastinate less. Also, when a task is harder than expected, or is known to produce more stress, a higher amount of procrastination is present (Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000). Results also indicate that while younger employees report procrastinating more than the elder employees, there was no difference between lower level of management men and upper level management for procrastination.

Researchers may use these consequences to examine other variables that may affect procrastination. One factor that could be directly related to procrastination is the competency of the employees. How able a person is can forecast how much time a person would need on a certain task, which would affect the extent and chance for procrastination. Szalavitz (2003) identified other variables that can add to a person procrastinating, such as: “fear of failure, perfectionism, self-control, disciplinary parenting, thrill seeking, and task related anxieties”.

Another factor not measured in this study is leadership style and the organizational stress. The influence of a leader or superior on overall approach to task may be closely related to procrastination. If the results from a study conducted by Pelegrina, Linares, and Casanova (2002) can be tested in corporate setting which showed that young adults that had parents who were more democratic or permissive had the highest scores in academic performance, academics motivation, perceived academic competence, and attributes to academic success. Therefore it is quite possible that different leadership style can have varied impact on procrastinating. It is evident from the earlier researches that stress does decrease the efficiency of the human resource in the organization. It would be interesting to identify the relation between the various organizational stressors factors and procrastination. Future research should examine the relationship between leadership style, occupational stress and procrastination.

CONCLUSION

Results revealed the existence of relation among age, Locus of control and procrastination scores and also indicated no significant relation between procrastination scores and hierarchical position.

There are always those split seconds when a wise manager chooses, for genuine reasons, to put off taking some action. But the underlying motivations that drive procrastination, although complex and varied, are not wholly rational, reality based, or in the best interest of an organization. While taking risks and attempting new things that may ultimately fail produces anxiety and some fear in all of us, the best managers become skilled at managing these emotions in the best interest of those they manage.

While procrastination can have different effects on organizational and individual effectiveness, managers should identify its reasons and try to reduce this destructive behavior among employees. They should consider to the factors such as fear of failure, aversiveness of task, difficulty making decisions, dependency, lacking of assertion, risk-taking, and rebellion against control among employees and try to remove them. Therefore, it is essential for managers to recognize the various causes and reasons for procrastination and plan to overcome them.

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