

## Advantages of learning time management skills during college studies and in professional life: literature review and prospects.

By Francesco Pesce and Francesca Maoli

**Summary:** 1. Introduction – 2. Social and practical relevance of the topic. – 3. The relationship between time management and well-being from a holistic point of view. – 4. The impact of time management on achievement and motivation. – 5. The relationship between procrastination and performance: time management as an effective tool against procrastination. – 6. Conclusions.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

“Time”, as known, is a social construct, i.e. – is created by humans and society to measure life and activities. It is an immaterial thing that cannot be perceived by the senses. This is the reason why the Roman philosopher Seneca lamented that people are unable to manage time because of the poor value attributed to it, because time is “something incorporeal, because it does not fall under the eyes, and therefore it is considered a small thing, indeed it has almost no price.”<sup>1</sup> However, time is an element that pervades our existence and is present in every aspect of life: all our activities require, de facto, time.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas some events are “natural” and “objective”, such as “day” and “night”, others are “artificial” and “objective”, such as “hours”, whilst other are influenced by psychological and internal factors. For example, how “long” an hour is perceived by a person according to his or her emotional state at a given moment? The perception of time also depends on our culture and on our environment.<sup>3</sup> As a preliminary remark, it is important to note at the outset that “time management”, as understood below, can only refer to the last of the three understandings of time, namely the internal and personal one.<sup>4</sup> A “day”, in its natural sense, cannot be managed by a person; so cannot an hour, as this is only the social construct of humanity<sup>5</sup> and does not exist in the world of real and material things.

What can be “managed” are the activities a single person, and so – in last instance his or her productivity – can proficiently carry out within the specific time-space of the social construct she or he has at disposal.

However, if “time-management” turns into the paradigm of “activity management during a given set of time”, and thus if the focus rests on the third understanding of time (the internal perception), the existence of a multitude of subjective and psychological elements – variable over time – make it difficult to elaborate a general and absolute theory

<sup>1</sup> L.A. Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae*, 49 AD, VIII.

<sup>2</sup> As Peter Drucker (1967) *The effective executive*. Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann., p. 22, wrote, «Everything requires time. It is the one truly universal condition. All work takes place in time and uses up time».

<sup>3</sup> Hall, E.T. (1959), *The Silent Language*, Anchor Books, New York, NY, p. 6; Pant, B. (2016), “Different cultures see deadlines differently”, *Harvard Business Review*, May 23, available at: <https://hbr.org/2016/05/different-cultures-see-deadlines-differently>.

<sup>4</sup> Orlikowski, W. and Yates, J. (2002), “It’s about time: temporal structuring in organizations”, *Organization Science*, Vol. 13 No. 6, pp. 684-700.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday; Zerubavel, E. (1981). *Hidden rhythms*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

and model for time management. In other words, it seems difficult, if not impossible at all, to elaborate a good-for-all forecast time management solution model that applies to everyone, in all situations.

Moreover, time management studies can contribute in the increase of personal productivity by suggesting new approaches and solutions to (smart) work, through planning and organization schemes aimed at rationalizing efforts and concentrate actions, also by way of avoiding distractions and procrastination.

The present contribution reviews the existing literature on time management, with the scope to establish whether the topic is relevant for the future professional life of university students. Most college studies and universities have traditionally disregarded the importance of soft skills in the job market and thus have not provided specific courses aimed at teaching those kind of competences to pupils and students – rather focusing on “hard skills”. However, several studies can constitute the basis for affirming that learning time management techniques while at the university may have a positive impact not only on grades and academic successes, but most of all as concerns the future personal and professional life.

## 2. SOCIAL AND PRACTICAL RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

Time management and efficient planning refers to the world of the so-called “soft skills” that defined as a set of character traits, attitudes and behaviors that enhance a person’s interactions and job performances.<sup>6</sup> Acquiring strong and effective time management skills is of crucial importance in current society. Today, students and workers at any stage and level experience difficulties in making good choices, because of the wide range of possibilities that suggest “consumers” to do many things in order to be successful. This is even more difficult considering that people are constantly exposed to any kind of distractions (e.g. social media) in their daily life.<sup>7</sup> The absence of a real method for addressing the demands of daily life makes more and more difficult to manage our daily choices and actions in a way that is effective for reaching our most important goals.

