

PERFECTIONISM AND PROCRASTINATION AT WORK

Elena Mugurița RADU¹, Maria Claudia IONESCU^{2*}

¹Argeș County Center for Resources and Educational Assistance, B-dul. Eroilor, no. 4-6, Pitești, Argeș, Romania

²National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, Pitești University Centre, Department of Psychology, Communication Sciences, and Social Work, Târgul din Vale, No.1, Pitești, Argeș, Romania



Abstract

Although negative implications of perfectionism (a multidimensional personality trait characterized by a person's striving for perfection and setting high performance standards, accompanied by both critical self-evaluations and a preoccupation with evaluating others) are well documented in clinical contexts, in folk psychology employees' striving for perfection is considered a desirable flaw, because in the organisational setting perfectionism is often perceived as a positive trait leading to increased professional performance. Research has highlighted both the positive and the negative side of the concept. Like perfectionism, procrastination has become a worrying issue, as it is often described as a harmful, unpleasant, dysfunctional phenomenon, the frequency of which seems to be increasing. The present research aims to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination at work in an organisational context. The study was carried out on a group of 110 participants, employed in sales organisations. The results identified significant relationships between perfectionism and procrastination at work, which may have implications on professional performance and on other individual and organisational variables.

Keywords: perfectionism, procrastination, organisational context

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, when organisations compete on a global scale, when the pressure for getting excellent results is very high, and when employees' mental health becomes a focus for many organisations, employees' perfectionism and procrastination can impede the outcomes organisations are trying to achieve (Bellam & Curran, 2025; Ocampo et al., 2020).

Perfectionism is increasing in younger generations (Curran & Hill, 2019) and the tendency to delay activities is a prevalent aspect of everyday life, transcending cultural differences, although cultural norms and values impact procrastination to various degrees (Ferrari et al., 2007; Lu et al., 2022). Like perfectionism, procrastination is also increasing in recent times (Steel & Ferrari, 2013).

In this context, it is important to understand and address this problem with effective solutions in the workplace.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is conceptualized as a personality trait associated with striving to be flawless, setting unreasonably high standards for oneself and others and often involves being critical of imperfections (Frost et al., 1990; Flett & Hewitt, 2002). It is a tendency to be overly self-critical

and to be excessively worried about making mistakes. Perfectionists expect to be perfect in all aspects of their lives, and they expect the same thing from others.

Initially, perfectionism was considered a unidimensional construct. Nowadays, there is consensus among researchers that the concept is a multidimensional one (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Although there are differences between theoretical models regarding the dimensions of perfectionism, at a certain point in time there was agreement that the concept comprises two superordinate factors: perfectionistic strivings or personal standards perfectionism (a form of positive perfectionism that includes high personal performance standards, linked to aspects of psychological adjustment) and perfectionistic concerns or evaluative concerns perfectionism (a form of negative perfectionism that includes feelings of discrepancy between expectations and results, doubts about actions, and concern over mistakes, associated with characteristics indicating psychological maladjustment) (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). The motivation underlying each dimension is different: perfectionistic strivings are approach-oriented and largely self-determined, whereas perfectionistic concerns are avoidance-oriented and lack self-determination (Stoeber & Damian, 2016; Stoeber et al., 2018). The growing body of research on the implication of perfectionism tends to challenge this view on the nature of adaptive/maladaptive dimensions. Although perfectionistic strivings have adaptive effects, these effects tend to be smaller than the maladaptive effects of perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber et al., 2020).

Procrastination

Procrastination, conceptualised as a behavioural disposition or as a trait, is a form of self-regulatory failure, where people “voluntarily delay an intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay” (Steel, 2007, p. 66). Procrastination at work has been conceptualized as “putting off work-related action by engaging in nonwork-related actions during work hours” (Metin et al., 2016, p.254).

There are unidimensional (Steel, 2007) and multidimensional models of procrastination. Chu and Choi (2005) distinguish between passive and active procrastinators. Passive procrastinators are the traditional procrastinators, delaying the start or the completion of task because they are unable to make rapid decisions and act on them. The active type indicates the positive side of procrastination. These individuals work well under pressure and they mobilize to complete the tasks on time. However, this view on the positive side of procrastination is challenged (Sederlund et al., 2020).

