Self-regulation coaching to alleviate student procrastination: Addressing the likeability of studying behaviours

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ABSTRACT

Students who habitually procrastinate may be at risk of underachieving academically as well as putting their health and well-being in jeopardy.   The current review of research on procrastination leads to the identification of four broad task likeability factors as encapsulating a range of procrastination patterns. These are: (1) perceived low level of task enjoyment, (2) anticipation of aversive outcomes, (3) estimated inability to do the task and (4) competing attractiveness of alternative tasks. Each of these low task likeability factors can lead to procrastination when accompanied by particular self-regulation shortcomings, identified respectively as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, anxieties of performance evaluation, low self-efficacy of performance and weak attentional control of distracters.

A self-regulation coaching framework is proposed as a comprehensive way to address academic procrastination. After identifying the low task likeability areas that are involved when faced with an assignment, student coachees can be facilitated to raise self-awareness and develop necessary self-regulation strategies to alleviate their procrastination patterns. The practical implications of this coaching approach are potentially vast. Therefore, further research to evaluate its efficacy is recommended as the next step towards this endeavour

The central tenet of this paper is to promote the development of a coaching framework for student procrastination that is based on sound theoretical argument. There is a strong case for such an objective: Higher Education remains a vital capital resource for nations throughout the world and with rising costs of studying at university, students are facing increasing pressure to complete their degrees and achieve good grades (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Nevertheless, procrastination continues to present itself as an obstacle in this regard. Procrastination in general is a ubiquitous and relentless phenomenon of human nature with examples dating as far back as 800 B.C (cited by Steel, 2007). Yet, there is a particular form of 'academic procrastination' that is also internationally recognised (Ferrari, O'Callaghan & Newbegin, 2005) and can be defined as intentionally deferring or delaying work that must be completed (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007). Its prevalence in the student population has been estimated as high as 95 percent (Ellis & Knaus, 1997) and it is typically manifested as putting off studying when there are more 'lucrative' distractions available or as cramming in assignments at the last minute (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993).

Procrastination is frequently reported to have adverse effects on academic work. Routine procrastinators experience a noticeable performance detriment as a result of delaying action (Day, Mensink, & O'Sullivan, 2000; Haycock, 1993; Micek, 1982; Onwuegbuzie, 2000; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Moreover, susceptible students submit late assignments, obtain lower grades and are also more likely to withdraw from their courses (Beswick, Rothblum, & Mann, 1988; Janssen & Carton, 1999; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Steel, 2007; Synn, Park, & Seo, 2005; Tice & Baumeister, 1997).

Beyond academic output, being a chronic procrastinator can involve substantial risks to students' well-being. Although, some people are able to use delay tactics functionally (Corkin, Yu & Lindt, 2011) or as 'incubation' periods of creativity (Gevers, Mohammed & Baytalskaya, 2013), there is abundant evidence to indicate that dysfunctional procrastination generally involves the personal state of what Keyes (2002) would refer to as 'languishing' rather than 'flourishing'. Given that the appeal of postponing work is often due to the short-term benefits it can bring in repairing mood (Tice & Baumeister, 1997), this evidence first seems to be paradoxical. However, research shows that the longer-term outcome of postponing work commonly involves affective experiences that are negative rather than positive (e.g., Burka & Yuen, 2008; Milgram, Marshevsky, &

Sadeh, 1995). Perfectionist procrastinators may be particularly susceptible to troublesome emotional consequences as they judge and berate themselves harshly (Kearns, Forbes, Gardiner & Marshall, 2008). There are extensive examples of acute anxiety and/or depression being prevalent in chronic procrastinators (Ferrari, Johnson & McCown, 1995; Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993; Lay & Silverman, 1996; Martin, Flett, Hewitt, Krames, & Szanto, 1996; Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami,1986; Saddler & Sacks,1993; Senécal, Koestner, & Vallerand,1995; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Stöber & Joorman, 2001; Van Eerde, 2003). Furthermore, an increased proneness to physical illness has been found in regular procrastinators (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). There is also evidence that most procrastinators would really like to procrastinate less if they could (O'Brien, 2002) and it has been compared to other harmful forms of weak self-control, for example, obesity, gambling, and excessive debt (Ellis and Knaus, 1977; Kachgal, Hansen, & Nutter, 2001; Steel, 2007; Van Eerde, 2003).

Recent studies have further examined the underlying processes involved in the reduced well-being of procrastinators. Poor emotional intelligence (the ability to understand and use emotions in a productive and healthy way) has been shown to relate to the problem (Chow, 2011; Pychyl, 2009), and a lack of 'mindfulness' (conscious engagement with the present moment) has been found to mediate the relationship between procrastination and poor mental and physical health (Sirois & Tosti, 2012).

