

Field and Online Experiments on Procrastination and Willpower

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Abstract: The issues of self-control, procrastination, willpower, and commitment have been the focus of a number of recent theoretical models. We conducted two studies to investigate patterns in how people complete a task of significant duration and how willpower depletion affects behavior, providing some of the first data in these areas. Each study involved a behavioral intervention designed to affect performance. We find that for a substantial task, intermediate goals neither reduce procrastination nor increase completion rates. Second, a willpower-depleting task reduces initial effort but increases overall task-completion rates. While our data provide some support for each of the behavioral models we consider, they are most consistent with models in which seemingly unrelated activities are linked due to cognitive load and self-signaling models.