Procrastination was mainly studied in student populations. Meta-analyses identified consistent negative correlations, varying from low to moderate intensity, between procrastination and academic performance (Akpur, 2020; Kim & Seo, 2015; Kooren et al., 2024). Procrastination tends to be higher in men than in women and it is significantly associated with lower income (Lu et al., 2022). It is linked to both individual differences and external factors such as the motivational value of the job, age, marital status, education and nationality (Nguyen et al., 2013; Steel & Ferrari, 2013). It is negatively associated with adverse health outcomes (Yang et al., 2025), individuals' stress (Sirois, 2014; Sirois, 2023), life satisfaction (Liu, 2024), job performance, work engagement, organisational citizenship behaviours, and its outcomes include lower self-efficacy, fatigue, psychological detachment, job boredom and stress, unemployment (Metin et al., 2018).

In their systematic review on factors linked to procrastination, Musteață and Holman (2025) conclude that procrastination should be studied from a context-specific and person-environment approach, being the result of a dynamic interplay between employees' individual differences (personal traits, self-concept, emotional factors, work-related internal factors, cognitive factors,

work-life balance, and the personal tendency to procrastinate) and external, workplace factors such as work and job characteristics, workload, time pressure, leadership style, and work context.

Perfectionism and procrastination in the workplace

Research studies in organisational contexts investigated perfectionism in relation to various individual and organisational outcomes, yielding mixed results. Self-oriented perfectionism (demanding perfection of oneself), seen by many authors as the positive side of perfectionism, has a negative correlation with research productivity in Psychology professors (Sherry et al., 2010). Adaptive perfectionism is linked to lower strain compared to maladaptive perfectionism (Ozibilir et al., 2014). Perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns are positively related to workaholism, perfectionistic strivings have positive relationships with work engagement and perfectionistic concerns are positively related to burnout (Stoeber & Damian, 2016). Bellam and Curran (2025) have identified positive correlations of both dimensions of perfectionism with the number of hours worked and a positive relationship between perfectionistic strivings and performance at work. Mohr et al. (2022) found that time pressure experienced by employees at work is positively related to perfectionistic strivings and concerns, and perfectionistic concerns are positively related to criticism experienced at work and negative affect.

A meta-analysis by Harari et al. (2018) showed that perfectionism has more disadvantages than positive effects at work. The positive relationships between perfectionism, motivation and engagement can be beneficial, but the consistent negative links with employees' well-being have negative effects for both employees and organisation. The authors found no relationship between perfectionism and performance.

The review of Ocampo et al. (2020) identified both positive and negative intrapersonal (on the level of job attitudes, well-being and job performance) and interpersonal consequences of perfectionism in organisational settings. Perfectionistic strivings have positive correlations with job engagement, job satisfaction, sense of work accomplishment, perceptions of coping ability, whereas perfectionistic concerns have negative correlations with the same aspects. Perfectionistic concerns are also negatively linked to well-being. Perfectionistic strivings have positive associations with some aspects of job performance like task performance, creativity or innovative behaviour, and mixed relationships with productivity and goal achievement. Perfectionistic concerns are positively linked to work effort and negatively associated with goal achievement.

Regarding the concept of procrastination at work, Metin et al. (2016) describe two dimensions: soldiering (delaying tasks by doing nonwork activities such as having very long conversations with colleagues, taking long breaks) and cyberslacking (use of the Internet during work hours for personal interest). Both dimensions were found to be associated with boredom at work and soldiering is linked to more work stress and lower job satisfaction (Mosquera et al., 2022), and negatively related to work engagement, task and contextual performance (Metin et al., 2020). Cyberloafing is considered by some authors not a counterproductive work behaviour, but a coping mechanism useful in stressful work situations (Pindek et al., 2019).

Research studies investigating the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination are not consistent, highlighting opposing results. This is due to differences in the conceptualization of the two constructs and the measures used to assess them: authors assess perfectionism and procrastination either as unidimensional or multidimensional concepts, with adaptive/maladaptive dimensions, and procrastination is considered either an occasional behaviour or a trait, with positive and negative forms. Although some of these issues, like the multidimensionality of perfectionism, are agreed upon in the research community, others (like the positive side of perfectionism) are still

debated. The link between the two concepts is a complex one and both concepts are considered as work-related problems (Steinert et al., 2021).

In the first meta-analysis on procrastination, Steel (2007) concluded that the probability for procrastinators to be perfectionist is actually low, rather than the other way around, and that the associations between procrastination and perfectionism (viewed as a unidimensional concept) were weak at best, conclusion which generated a fruitful debate in research. In a more recent study, Steel et al. (2022, p. 14) concluded that “There was little to no support for perfectionism being a cause of procrastination”.