With academic procrastination continuing to be a matter of ongoing concern, the purpose of this paper is to propose a coaching framework for managing it that gets to the crux of the problem. Beginning with the assumption that people procrastinate for activities that they dislike in their desire for short-term mood elevation (Ferrari & Emmons, 1995), the first step involves identifying the cognitive and motivational factors that influence task likeability judgements. The author has identified four comprehensive factors that lead to low likeability thoughts and these are discussed in the next section. Although, many researchers now agree that poor self-regulation is at the heart of the problem (e.g., Steel, 2007, Wolters, 2003), the second section of this paper identifies the particular self-regulatory processes associated with managing each of the four areas of low task likeability. The third section then uses this model to present a structured coaching approach for reducing procrastination. It discusses how

the coach can use this model to help coachees identify their low task likeability pattern and set corresponding areas of self-regulatory development as coaching goals.

A) Student procrastination due to poor task likeability

Some researchers have used established personality profiles such as the Big-five (McCrae & Costa, 1987) to ascertain the characteristics of those who are most likely to procrastinate as a stable pattern of behaviour.   Conscientiousness has been frequently identified as having an inverse relationship to the predisposition to engage in procrastination (Johnson & Bloom, 1995; Lee, Kelly & Edwards, 2006; Milgram & Tenne, 2000; Schouwenburg & Lay, 1995; Van Eerde, 2003). Facets of neuroticism have also been linked to self-reported dilatory behaviour (Johnson & Bloom, 1995; Schouwenburg & Lay, 1995) and extraversion has also been associated with procrastination scores (Schouwenburg & Lay, 1995).   Whilst personality attributes are likely to go some way in accounting for why certain people are more susceptible than others, this paper adopts quite a different approach. It examines instead the momentary thoughts and emotions that convey messages about poor task likeability leading a person to postpone carrying out a task.   Four factors have been identified as influencing the content of these hastily made low task likeability reactions. These are *Enjoyment, Consequence, Ability and Competition* and each of these factors is discussed below:

A1. Enjoyment: Do I like doing it?

Some researchers have focused on procrastination as a function of *Task Aversiveness*: (Milgram et al.,1995; Senécal, Lavoie, & Koestner,1997) and others have regarded the problem as due to *Low frustration tolerance* (Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Harrington, 2005). Both of these descriptions refer to the perceived noxious nature of the task itself as accounting for one's desire to avoid it. So what is it about certain academic tasks that make them unattractive to students?

Students may find some academic tasks non-gratifying and so they either resent doing them or cannot be bothered to do them. Task aversion can be due to lack of interest in

the topic, task difficulty (hard work) or boredom (non-stimulating) (Blunt & Pychyl, 2000; Lay, 1992).

Writing tasks have been reported to be the most common kinds of delayed assignments (Klassen, Krawchuk & Rajani, 2008), presumably as they usually carry a heavy cognitive load and require perseverance to complete. Also, students who have conflicting feelings about the courses they are undertaking are more likely to postpone doing the set assignments (Senécal et al., 1995).

Procrastination researchers often conflate task enjoyment with rewarding outcomes when they discuss the 'value' a person gives to a task (for example, Steel, 2007). However, an individual may find a particular activity to be enjoyable to do *per se,* but still consider it to be aversive because of anticipated risky consequences. A person may love singing but decide not to perform karaoke if the audience is considered to be judgmental. As task enjoyment and perception of rewarding outcomes are different features of likeability, the model of procrastination proposed here treats them as two separate factors.

A2. Consequence cognitions: What will be the result?

Performance anxiety has been regarded as a key cause of procrastination by many researchers, who have focused either on *Fear of failure* (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Haycock, McCarthy & Skay, 1998; Milgram et al.,1995; Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2000; Saddler & Buley, 1999; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Steel, 2007; Van Eerde, 2003); *Fear of success* (Rorer, 1983); and/or *Perfectionist thinking* (Burka & Yuen, 2008; Flett, Blankstein, Hewitt & Koledin, 1992; Flett, Hewitt & Martin, 1995; Seo, 2008). What these perspectives actually share is a focus on procrastination involving people's anxieties about performance scrutiny. In academic environments, where there is high concentration on regular assessment and grading of work, concerns about being evaluated are particularly apparent. In fact, tasks that get evaluated and have the largest impact on students' final results have been shown to yield the highest levels of academic procrastination (Senécal et al., 1997; Kachgal et al., 2001).

Perfectionist procrastinators are also likely to be self-critical, set high standards for themselves and judge themselves harshly when failing to meet them (Stainton, Lay & Flett, 2000). They are also likely to feel guilty or ashamed when they procrastinate (Fee & Tangney, 2000). Reported self-discrepancies between 'actual-self' and 'ought-to-self' (Higgins, 1987) were the strongest predictor of procrastination in one study involving college student participants (Orellana-Damacela, Tindale & Suárez-Balcázar, 2000).