Higher demands in performance have made time management and efficient planning skills a substantial prerequisite in the professional and occupational context. The strong competitiveness business organizations face in an environment of continuous change involves the search for cost reduction and increased productivity, all of which require the employee greater requirements in terms of tasks and hours of work.<sup>8</sup> There is a clear understanding on the relation between time and organizational productivity, as the first is a fundamental element of the second: according to Doob,<sup>9</sup> the efficiency of an operation is measured on its accomplishment with the smallest expenditure of energy and time.

It appears particularly important to remember how the first studies of time management were originally directed to ensure better performances of leading figures

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<sup>6</sup> M.M. Robles (2012), *Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today’s Workplace*, in *Business Communication Quarterly*, 2012, v. 4, p. 453 ff., at p. 457; T.L. Parsons (2008), *Definition: Soft Skills*, as cited in Robles (2012).

<sup>7</sup> According to the Global Digital Report 2020 (available at <http://wearesocial.com>), in January 2019 there were 3.48 billion social media users, with the worldwide total growing by 288 million (9 percent) since January 2018. There were 3.26 billion people using social media on mobile devices in January 2019, with a growth of 297 million new users representing a year-on-year increase of more than 10 percent.

<sup>8</sup> Garhammer, M. (2002), “Pace of life and enjoyment of life”, *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 3, pp. 217-56.

<sup>9</sup> L.W. Doob (1971), *Patterning of Time*, New Haven, CT:Yale University Press, p. 349.

within top-ranking companies.<sup>10</sup> “Managers” were the first natural target group of time management studies and recipients of deliverables. Nonetheless, over time, more and more worker categories have been attracted in those included within the “beneficiaries” of these studies, as a better individual management of productivity at *any* level bears positive outcomes, not only for the single worker or employee, but for the market as well. Workers who can better manage their time are more efficient than those falling behind schedule. Those trends are not surprising, in the light of the growing flexibility of work in terms of organization and time schedules, that puts the burden of time management on employers instead of companies.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding this growing need of time mastering skills – as well as the great philosophical and scientific concern for the topic – there has traditionally been a lack of attention for this aspect in significant areas of education.

Several studies have examined the effects of time management training programs on job performance:<sup>12</sup> for instance, Van Eerde in 2003<sup>13</sup> found that participants showed a more frequent use of time management behaviors, that significantly decreased worrying and trait procrastination. Another study indicated that one’s success depends at 85% on soft skills and at 15% on “hard skills” (that are the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job).<sup>14</sup> Learning time management skills as a student in organized and well-rounded way allows to consolidate effective capacities before accessing to the labor market, other than enhancing academic results that increase their chances of better job-placement. Having the possibility to acquire and learn those skills enable students to develop a consolidated personalized method, which can easily be applied in the future.

If Universities are supposed to prepare people for their future professional life, a teaching on time management and efficient planning should be offered, if not even considered compulsory, since those abilities have evident effects on how jobs are and will be performed, as well as they might contribute in attaining an acceptable work-life balance.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME MANAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING FROM A HOLISTIC POINT OF VIEW

As mentioned, the first studies on time management were focused on managers, in order to enable them to reach better performances at work. Subsequently, time management investigations turned to the work environment and techniques in the field as a whole, reaching also employees and, in general, the overall organization of workplaces. Later on, the science of time management has evolved and further broadened its scope: many researches had started to find out the impact of time management and organization skills over the quality of people’s life in a broader and more general sense.

Other than business, time management has interested the self-development literature that follows a more holistic approach, encompassing life in general and also from an educational perspective.<sup>15</sup> In this context, time management represent a self-regulation

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance K.H. Blanchard & S. Johnson (1982), *The One Minute Manager*, William Morrow & Co., New York, NY.

<sup>11</sup> B. Aeon and H. Aguinis (2017), *It’s About Time: New Perspectives and Insights on Time Management*, in *Academy of Management Perspectives*, Vol. 31 No. 4, p. 324.

<sup>12</sup> Green & Skinner, 005; King & al., (1986), Macan (1994), Slaven & Totterdell (1993), Van Eerde (2003), Hall & Hirsch (1982); Orpen (1994).

<sup>13</sup> W. Van Eerde (2003), *Procrastination at work and time management training*, in *Journal of Psychology*, v. 137, p. 421 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Watts & Watts (2008)

<sup>15</sup> B. Zimmermann (2008), *Investigating self-regulation and motivation: Historical background, methodological developments, and future prospects*, in *American Educational Research Journal*, v. 45, p. 166 ff.; H.K. Ning & K. Downing (2010), *The reciprocal*

behavior that consists in a series of individual initiatives to monitor and regulate time use,<sup>16</sup> that also has beneficial outcomes for people's physical and mental health, and for overall satisfaction and well-being.