Rice et al. (2012) found that students’ perfectionism and procrastination, measured three times during one university semester, have modest, but very significant correlations (correlation coefficients vary from .16 to .23) and that both are strongly associated with psychological distress. Sirois et al. (2017) contradict Steel’s conclusion and find out in their meta-analysis that trait procrastination and perfectionistic concerns (the maladaptive side of perfectionism) have a small to medium positive association, whereas trait procrastination has a small negative association with perfectionistic strivings (the adaptive side of perfectionism).

Smith et al. (2017) found that perfectionistic strivings had a moderate negative association with procrastination, whereas perfectionistic concerns had a large positive association with procrastination. In their review of the relationship between procrastination and multidimensional perfectionism, Xie et al. (2018) found similar results. They also confirmed that self-efficacy was a mediator in the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and procrastination.

Stoicescu et al. (2025) identified significant associations between negative perfectionism, procrastination, life satisfaction and self-regulation in a Romanian adult sample and showed that a high level of negative perfectionism predicts higher levels of procrastination, which, in turn, leads to lower life satisfaction.

In conclusion, the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination is a topic of ongoing debate. Nowadays, the dominant tendency in research is to study this association in a network approach, including individual and contextual level variables.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main objective of the current study is to explore the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination in organisational context, so we presume that there is a relationship between employees’ perfectionism and procrastination.

The research sample includes 110 employees from several privately owned sale organisations from Romania, with 55 (50%) males and 55 (50%) females. Participants’ age varies between 19 and 62 ($X=42.74$, $std=8.81$) and their job tenure ranges from 1 to 40 years ($X=19.61$, $std=8.64$).

Measures

Perfectionism was assessed with **The Big Three Perfectionism Scale (BTPS)** (Smith et al., 2016), which includes 45 items on a 5-point Likert-type response scale (1 – strong disagreement, 5 – strong agreement). It comprises three global factors and 10 subfactors: **rigid perfectionism** (1. self-oriented perfectionism – the tendency to believe that being perfect and striving for perfection is important and 2. self-worth contingencies – the individual self-worth is based on self-imposed perfectionistic standards), **self-critical perfectionism** (1. concern over mistakes - the tendency to have exaggerated negative reactions to perceived setbacks or failures, 2. doubts about actions – the tendency to have uncertainties about performance, 3. self-criticism - the tendency to be very self-critical when performance is not perfect, and 4. socially prescribed perfectionism – the tendency to

perceive others as demanding perfection), **narcissistic perfectionism** (1. other-oriented perfectionism – having unrealistic expectations for others, 2. hypercriticism – the tendency to devalue others and their imperfections, 3. entitlement – the belief that one is entitled to perfect or special treatment, and 4. grandiosity – the tendency to view oneself as perfect or superior to others). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .83 to .90 for the 10 facets and from .92 to .93 for the three global factors. In our study results, Cronbach's alphas for all 13 scales range from .78 to .91.

Procrastination was measured with the **Procrastination at Work Scale (PAWS)** (Metin et al., 2016), comprising 12 items with a 7-point Likert-type response scale (0 – Never, 7 – Always). It includes two factors: **soldiering** - avoidance of work tasks for more than 1 h a day without aiming to harm others or passing on your own work onto colleagues (daydreaming, engaging in more pleasurable activities than working, gossiping, taking long coffee breaks) and **cyberslacking** - use of information technology during work hours unrelated to work tasks (reading blogs for personal interest, activity on social networks, gaming, online shopping). Cronbach's alphas for the two factors are .84 and .69 and for our research sample they are .90 and .74.

The data were collected online.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Table 1. Correlations between research variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1	.850**	.554**	.317**	.676**	.442**	.730**	.429**	.492**	.486**	.954**	.591**	.708**	.328**	.090
2	.850**	1	.596**	.250**	.735**	.424**	.711**	.370**	.495**	.481**	.969**	.599**	.683**	.276**	.111
3	.554**	.596**	1	.680**	.815**	.584**	.517**	.523**	.374**	-.005	.600**	.928**	.479**	.519**	.176
4	.317**	.250**	.680**	1	.537**	.516**	.257**	.426**	.291**	-.083	.292**	.818**	.297**	.583**	.183
5	.676**	.735**	.815**	.537**	1	.548**	.556**	.476**	.426**	.191*	.736**	.871**	.551**	.477**	.091
6	.442**	.424**	.584**	.516**	.548**	1	.562**	.538**	.546**	.194*	.449**	.748**	.609**	.399**	.054
7	.730**	.711**	.517**	.257**	.556**	.562**	1	.635**	.605**	.361**	.748**	.550**	.880**	.333**	.105
8	.429**	.370**	.523**	.426**	.476**	.538**	.635**	1	.536**	.049	.412**	.574**	.732**	.476**	.164
9	.492**	.495**	.374**	.291**	.426**	.546**	.605**	.536**	1	.512**	.513**	.469**	.854**	.436**	.268
10	.486**	.481**	-.005	-.083	.191*	.194*	.361**	.049	.512**	1	.502**	.075	.593**	-.020	.067
11	.954**	.969**	.600**	.292**	.736**	.449**	.748**	.412**	.513**	.502**	1	.619**	.722**	.311**	.106
12	.591**	.599**	.928**	.818**	.871**	.748**	.550**	.574**	.469**	.075	.619**	1	.559**	.591**	.156
13	.708**	.683**	.479**	.297**	.551**	.609**	.880**	.732**	.854**	.593**	.722**	.559**	1	.405**	.193
14	.328**	.276**	.519**	.583**	.477**	.399**	.333**	.476**	.436**	-.020	.311**	.591**	.405**	1	.360**
15	.090	.111	.176	.183	.091	.054	.105	.164	.268	.067	.106	.156	.193	.360**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