Although procrastination has been documented as a characteristic of human behaviour throughout history and in all societies, prevalence indicates an increasing trend (Kachgal et al. 2001) as a reflection of cultural expectations within achievement oriented industrialized societies. Flett et al (1992) found that academic procrastination stems partly from anticipation of disapproval from others though socially prescribed perfectionist standards. These are beliefs that significant others place excessively high standards on them and are putting pressure on them to be perfect.

One of the difficulties in breaking the habit is that chronic procrastinators will often go to great lengths to justify and rationalise their behaviours. Even those who seek help for their habit will say that they work best under pressure (Fernie & Spada, 2008; Tice & Baumeister, 1997). After a poor outcome, procrastinators tend to prefer downward-counterfactuals (It could have been worse) rather than upward ones (I could have done better) (Sirois, 2004).   Some studies have focused on self-handicapping behaviour, such as staying up late to party the night before an exam so that there is a back-up excuse to use in the event of poor exam performance (Ferrari & Tice, 2000; Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005). This excuse-making pattern is a strategic form of impression management that helps evaluation anxiety procrastinators 'save face.'

Another factor that influences the relationship of performance evaluation anxiety on procrastination probability is the duration of the delay. Performance 'delay' is at the core of Steel's (2007) definition of procrastination, expressed within a formula of task 'utility' that focuses on hyperbolic time discounting (Ainslie, 1975). This time model highlights the probability of procrastination being highest when the deadline is distant because it can be discounted, and its likelihood decreasing as the deadline approaches and the reward of completion overrides performance anxiety. However, some

procrastinators may *never* make the decision that it is the right time to act even after a delay. Distress levels are shown to either increase (Tice & Baumeister, 1997) or remain as high across the term (Rice, Richardson & Clark, 2012).   Therefore, with anxiety levels remaining so high, these students are at risk of dropping out through never being able to confront and complete their assignments even when their deadlines are pending.

A3. Ability: Am I able to do it?

The third likeability factor for procrastination relates to the person's current judgment of their capabilities to organise and execute the actions required to successfully complete the academic assignment.

Students' comfort levels about doing assignments and taking exams depend on how competent they are feeling.   Some students may feel that they are not prepared adequately when they come to do the work and this can be due to poor strategic study patterns. Spacing an assignment across several sessions over a period of time has been shown to be more effective than cramming in work at the last minute (Dempster & Farris, 1990). One study showed that, when students are given sequential sets of study materials with each new set being conditional upon completion of the one before it, they were less likely to cram at the end. They also did better on the final test. It is as if being shown how to make studying more evenly distributed made them feel prepared, such that they no longer felt the need for a period of high intensity studying close to the deadline (Perrin, Miller, Haberlin, Ivy, Meindl & Neef, 2011).

Students have reported low energy and 'tiredness' as a chief reason for putting off doing a task (Strongman & Burt, 2000; Gropel & Steel 2008). With widening participation in Higher Education, students who are the first generation in their families to enter university may feel most compelled to supplement their education with an income (Bui, 2002) and in one study, academic procrastination has been found to increase with lower socio-economic status (Chow, 2011). Juggling multiple demands on time may be a core reason why students feel unable to cope with assignments and why they procrastinate. Burnout occurs when students become exhausted in response to their study load. It is manifested in a detached attitude toward one's study, as well as

feeling incompetent as a student (Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002).

A4. Task competition: Is there something better to do?

Many procrastination writers focus on it being a form of *Impulsive behaviour,* with people's need for immediate gratification (Ferrari & Emmons, 1995) and succumbing easily to temptations (Dewitte & Schouwenburg 2002) accounting for its pervasiveness.

The negative relationship shown between age and procrastination in meta-analytic reviews (Steel, 2007, Van Eerde, 2002) and in research with unusually large samples (Gropel and Steel, 2008), suggests that younger adults are more inclined to surrender to procrastination than older adults. The tendency of many students to procrastinate may partly reflect post-modern attitudes of a student life that involves a lot of socializing. Students value highly being able to spontaneously decide the activities they want to participate in (Dietz, Hofer & Fries, 2007).