The relationship of time management with non-economic variables such as the ones mentioned above has been analyzed by various authors.<sup>17</sup> Person-related outcomes such as reduced anxiety, reduced job-induced and somatic tensions, job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction have been related to the learning and application of time management, organization and planning skills. In general, the outcomes have confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between the control of time (expressed through time management behaviors) and the so called work-life balance.

In this sense, an important aspect concerns the consideration of time management and its positive outcomes not only in the work environment – and within the professional performance – but also in relationship with personal life: work-life balance has been studied as an outcome of the application of time management skills.<sup>18</sup> In this perspective, the positive effects following a proper time management are naturally experienced at work, on the basis of the most recent approach that considers personal and professional life as two communicating vessels, where the dynamics occurring in one context necessarily influence the others'. Starting from the assumption that our lives are not made of clean, separated and disconnected "boxes", the natural interference between family life and work constitutes a field of study on the well-being of people as a consequence of a certain type of organization.<sup>19</sup> Since family and work "interfere" with each other<sup>20</sup> (so to say), if this relationship is conflictual it is possible to experience dissatisfaction and even health complaints. In this context, the learning and application of time management behaviors<sup>21</sup> has proven to be beneficial for the reduction of work-family conflicts, through a specific influence on the perceived control of time. This means that workers who perceive themselves as having greater control over their (work, but also family) time are less prone to stress caused by a dysfunctional work-family balance, to job dissatisfaction and to health problems.

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*relationship between motivation and self-regulation: A longitudinal study on academic performance, in learning and Individual Differences*, v. 69, p. 205 ff.; J. Xu, J. Du, C. Wang, F. Liu, B. Huang, M. Zhang & J. Lie (2020), *Intrinsic motivation, favorability, time management, and achievement: A cross-lagged panel analysis*, in *Learning and Motivation*, v. 72, p. 1 ff.

<sup>16</sup> P.R. Pintrich (2004), *A conceptual framework for assessing motivation and self-regulated learning in college students*, in *Educational Psychology Review*, v. 16, p. 385 ff.

<sup>17</sup> T.H. Macan (1994), Time management: test of a process model, in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, v. 79, p.381 ff.; R. Misra & M. McKean (2000), College students'academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction, in *American Journal of Health Studies*, v. 16, p. 41 ff.; Pérez-González, F., García-Ros, R. and Talaya González, I. (2003), "Learning styles and management skills of academic time in secondary education", *Revista Portuguesa de Educação*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 59-74; Strazdins, L., Griffin, A.L., Broom, D.H., Banwell, C., Korda, R. and Dixon, J. (2011), "Time scarcity: another health inequality?", *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 43 No. 3, pp. 545-559; Boixadós, M., Hernández-Encuentra, E. and Pousada, M. (2012), "Personal time management and quality of life in the network society", in Stoilov, T. (Ed.), *Time Management*, InTech, New York, NY, 19p., ISBN: 978-953-51-0335-6, available at: [www.intechopen.com/books/timemanagement/personal-time-management-and-quality-of-life-in-the-network-society](http://www.intechopen.com/books/timemanagement/personal-time-management-and-quality-of-life-in-the-network-society).

<sup>18</sup> Adams, G. A. & Jex, S. M. (1999). Relationships between time management, control, work-family conflict, and strain. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 4, 72-77.

<sup>19</sup> See G.A. Adams & S.M. Jex (1999), *Relationships between time management, control, work-family conflict, and strain*, in *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, v. 4, p. 72 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Reference is made, for the purpose of this contribution, to time-based conflicts where time demands associated with family roles and work roles interfere with each other: G.A. Adams & S.M. Jex (1999), *cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Following the accredited work of T.H. Macan (1994), Time management: test of a process model, *cit.*, time management behaviours are divided in three main categories: a) setting goals and priorities; b) making lists and schedules; c) organization.

From the above, it is apparent how soft skills acquired mainly for professional purposes, if correctly employed in other contexts, may exert positive direct or indirect externalities – either because a better work time management helps reducing a work-life conflict, either because methodologies and techniques for time management can be replicated in non-professional tasks as well increasing the capacity to perform task and reduce anxiety. The beneficial effects of time management are the result of a better self-perception of one's ability to be in charge of roles, tasks and duties. In other words, a more active role in the definition of one's goals and priorities, as well as a better schedule and application of organization techniques, determines a better psychological self-perception of one's success in managing all aspects of life.