1 Self-oriented Perfectionism, 2 Self-worth Contingencies, 3 Concern over mistakes, 4 Doubts about actions, 5 Self-criticism, 6 Socially prescribed Perfectionism, 7 Other-oriented Perfectionism, 8 Hypercriticism, 9 Entitlement, 10 Grandiosity 11 Rigid Perfectionism, 12 Self-critical Perfectionism, 13 Narcissistic Perfectionism, 14 Soldiering, 15 Cyberslacking

We identified very significant positive correlations between soldiering and all three dimensions of perfectionism and 9 of their facets (table 1). The strongest correlations are between self-critical perfectionism, including its facets, and soldiering. Given the strong correlations between the three perfectionism factors, partial correlations were computed between each perfectionism factor and the dimensions of procrastination, controlling for the other two perfectionism factors. The results were:

- There is a statistically significant, positive, strong partial correlation between self-critical perfectionism and soldiering ($r(106)=.506$, $p<.01$), after controlling for both rigid

perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism. There are also significant positive partial correlations between soldiering and each facet of this factor: concern over mistakes ($r(106)=.432, p<.01$), doubts about actions ($r(106)=.531, p<.01$), self-criticism ($r(106)=.398, p<.01$), and socially prescribed perfectionism ($r(106)=.209, p<.05$),

- There is a significant, positive, weak partial correlation between narcissistic perfectionism and soldiering ($r(106)=.198, p<.05$), after controlling for both rigid perfectionism and self-critical perfectionism.
- There is a nonsignificant, negative, weak partial correlation between rigid perfectionism and soldiering ($r(106)=-.185, p>.05$).

Although all three dimensions of perfectionism were positively associated with Soldiering at the bivariate level, only self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism demonstrated significant unique associations when the shared variance among the perfectionism dimensions was controlled for. These results show that self-critical perfectionism remains strongly associated with soldiering, even after removing the shared variance of the other two perfectionism factors.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and workplace procrastination on a convenience sample of 110 employees from privately owned sales organisations in Romania. Given the substantial intercorrelations among the three perfectionism dimensions, partial correlation analysis was conducted to examine their unique associations with Soldiering. The findings confirm our hypothesis and indicate that the relationship between perfectionism and workplace procrastination is not uniform across perfectionism dimensions. Self-critical perfectionism showed the strongest association with Soldiering after controlling for rigid and narcissistic perfectionism ($r = .506, p < .01$). Narcissistic perfectionism retained a smaller but significant positive association after controlling for the other two dimensions ($r = .198, p < .05$), whereas rigid perfectionism was negatively, but not significantly, associated with Soldiering ($r = -.185, p = .056$). Overall, these findings suggest that workplace procrastination may be more strongly related to the self-critical and evaluative aspects of perfectionism than to rigid perfectionistic standards.

The positive, strong correlation between self-critical perfectionism and soldiering shows that individuals' tendency to doubt their actions, to be overly preoccupied with the probability of errors occurring in their work is linked to putting off work. This relationship is consistent with previous research (Somantico et al., 2024) and can be explained by considering other personal variables. Perfectionism and procrastination share certain characteristics, such as irrational beliefs and excessive fear of failure (Flett et al., 1995), worry (especially with concern over mistakes and doubts about actions) (Stöber & Joormann, 2001), fear of failure, temporal orientation, external stimulation, and negative emotional aspects, such as depression, stress, and anxiety (Sederlung et al., 2020).