Therefore, it is no wonder that academic activities lose out over more alluring and readily available pursuits, such as online gaming, social networking and mobile phone text messaging that can bring immediate satisfaction all day long (Hedin, 2012). One research study found that student *Facebook*® users were more prone to distraction and claimed that it prevented them from getting on with their work (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

B) Self-regulation: the antithesis of procrastination

There is good evidence that the common underlying factor accounting for procrastination behaviour is poor self-regulation (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Brownlow & Reasinger, 2000; Chu & Choi, 2005; Ferrari, 2001; Howell & Watson, 2007; Klassen et al. 2008a; Rabin, Fogel & Nutter-Upham, 2011; Senéchal et al, 1995; Van Eerde, 2000; Vohs & Baumeister, 2004, Wolters, 2003). Self-regulation refers to 'thoughts, feelings and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals' (Zimmerman, 2000, p.14). They are otherwise referred to

as executive functioning processes that are associated with activities occurring in the Prefrontal cortex (Roth, Randolph, Koven & Isquith, 2006), that part of the brain that is the most recently evolved (Barkley, 2001). Damage to this area results in a loss of initiative, not unlike the task resistant behaviour we see in procrastinators.

Research has shown that poor self-regulation leads to procrastination behaviour. Some studies have found that lacking an awareness of how to plan and monitor a task, along with having poor organisation strategies are common self-regulatory problems experienced by procrastinators (Howell & Watson, 2007, Rabin et al. 2011, Wolters, 2003).

There is evidence that self-regulation becomes difficult when managing   present-self emotional needs (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Also, distressed people give short-term affect regulation priority over other self-regulatory goals, in order to feel better (Tice, Bratslavsky & Baumeister, 2001).

What is required is further examination of the mechanisms linking self-regulation processes to procrastination behaviour. The next section does this by examining the role that different facets of self-regulation play in relation to each of the four task likeability factors of Enjoyment, Consequences, Ability and Competition (Table 1).

B1. Enjoyment: Intrinsic/Extrinsic motivation

Research has found that intrinsic motivation accounts for the ability to perform assignments in a timely fashion (Senécal et al., 1995). Intrinsic motivators are driven by the enjoyment of the learning process itself and they approach activities with gusto and enthusiasm (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).   Students on an online program who were less intrinsically motivated showed higher levels of procrastination (Rakes & Dunn, 2010). Intrinsic motivators are driven by task mastery rather than avoidance and such a mastery goal orientation has been found to inversely predict procrastination behaviour (Howell & Watson, 2007).

Furthermore, having personal choice increases people's intrinsic motivation (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000), a finding consistent with self-determination theory that emphasises the central role of autonomy in motivating people in their striving towards personal growth (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

People who use delays or incubation periods of inactivity for functional task management have been shown to be completely engaged when they get going, through a state of arousal and intense subjective interest, known as 'flow' (Csikszentzmihalyi, 1990; Kim & Seo, 2013). By contrast, dysfunctional procrastinators who lack this level of motivation are often pressured when working after a delay. Once, they finally get started on an assignment to a tight deadline, they are slower and less accurate, especially when trying to manage a cognitively demanding task (Ferrari, 2001).

Students who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to procrastinate than intrinsic motivators (Senécal et al.,1995). Extrinsic motivation involves doing something in order to obtain a reward for doing it and it is harder to persist with tasks where the rewards seem a long a way off. People who lack intrinsic enjoyment in a task need to *internalize* it (Deci & Ryan, 2000): They need to actively transform the extrinsic motive into a personally endorsed value in order to persist with it.

B2. Consequence cognitions: Anxieties of Performance evaluation

Extrinsic motivation can lead to performance-avoidance as a result of excessive performance evaluation anxiety (e.g. Wolters, 2003).   This type of procrastination is aggravated through high pressure to get good grades and/or social approval, rather than through any desire to study as an end in itself. This avoidance orientation has been shown to predict maladaptive strategies and giving up in the face of tough challenges. (e.g. Pintrich, 2000).

Procrastination to reduce anxiety is an example of what Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) refer to as 'misregulation,' because it is a regulation of mood over self-regulation for pursuing long-term goals. It has been argued that emotion regulation takes precedence when people are distressed as they strive to act in order to feel better (Tice et al., 2001).

Moreover, deadlines seem to make matters worse for these students. Chronic procrastinators have shown lower speed and accuracy under time constraints as compared with their speed and accuracy when not under time constraints (Ferrari, 2001). Overall, it seems that the self-regulation difficulties faced by overly anxious procrastinators appear to reflect the challenges of being able to handle doing tasks when working under pressure.

B3. Ability: Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in one's own ability to achieve in a particular area (Bandura, 1997). Learners who show competence in self-regulation strategies in an academic domain are also likely to believe that they are capable of achieving successfully in that domain (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schunk, 1991). According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy determines "how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences" (p.123). Therefore, it is not surprising that several studies have found a relationship between low academic self-efficacy and procrastination   (Burns, Dittman, Nguyen & Mitchelson, 2000; Ferrari, Parker, & Ware, 1992; Haycock et al., 1998; Klassen et al., 2008a; Seo, 2008; Sirois, 2004; Steel, 2007; Van Eerde, 2003; Wolters, 2003).

