

Ariely, Daniel and Klaus Wertenbroch (2002):
Procrastination, Deadlines, and Performance: Using
Precommitment to Regulate One's Behavior

Agenda

1. Aim of the paper
- 2.1. Free choice/no-choice study - Experimental design
- 2.2. Free choice/no-choice study - Results
- 3.1. Proofreading study - Experimental design
- 3.2. Proofreading study - Results
4. Remarks

1. Aim of the paper

- analyze self-control and procrastination

Research questions:

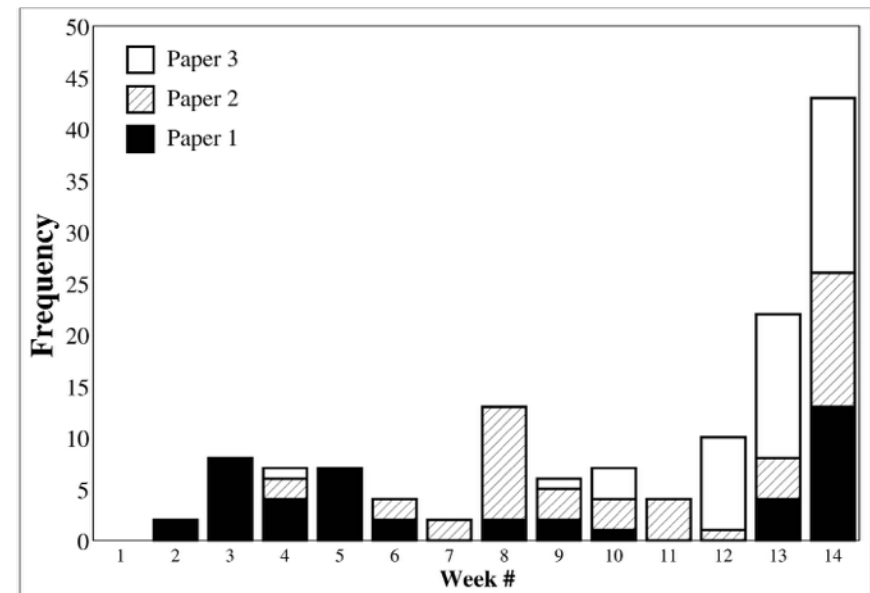
- Do people self-impose costly deadlines in order to overcome procrastination, which impairs their performances?
- Are those deadlines set optimally and effective whereby the performance is enhanced compared to exogenous deadlines?

2.1. Free-choice/no-choice study - Experimental design

- 99 subjects of an executive-education course at MIT
- three short papers had to be provided
- no-choice section (48 students): evenly spaced deadlines to hand over the papers
- free-choice section (51 students): deadlines chosen by the students
- constraints:
 - no paper provided later than the last lecture
 - deadlines had to be announced before the second lecture
 - dates are fixed
 - each day of delay = 1% penalty in overall grade

2.2. Free-choice/no-choice study - Results

- only 12 students set final deadline of all papers to the last week
- most subjects set costly deadlines to overcome procrastination
- grades in no-choice section were significantly higher
 - deadlines were not set optimally
 - deadlines less binding since they were self-imposed



frequency of the declared deadlines in free-choice section

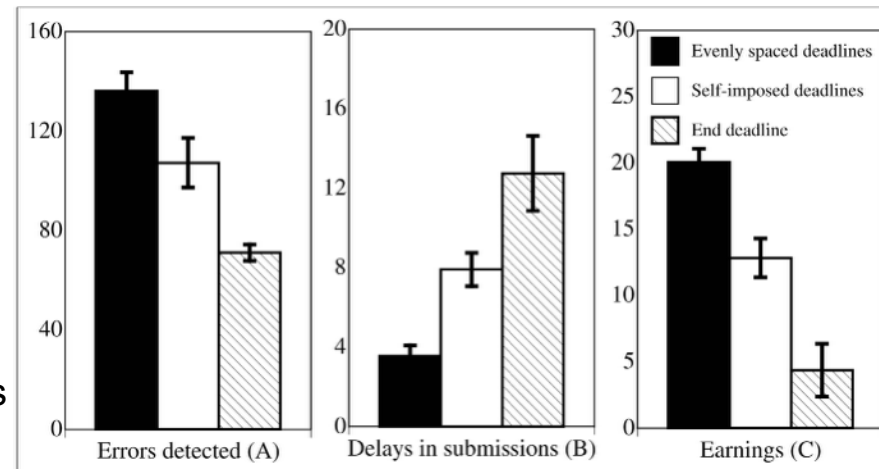
- grades of evenly spaced deadlines compared to no-choice section were almost similar
 - overall differences in grades mainly caused by suboptimal timing of deadlines

3.1. Proofreading study - Experimental design

- proofreading of three texts of 10 pages with 100 errors in each text
- 60 subjects of MIT
- payout depends on the number of errors detected and the time of submission → 10 cents per error detected, \$1 penalty for each day of delay
- three conditions:
 1. one text every 7 days (evenly spaced deadlines)
 2. all three texts after 21 days (end deadline)
 3. self-imposed deadlines (free choice)

3.2. Proofreading study - Results

- subjects tend to impose costly deadlines
- highest outcome (errors found - costs of delay) in evenly spaced deadlines condition
- almost no difference between evenly spaced fixed deadlines and self-imposed evenly spaced deadlines
→ suboptimal choice of deadlines



- subjects in evenly spaced deadline condition did dislike the task the most, but spent the most time on average
- comparable results to the first study

4. Remarks

- people tend to choose, even costly, deadlines to prevent procrastination
- often, people are not aware of how to set deadlines optimally
- optimally set deadlines enhance task performance
- rational decision makers should not impose (costly) deadlines, unless they have self-control problems

Thank you for your attention!