The structure of Self-critical perfectionism factor reproduces the dimension of perfectionistic concerns, the maladaptive form of perfectionism. Smith et al. (2017) found that perfectionistic concerns were positively associated with procrastination, whereas perfectionistic strivings were negatively associated with procrastination. Similarly, Xie et al. (2018) suggested that individuals characterized by perfectionistic concerns may be particularly vulnerable to task delay because of concerns about mistakes, doubts regarding their actions, perceived discrepancies between expectations and performance, and fear of failure.

Sirois et al. (2017) proposed a self-regulation perspective, useful in explaining these results. They show that perfectionistic concerns and procrastination share cognitive, affective, and behavioural characteristics related to negative self-evaluation, self-blame, fear of failure, disengagement, and avoidance. When individuals perceive a marked discrepancy between their current performance and their high, personally imposed standards, task engagement may become aversive, thereby increasing the likelihood of work postponing. In the present study, self-critical perfectionism may therefore be associated with soldiering because work tasks can activate concerns about inadequate performance and negative self-evaluation. This interpretation may be particularly relevant in sales organisations, where employees must meet sometimes short deadlines and competitive pressure, and their performance is often evaluated against explicit targets and performance indicators.

Recent evidence further supports the role of negative self-evaluative processes in the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination. Mohr et al. (2023) found that daily perfectionistic concerns were positively associated with self-blaming at work and negatively associated with planning, with evidence also suggesting a positive relationship with procrastination. Similarly, Yosopov et al. (2024) identified fear of failure and the overgeneralization of failure to the self as important mechanisms linking perfectionism with procrastination.

Narcissistic perfectionism demonstrated a smaller but statistically significant association with soldiering. Although part of its relationship with soldiering appears to overlap with the other perfectionism dimensions, the remaining partial correlation suggests that narcissistic perfectionism may also be independently related to workplace procrastination. Previous research suggests that narcissistic and self-critical perfectionism involve different self-evaluative processes. Nealis et al. (2015) proposed that narcissistic perfectionism is associated with concerns involving other-oriented discrepancies, criticism, interpersonal conflict, and the maintenance of one's self-image. Accordingly, soldiering may represent, in some situations, a response to perceived threats to one's desired image of competence or superiority. However, the comparatively small partial correlation indicates that these processes may be less central to workplace procrastination than the self-critical concerns.

The findings for rigid perfectionism highlight the importance of distinguishing among perfectionism dimensions. After controlling for self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism, rigid perfectionism was not significantly associated with soldiering, although the direction of the association has changed. The absence of a significant positive association is consistent with research indicating that high standards and perfectionistic strivings may function differently from perfectionistic concerns. Previous studies have reported negative associations between adaptive perfectionism or perfectionistic strivings and procrastination, whereas maladaptive perfectionism and perfectionistic concerns tend to show positive associations (Kurtovic et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017).

The present findings are also consistent with recent Romanian research evidence showing a positive relationship between negative perfectionism and procrastination (Stoicescu et al., 2025). In

conclusion, the partial correlation analysis indicates that self-critical perfectionism has the strongest and most distinctive association with soldiering after accounting for the overlap among the three perfectionism dimensions. Narcissistic perfectionism also demonstrated a smaller positive association, whereas rigid perfectionism was not significantly associated with soldiering after controlling for the other dimensions. These findings support the view that perfectionism should be treated as a multidimensional construct and suggest that negative self-evaluation, fear of failure, and

related self-regulatory difficulties may be particularly important for understanding the relationship between perfectionism and workplace procrastination.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our study objective was to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination at work. Our results indicate that the associations between the two variables are not uniform across perfectionism dimensions, pointing toward the particular importance of self-critical perfectionism. The results are in line with previous research which identified associations between the two variables.

This study has several limitations. The data were collected from a small convenience sample from employees working in sales organisations, so the generalization of results is not possible. We used self-report instruments, not objective measures. In addition to that, measuring procrastination, which can be seen as a negative behaviour, could generate socially desirable responses. The results are purely correlational, with no implication for causal relationships between variables.

Given the growing body of literature on the topic, future research should include perfectionism and procrastination in a larger perspective, investigating their relationships with both individual and contextual factors and clarifying the nature of their relationship.

Regarding the practical implications of the study, the association between perfectionism and procrastination in work context have negative implications for both employees and organisations, in terms of well-being and performance. Individual and organisational factors contributing to perfectionism-procrastination association should be addressed in order to lessen the pressure on employees and to enhance their motivation and resilience through rational workload and performance expectations, clear and reasonable deadlines, meaningful and clear tasks, autonomy and accountability, relevant criteria for performance evaluation, organisational support for difficult tasks, training on time and stress management, decision-making and problem-solving skills.

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