More recently, research has extended this argument to show that self-regulation accounts for the predictive power of self-efficacy on procrastination and that it is students' self-efficacy for self-regulated learning that matters (Klassen et al., 2008a; Strunk & Steel, 2011; Tan, Ang, Klassen, Yeo, Wong, Huan & Chong, 2008; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Students with learning disabilities have been shown to procrastinate more than students without such disabilities and this is related to their low self-efficacy for using self-regulation strategies (Klassen, Krawchuk, Lynch & Rajani, 2008).

Many procrastinators have a 'planning fallacy': they underestimate task completion times (McCown, Petzel & Rupert, 1987; Pychyl, Morin & Salmon, 2001).   One obstacle for the poor planner is a weakness in organization skills, such that they need to develop a more systematic and structured approach to studying (Howell & Watson, 2007; Lay, 1986; Steel, 2007). They may be initiating action but in a haphazard way. Thus, not surprisingly, procrastination has been shown to relate negatively to self-reported learned resourcefulness, which means lacking skills needed to use time efficiently in producing a complete assignment (Milgram, Dangour & Ravi, 1992).

Failure to self-regulate can also occur "because people have limited resources for self-regulation and these become depleted in a manner akin to a muscle's becoming fatigued" (Muraven, Baumeister, & Tice, 1999, p. 447).   High stress arousal can undermine self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) and feelings of efficacy or inefficacy have been considered as the 'third dimension' of burnout along with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Bresó, Salanova & Schaufeli, 2007).   However, regular and deliberate practice of self-regulation exercises results in improvements in self-regulation strength, such that people are less likely to become exhausted when using those strategies in future (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall & Oaten, 2006).

B4. Competing tasks: Distractibility

Some students may be inclined towards an 'intention-action gap' when they postpone working (Lay & Schouwenberg, 1993). Here, the student may be estimating study time accurately, but is having trouble sticking to the plan. These students may be more susceptible to getting distracted when there are temptations to lure them away from the task. 'Effort Regulation' (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie, 1991) is a self-regulation strategy where one is able to control one's attention in completing study goals even when faced with distracting situations. Students who cannot regulate the amount of effort they put into doing a task due to a hedonic persuasion towards seductive cues around them are at risk of procrastinating even if they feel they have the skills to undertake the assignment.

C) Developing a Self-regulation coaching framework for managing student procrastination.

There are many reasons why coaching can be an effective intervention for handling academic procrastination. Firstly, attempts to alleviate procrastination have largely been driven through therapy (e.g. Ellis & Knaus, 1977). Whilst therapists have an important role to play in helping clinical populations, coaches can support people who do not have serious mental health problems (Bluckert, 2005, Grant, 2006). Coaching is a time-limited and solution-oriented process whereby the focus is on moving towards the coachee's goals (Grant, 2003). Thus, for addressing procrastination habits shown in otherwise healthy and resourceful adults, procrastination management could be a core coaching goal or one of the goals set by a student coachee who wants to focus on achieving academic success.

Moreover, the coaching relationship is a collaborative one where coachees are perceived to be autonomous learners who are ready to develop through self-directed learning (Stöber and Grant, 2006).   Therefore, the role of the coach is ideally placed to support coachees in identifying and developing the self-regulation shortcomings that are responsible for their particular procrastination pattern.

Cognitive-behavioural coaching (CBC: Neenan & Dryden, 2002) has been recommended for working with procrastination (Karas & Spada, 2009). CBC uses cognitive-behavioural techniques based on Rational-emotive therapy and Cognitive behavioural therapy (Ellis, 1997), but within the context of coaching. Essentially, the focus is on helping coachees to gain an awareness of how their thoughts and beliefs about events influence how they feel and act.   Karas and Spada (2009) found that coaching intervention using CBC methods, led to a reduction in self-reported procrastination in a small group of chronic procrastinators. However, the researchers claimed that it would "be valuable to identify the key active components of this coaching approach as they are still unclear at present" (p.50).

The framework presented here offers a theoretically informed approach to coaching procrastination that identifies four task likeability factors accounting for task delay. In pinpointing precisely just those factors accounting for a coachee's procrastination pattern, I also advocate using an approach that Neenan and Dryden (2002) refer to as

a two-pronged attack: focusing on the emotional aspects of procrastination before dealing with the problem-solving or practical aspects. The emotional aspects are dealt with using CBC and the practical aspects involve developing self-regulation strategies that are matched to the particular low task likeability patterns of the coachee.

