Bajcar, Beata (2025): *Understanding Procrastination at Work. Individual and Workplace Perspectives*. Routledge[1]

■   **Jan Ch. Karlsson**[2]
Professor Emeritus, Karlstad University, Sweden

In research, general procrastination was for a long time regarded as reprehensible—a kind of sin—and it largely still is. However, a turning point came in 2005 when Chu and Choi published an article identifying two types of procrastinators. One is the passive type, long discussed in the literature, who suffers negative consequences of the (non)actions. The other delays tasks actively but still completes them on time, yielding positive outcomes. Chu and Choi (2005:262) argue that active procrastination may be particularly beneficial in environments that are 'highly demanding, unpredictable, and fast changing'. In such settings—conditions many claim characterize today's working life—active procrastinators may perform more effectively than others by avoiding rigid plans and responding spontaneously to unexpected changes.

Recently, studies with other populations than the dominant one—students—have emerged, including research focusing on the labor market. Scholars have long noted the lack of studies on procrastination in wage labor (Weymann 1988:226), a point reiterated decades later (van Eerde 2016:233) and again recently (Aydin 2023:224). Against this backdrop, Beata Bajcar's full-length book, *Understanding Procrastination at Work* (2025), stands out. Her central thesis is that procrastination in wage labor is dysfunctional for organizations and self-handicapping for employees, and thus something management should address or eliminate. However, she largely overlooks the concept of active procrastination—even though it has been shown to 'promote better decision-making, optimize resource utilization, facilitate time management and increase motivation' (Chauhan et al. 2020:1290). These characteristics are positive and are viewed by some researchers as managerial assets (Chauhan et al. 2020:1295):

> Unlike most non-procrastinators, active procrastinators are not rigid in their planning, which enables an increased sense of flexibility and control over their time. Despite an inclination to procrastinate, active procrastinators are both capable of meeting deadlines and are satisfied with the end result because of their effective use of time. […] Active procrastination may even lead to better outcomes than non-procrastination in circumstances with lower levels of time structure and increased flexibility.

Procrastination research is thus increasingly engaging with the field of wage labor, and Bajcar's book is currently the most comprehensive contribution. After reviewing the literature on general procrastination, the bulk of the book presents an empirical study of procrastination in Polish working life using the established Procrastination at Work Scale (PAWS).

---

[1] You can find this text and its DOI at https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index.
[2] Corresponding author: Jan Ch. Karlsson. E-mail: Jan.karlsson@kau.se

But how can research on procrastination in wage labor establish its own niche in working life studies? One option would be to slightly modify the common definition to include 'work', like this: 'Voluntarily delaying an intended course of action at work even though you expect that you will be worse off because of the delay'. However, the dominant definition of procrastination at work differs from the simple one (Metin et al. 2016:255; emphasis added): 'the delay of work-related action by intentionally engaging (behaviorally or cognitively) in nonwork-related actions, with *no intention of harming* the employer, employee, workplace or client'. Why does this definition emphasize the absence of intent to harm? Though the rationale isn't explicitly stated, it is likely a way to differentiate procrastination from a competing concept: 'counterproductive behavior'. The latter involves willful actions that '*harm or intend to harm*, organizations and/or organization stakeholders, such as clients, coworkers, customers, and supervisors' (Spector et al. 2006:447; emphasis added). Procrastination at work, then, is defined as involving no intent to harm, whereas counterproductive behavior is characterized by such intent.

This conceptual distinction should logically influence how procrastination in wage labor is operationalized. However, despite the definition including intentionality, the operationalization focuses solely on observable behaviors, not intentions. As a result, the operationalization aligns more closely with counterproductive behavior than with procrastination as defined. In other words, even though the definitions differ, the operationalization is practically the same.