#### 4. THE IMPACT OF TIME MANAGEMENT ON ACHIEVEMENT AND MOTIVATION

Researches showing that student's academic performances are influenced by various factors, among which there is time management, have also highlighted the importance of the role of Universities in identifying those factors and in improving the acquisitions that those factors and the related skills by students.<sup>22</sup> When studying the effects of time management behaviors on learning outcomes and academic results, it was found that there is a positive relationship between time management and achievement.<sup>23</sup> The latter indicates the capacity to be successful in an activity or, in other terms, the act of reaching a goal, thus concerning the actual outcomes of a performance.<sup>24</sup> The prior use of self-regulatory strategies of that kind showed subsequent better results in those terms.

Other than achievement, motivation is another factor which enables people to reach their goals. In psychology, motivation is defined as the drive or impulse that gives purpose or direction to human behavior.<sup>25</sup> Motivation psychology addresses the "whys" and "hows" of activities that reflect the pursuit of a particular goal.<sup>26</sup> According to some studies, a correlation between time management and motivation has been found, according to which prior time management conduces to higher motivation.<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand the reasons why certain self-regulation behaviors may increase motivation, it is necessary to introduce the concepts of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.<sup>28</sup> Intrinsic motivation is the impetus or inspiration to do something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable. When acting because of an intrinsic motivation, there is no obvious external reward, but the act is driven by an internal will: the end result satisfies the conscious, the ego, or the self-esteem in a positive way. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome: there are many

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<sup>22</sup> Womble, P. (2003). Impacts of Stress factors on college student's academic performance. *Undergraduate journal of Psychology*, 16(1), 16-23.

<sup>23</sup> B.K. Britton and A. Tesser (1991), *Effects of Time-Management Practices on College Grades*, cit.; J.C. Núñez, N. Suárez, P. Rosário, G. Vallejo, A. Valle & J.L. Epstein (2015), Relationships between perceived parental involvement in homework, student homework behaviors, and academic achievement: differences among elementary, junior high, and high school students, in *Metacognition and learning*, v. 10(3), p. 375 ff.

<sup>24</sup> P.H. Winne & J.C. Nesbit (2010), *The Psychology of Academic Achievement*, in *Annual Review of Psychology*, v. 61, p. 653 ff.

<sup>25</sup> APA Dictionary of Psychology, available at <https://dictionary.apa.org/> (last accessed November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Jutta Heckhausen and Heinz Heckhausen, Motivation and Action: Introduction and Overview, in Jutta Heckhausen, Heinz Heckhausen (eds.), *Motivation and Action*, 3rd ed., 2018, p. 1 ff.

<sup>27</sup> H.K. Ning & K. Downing (2010), *The reciprocal relationship between motivation and self-regulation*, cit., p. 205 ff.; J. Xu, J. Du, C. Wang, F. Liu, B. Huang, M. Zhang & J. Lie (2020), *Intrinsic motivation, favorability, time management, and achievement*, cit., p. 9 ff.

<sup>28</sup> In this contribution we follow the definitions given by R.M. Ryan and E.L. Deci within their Self-Determination Theory: see R.M. Ryan and E.L. Deci (2000), *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*, in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, v. 25, p. 54.

sources of extrinsic motivation, whose common trait is to stem from a source that is external and separate from (although not necessarily in conflict with) the inner goals and aspirations of the subject. Extrinsic motivation may also occur when a person carries out an action because there will be a tangible reward to it (such as good grades or an increment in salary).

According to some studies, there is a close relationship between time management and intrinsic motivation.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, the emotional implications that underline our intrinsic motivation, the value each person assigns to his or her work, and the self-perception of competences and abilities may affect to the way we manage our time. On the other hand, if we acquire time management skills, our perceived control of time may affect positively our motivation to perform a certain task. The underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to action are psychological, in the sense that increasing our perceived control of time makes us more confident in the performance of activities. The prior organization of time, eventually through the development of a clear plan and the reservation of specific time slots for the performance of an activity, raises the perceived importance of the tasks to be done and makes the subsequent, effective performance more likely.

In this context, time management seems to play an important role especially for students. Assuming that students' motivation and performances are often affected by their way of coping with academic stress and anxiety (*e.g.* following a negative result or before a deadline or an exam), students who take advantage of time management skills should be able to manage stress more effectively. In this regard, research has shown that time management skills bring more positive effects than leisure satisfaction activities,<sup>30</sup> that may have a role in reducing stress in the short-term, but may obviously obstacle the effective achievement of academic goals in the long run. In other terms, time management skills would consent a better use of time also for the purpose of engaging in leisure and stress-reducing activities and without compromising academic success.