The emotional reactions of procrastinators when faced with an academic assignment can range from mild frustration to more serious anxieties. If task avoidance is driven by the need to restore immediate feelings of pleasure or comfort, then this act is simultaneously preventing the individual from confronting the internal processes that take place when those negative reactions occur. Therefore, CBC serves to bring the coachee directly to the moment when negative thoughts and feelings occur so as to deliberately explore this discomfort phase and bring awareness to it. The ABCDE approach (Ellis, 1997) is one method for dealing with relationships between beliefs, emotions and behaviour (Neenan, 2008). A different model that I often use is the SPACE model (Edgerton and Palmer, 2005). This is a bio-psycho-social interactive systems model dealing with interactions of Social Context, Physiology, Action, Cognition and Emotion. SPACE is a tool to enable coachees to imagine a typical or previous situation that leads them to procrastinate (for example, being given an assignment to do) and then encourages them to examine their thoughts, feelings, actions, bodily reactions and social context in response to this situation.

In table 1, academic procrastination is divided into the four areas of low task likeability previously discussed. The coach can begin by presenting this task likeability model as a psycho-educative process of demonstrating to the coachee that people procrastinate to avoid unpleasant experiences, and that any combination of the four factors may be involved. Some students may be driven to procrastinate through a combination of these factors. However, the benefit of teasing them apart is that each can be identified and dealt with separately within a coaching context.

This rest of the paper addresses some of the ways that a coach could raise student coachees' self-awareness and facilitate them in developing self-regulation strategies for handling each of their low likeability areas. The particular tools chosen will depend on the perspective and experience of the coach and thus, they serve as guidelines for coaches to consider when targeting each of the areas in a structured way.

C1. Enjoyment: Addressing Intrinsic motivation

If it is revealed that coachees are avoiding undertaking academic assignments because they are perceived as boring, uninteresting or too labour intensive, they can be helped to improve their tolerance of those academic tasks and to develop ways of making them more rewarding.

In improving tolerance, they can be encouraged to reframe their negative beliefs into more constructive ones in order to reduce or eliminate emotional reactions of frustration, irritability or anger. Automatic negative thoughts such as all-or-none thinking (I always hate these exercises so I will hate this one), low frustration tolerance (I cannot be bothered to do this now) or catastrophic thinking (I cannot bear to do this now) need to be realised and challenged.   The coachee can then be assisted in brainstorming and practising more constructive thoughts such as 'I do not like doing this work but it is important and I will feel much better when I get it finished.'

The coach can assess a coachee's level of autonomy towards doing an academic task by asking, "What are your reasons for doing this course/assignment?" The coach can use further questioning to reveal unhelpful extrinsic motivational thoughts that are perpetuating coachees' avoidance patterns, such as, 'I have to do this as part of the course'.   Deci and Ryan (2000) have recognised different levels of extrinsic motivation and for tasks that simply are not enjoyable in their own right, one can aim for 'Identified motivation'. Thoughts such as 'I choose to study because it is important to me,' are identified motivational thoughts.

Research has shown that providing rationales for doing a seemingly uninteresting activity, such as a statistics assignment, increases engagement and learning in students for those tasks (Jang, 2008). This could be encouraged in a coaching context by asking the coachee to write a list of potentially useful skills that a particular academic assignment can provide for them in their personal and future professional lives.

Another approach is to help coachees brainstorm ways of making assignments more interesting or enjoyable by focusing on their existing strengths and interests. For example, further questioning could reveal that aversion to writing an essay may be mostly due to a dislike of spending time sitting in a library or office. Perhaps this

individual could think about planning her study routine in ways that are more in tune with her natural preferences, for example, cycling to the park to read a journal article outdoors or audio-recording her ideas before writing them to reduce the overall period of writing. Visual-spatial thinkers could be helped to use non-verbal approaches to planning assignments such as mind mapping (Buzan and Buzan, 1996).

C2. Consequence cognitions: Managing performance evaluation anxieties

For the performance-avoidant student who is overly concerned with being evaluated, they are likely to have an aversion to doing tasks that get graded. They will show performance anxiety that is tied to ruminating thoughts about the social consequences of failing (Everyone will think I am a failure), self critical judgments for being less than perfect (If I do not get a first grade, I am useless) and/or beliefs about not being able to cope with the consequences (If I pass this test, I will be expected to pass the harder one). The initial aim here is to help coachees become aware of how their exaggerated negative appraisals are influencing their anxiety levels, health and overall performance. The self-regulatory goals will involve developing more realistic ways of thinking about their assignments.