Two types of workplace procrastination are often discussed: soldiering and cyberslacking. The only real difference between the two is the use of computers—cyberslacking involves digital tools, while soldiering does not. Each PAWS item corresponds to one of these types, which the scale's authors claim 'captures explicitly all relevant aspects of work-related idleness' (Metin et al. 2016:255). Yet, there is no explanation for why computer use constitutes the most meaningful theoretical distinction. Given that active procrastination may align better with modern wage labor, one might expect the active–passive distinction to be more insightful, but it isn't even addressed. Bajcar adopts the PAWS without critique, so let's examine it more closely. Respondents are instructed as follows (emphasis added): 'The following statements concern *various sorts of behaviors* at work. Please read all statements carefully and then select how often you exhibit these behaviors at work'. The instruction does not mention intentions, nor do the items. For example, the four cyberslacking items are:

– I use Instant Messaging (MSN, Skype, GTalk, WhatsApp…) at work.
– I spend more than half an hour on social network sites (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter etc.) on work per day.
– I read news online at work.
– I do online shopping during working hours.

Metin et al. (2016:259) claim that 'PAWS is a valid instrument to measure workplace procrastination', but none of the items assess intent—only frequency of behavior. As a result, the core conceptual distinction between procrastination and counterproductive behavior—lack of intent or intent to harm—is not captured. The scale therefore cannot fulfill its proposed purpose. Moreover, many of the listed behaviors are legitimate in certain occupations. Academics routinely use instant messaging. Communication professionals and social media managers may spend extensive time on social networking

sites. Journalists read news online as a part of their job, and purchasers in organizations engage in online shopping. These employer-approved activities would be misclassified as procrastination in PAWS. Although the scale developers acknowledge some of these concerns (Metin et al. 2016:262), they do not revise the scale accordingly. Addressing the issues would have required removing all cyberslacking items.

Since Bajcar's empirical study is based on PAWS, her conclusions are affected by its limitations. She begins her book by asserting that 'Today's competitive and rapidly changing world requires organizations to demonstrate unprecedented competences, high flexibility, and the ability to adapt to new conditions'. This would seem to describe a setting in which active procrastinators thrive—yet they receive only brief mention. Bajcar dismisses the active–passive procrastination distinction without justification and instead adopts the soldiering vs. cyberslacking dichotomy, based on whether computers are used. She defines procrastination as 'the tendency to irrationally delay tasks and engage in non-work-related activities, both offline and online, during work hours' (2025:1-2). She also affirms that counterproductive behavior involves intent to harm, while procrastination does not. Nonetheless, she consistently describes procrastination in negative terms—dysfunctional, maladaptive, deviant, undesirable, and self-handicapping. It is portrayed as harmful not only to employees but also to employers, leading to reduced output and diminished quality. Moreover, it is widespread: in one study she cites (2025:70), only 10% of employees report never wasting time on the job.

After conducting numerous statistical tests, Bajcar concludes that PAWS demonstrates 'excellent' validity and reliability—technically, this appears correct. Yet she fails to note that PAWS does not measure intent, which is central to the conceptual distinction she endorses. She also ignores the original authors' concerns about some cyberslacking items and overlooks the additional logical flaws discussed here. The result is a chaotic operationalization of cyberslacking—and the entire scale—undermining the credibility of her empirical results.

There is also significant terminological confusion. As mentioned, Bajcar differentiates between soldiering and cyberslacking, yet she often compares procrastination and cyberslacking as if they were distinct categories—even though the latter is a subset of the former. Examples include: 'Studies have shown that procrastination and cyberslacking…' (2025:93); 'the role of sociodemographic factors in explaining procrastination and cyberslacking…' (2025:94–95); and 'the workload has an ambivalent effect in predicting procrastination and cyberslacking…' (2025:111). The confusion deepens when she introduces a third category—'withdrawal'—despite soldiering and cyberslacking being framed as exhaustive of procrastination. She defines withdrawal as 'limiting working time below the required standard', positioning it as a part of both counterproductive behavior (2025:67) and procrastination. Thus, two phenomena are subsumed under one concept, while two terms are used to describe that concept. The terminological inconsistency escalates when she asserts that procrastination 'can be included in the broad category of counterproductive work behavior'. Matters are further muddled by the statement: 'Counterproductive work behavior, procrastination, and cyberslacking entail a decrease in employee productivity and thus in the effectiveness of the organization'. Here, all previously noted conceptual confusions converge.

Bajcar's book reproduces the weaknesses of managerialist procrastination research—and adds some new ones.