The SPACE model (Edgerton & Palmer, 2005) is particularly useful with this kind of procrastinating student because it can be used to compare what a person is thinking, feeling and doing when they imagine a deadline that is a long way off compared with their reactions when the deadline becomes imminent. It can also be a good idea to conduct a few models with the coachee to identify the changes in his/her reactions over different points in time between an assignment being set and the deadline.   Raising awareness of how patterns change over time can be very revealing. For example, they can see how deadline distant thoughts lead to procrastination behaviour, whereas deadline imminent catastrophic beliefs, such as 'I can't stand it, as this has to be finished today', elevate anxiety levels and the tendency to cram in poor quality work. Coachees can also become aware of how this pattern is affecting their health by noticing changes in their body. Perhaps deadline distant reactions lead to 'butterflies' in the stomach, whereas close to deadline reactions lead to more serious physical effects such as headaches, stomach cramps and poor sleeping patterns.

Socratic questions are recommended here to provoke insightful thinking to help the coachee move forward. They encourage coachees to question the rationality, evidence and utility of their negative beliefs. Examples are, "How does failing this exam make you a complete failure?" "Might you be exaggerating the importance of your concerns?" or "Is your belief helping you achieve your goals?" The homework for this student would be to practise using more constructive thoughts in various contexts where they are prone to being performance-avoidant.

Recent research is pointing to the relationship between procrastination and self-compassion (Sirois, 2013). Therefore, this coachee could benefit from practising coaching tools for developing self-acceptance (Palmer, 1997) and learning to appreciate a more realistic view of pursuing excellence over perfection. Practising Mindfulness could also be a way that coachees may be shown to increase their levels of self-compassion (Birnie, Speca & Carlson, 2010).   Mindfulness can also be important for lowering stress (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and permits non-judgmental awareness of discrepancies between current and desired future states that can increase persistence (Evans, Baer & Segerstrom, 2009).

C3. Ability: Increasing Self-efficacy

Student coachees may express various emotions if they lack confidence in their ability to complete assignments: They may be frustrated, angry and/or fearful. Again, exploring the cognitions, particularly those relating to judgments they have about themselves, should clarify the reasons for low self-efficacy beliefs leading to procrastination tendencies. Coaching strategies can then be selected that focus on those areas that are providing obstacles to feeling competent about a task. The aim is to increase the coachee's sense of mastery (Bandura, 1997) through identifying efficacy concerns and guiding them to handle those particular obstacles as action plans. Setting 'implementation intentions': goals that specify when, where and how the task is to be performed, have been shown to reduce procrastination (Owens, Bowman & Dill, 2008); and low self-efficacy procrastinators are likely to make important mastery gains from using coaching tools that encourage this.

Lacking self-efficacy for this coachee could be related to poor planning and organisational abilities. People will procrastinate less if they are thinking about difficult

tasks on a more specific and concrete level (McCrea, Libermann, Trope & Sherman, 2008). Breaking a large task down into manageable sub-goals is shown to increase mastery by providing incremental goals that can be achieved (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Procrastination has been shown to reduce when an academic task is sub-divided into a number of specific proximal goals, such as the daily writing of goals or regular quizzes (Tuckman, 1998; Wesp, 1986).

If the student expresses study detachment thoughts along with signs of being overly stressed and exhausted, the coach can explore whether overwhelming feelings of an inability to cope with workload are potentiating his/her problems. It is useful in this situation to steer the coaching dialogue to raise awareness of how time is being spent, and to realistically estimate the most efficient ways of spending it. Questions to be asked here are "What time of day are you more alert?" and "Which tasks can you leave to times of the day when you are not at your best?" Some research has shown that procrastination relates to circadian rhythms, with late evening owls being more vulnerable than early rising larks (Hess, Sherman & Goodman, 2000). A useful homework tool is to track performance graphically from plus 5 to minus 5 every hour over the course of a day to identify one's energy cycle (Hindle, 1998). The aim here is to examine how the student's typical dietary, and possibly exercise routine fits with energy levels across a typical day? Any negative signs, such as energy dips after eating a heavy lunch, for example, could be action planned into experimenting with changes in diet and/or mealtimes. Does the student coachee prefer to work for long periods of uninterrupted concentration or does s/he prefer regular tea breaks and shorter bursts of study? The role of the coach here is to facilitate coachees in recognising which patterns are peculiar to them for planning work timetables to complement their own natural tendencies, whilst also recognising ways of changing certain unhelpful daily habits to optimise the resources they can give to their studies.

Ultimately, for students facing multiple demands on their time, the toughest challenge may be to select which activities really do have to change. Can the student expect to achieve a good degree whilst committing long hours to travelling and/or taking on a demanding job of work? What are the possibilities for converting to part-time or other more flexible modes of study? Can the student consider moving home, or transferring to a different University? These sorts of questions can be addressed for the procrastinator who believes that they are unable to cope with university life even after strategies have been implemented to make more efficient use of their energy cycle.

C4. Competing tasks: Minimise distractibility:

If getting distracted by more enticing activities is a key problem, the emotional reaction here is likely to be the relative pleasure gained from choosing the distracting pastime over doing the academic task.   CBC can be used to enable coachees to see the difference between their reactions when imagining carrying out their usual distraction activities (for example, talking to friends, online gaming) versus their reactions to imagining having to do the assignment instead. This can be useful for raising awareness, particularly for the impulsive procrastinator who is just doing things without giving much thought as to the reasons for those behaviours.

Neenan (2008) discusses the 'discomfort disturbance' beliefs of procrastinators who are 'dreamers'. Typical beliefs here are, 'I shouldn't have to work hard to fulfill my dreams'. Therefore, if the coachee expresses reactionary emotions to the thought of being made to undertake the task, they can be shown how angry thoughts are interfering with their ability to shun distractions.

In one study, procrastination was found to be negatively related to the use of time management strategies, conceptualized as the setting of goals and priorities (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993).   Therefore, distracted procrastinators may benefit greatly from completing a weekly (or longer) time-log as homework, in order to capture a detailed understanding of how their time is being spent. One might expect an impulsive procrastinator to be wasting time on things that are more accessible and pleasurable to do rather than getting on with the academic assignment.

To minimise distraction, coaching can support new strategies so that the individual either fails to encode competing cues or limits their processing so that they are not fully valued. Coaching dialogue can encourage coachees to identify the distracting cues diverting them and to brainstorm ways of minimising and/or replacing them.   An easily distracted student can be helped to create a 'work space' that decreases the cues for distraction: to put the phone onto voicemail and to limit opening emails to twice a day, for example. Burka & Yuen (2008) call this 'going on a low-information diet (p.226)' and they provide good advice for questioning whether a person really needs to check their 'e-clutter', such as emails and news reports several times daily.

It is likely that students who are susceptible to distraction will also need to commit themselves to a reasonable degree of discipline. However, coaching goals are best aimed at reshuffling and prioritising social engagements and events rather than cancelling them altogether. 'Relatedness' has been recognised as a basic psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In fact, daily fluctuations in emotional well-being are accounted for by levels of satisfaction with activities that involve feeling understood and appreciated, having meaningful conversations, hanging out with others and doing fun things with them (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000). The coachee can search for ways of finding a balance between making time for academic study and time for doing those valuable social activities that allow the individual to enjoy a fulfilling and happy life.

Conclusion

One procrastination writer made the claim that "Procrastination is the college student's eternal bedfellow" (Greenberg, 2010, p. 79). The current paper discusses how the underlying processes that potentiate procrastination behaviour can be both recognised and alleviated through self-regulation coaching. A self-regulation coaching framework is an efficient way to address the four kinds of rash task likeability decisions that lead a person to habitually put things off. It allows a personal pattern to be both recognised and targeted in the goal of procrastination management.

Persisting with changes to a mood changing habit such as procrastination is likely to require considerable willpower. Therefore, it is important that coachees are helped to establish a long-term mindset before they walk away. Dryden (2000, cited in Neenan 2008) provides examples of how a coach can support the coachee in developing an anti-procrastination outlook that enables lasting improvements once coaching goals have been achieved.

Whilst scientific literature on procrastination has informed the formulation of the four-factor task likeability model discussed in this paper (Enjoyment, Consequence, Ability, Competition), it would be useful to have further evidence that these factors, either alone or in various combinations, account for all examples of ineffectual procrastination behaviour. Moreover, evidence to support the efficacy of this self-regulation coaching

approach for alleviating academic procrastination would help build a more solid foundation of its validity.

The self-regulation coaching model could be used to improve employee productivity or other kinds of important goals that people tend to postpone until it is too late, such as planning for retirement.   However, this paper focuses on the widespread problem of academic procrastination.   If it successfully helps a diversity of students to experience the benefits of proactive studying and persistence during those important years that are spent in education, such an intervention could prove to be invaluable.

Table 1:

A 'likeability' model for self-regulation coaching in managing academic procrastination'

Task Likeability	Self-regulation shortcomings	Coaching using CBC and self-regulation strategies
Enjoyment	Intrinsic/Extrinsic motivation	• Increase tolerance of tasks • Increasing intrinsic motivation for doing the tasks
Consequence	Performance Evaluation anxieties	• Reduce performance anxieties (realistic & self-compassionate thinking) • Raise awareness of discrepancies between current and future states
Ability	Low Self-efficacy of performance	• Increase mastery through: • Planning/organization strategies • Energy cycle regulation strategies
Competition	Weak attentional control of distracters	• Time awareness and management • Strategies for minimizing processing of distracter cues

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