As concerns the work environment, the management of human resources is very much focused on the improvement in performance of employers, with a view of increasing their efficiency through motivation.<sup>31</sup> Time management behaviors have been found to be positively correlated with job satisfaction, health<sup>32</sup> and motivation.<sup>33</sup> Time management also has an important role in reducing the risk of burnout. Burnout is a stress syndrome generally caused by heavy workloads or high performance demands in a job's given time throughout its lifespan. Other than the burnout that may occur during university studies, this phenomenon is one of the most studied problems in the field of organizational psychology.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, one of the factors that has a main role in job-related stress is time perceived as a

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<sup>29</sup> See the studies cited above, at note 34.

<sup>30</sup> R. Misra and M. McKean, College students' academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction, in *American Journal of Health Studies*, 2000, v. 16, p. 41 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Awosusi, O.O., (2011). *International Journal of Pharma and Bio Sciences*. Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, Motivation and Job Performances Among Nurses in the Ekiti State Environment of Nigeria, Volume 2; Ahmad, Nor Lela & Yusuf, Ahmad & Shobri, Nor & Wahab, Samsudin. (2012). *The Relationship between Time Management and Job Performance in Event Management*. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 65. 937-941; Erwin, M. (2009). *21st Century Time management*: New Delhi: time creation press; Goddard, R. (2001) *Time in Organisations*. *Journal of management and development*, vol. 20 Iss/pp. 19-27; Häfner A., Stock A. (2010), *Time Management Training and Perceived Control of Time at Work*, *The Journal of Psychology*, vol. 144, p. 429-447.

<sup>32</sup> Claessens, B. J. C., Eerde, W. V., Rutte, C. G., & Roe, R. A. (2007). *A review of the time management literature*. *Personnel Review*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 36(2), 255-276.

<sup>33</sup> Alvani, C. M. (2008). *Public management*. Tehran: Ney publication.

<sup>34</sup> Brummelhuis L.L., Hoeven C.L., Bakker A.B., Peper B., *Breaking through the loss cycle of burnout: The role of motivation*, in *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2011, v. 84, p. 268; Khodaveisi, M., Bahar, G. S., & Ahmadi, S. (2015). *The Relation between time management and job stress in physical education lecturers and faculty members of Hamedan Universities*. *Sport Science*, 8(1), 60- 63.

“resource”: the feeling of having too much to do and not enough time to do it is what causes the negative consequences linked to stress and burnout. “*Time famine*” is the expression used by Perlow to indicate this feeling.<sup>35</sup>

Among the factors that are particularly likely to influence burnout, motivation has been studied as a key to break the vicious circle between high demands, accumulation of tasks and the stress resulting from the heavy workload. In particular, intrinsic motivation can improve well-being and performance, since persons who are intrinsically motivated may have more persistence, concentration and effort.<sup>36</sup>

Since the good application of time management techniques may improve our perceived control of time and therefore may result beneficial for our intrinsic motivation, it could be possible to infer that an improvement in the management of time may have a certain role in preventing and/or reducing the risk of burnout as well. Moreover, people who have excellent time management skills can better cope with a heavy workload, thus preventing demand accumulation.<sup>37</sup>

On the basis of these considerations, institutions of higher education that offer courses in soft skills, and specifically on time management, usually serve their students well. Firstly, the acquisition and application of time management skills improves academic performance. Secondly, academic performance is connected and leads to better job opportunities. Thirdly, the positive effects of the acquisition of time management skills is able to affect offers students with techniques and methodologies that can be adapted to the work market and thus serve stress management also outside the academic environment, after graduation in the professional life.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROCRASTINATION AND PERFORMANCE: TIME MANAGEMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL AGAINST PROCRASTINATION.

Procrastination is defined as a behavior that consists in the avoidance of the execution of an intended action.<sup>39</sup> In other words, it is a dilatory tendency that consists in postponing tasks and activities that are perceived as unpleasant, using an alternative and less important activity as a distraction. The latter usually is an action that can be taken up and abandoned within a short time span.<sup>40</sup> This behavior produces an immediate – yet temporary – release from stress,<sup>41</sup> but may seriously negatively affect fundamental and groundbreaking academic and professional achievements and satisfaction in the long term. Procrastinators are more likely to be behind schedule on personal and professional projects, to study for an exams less hours than intended, to miss deadlines and to engage in higher level of anxiety and agitation. It is no coincidence that procrastination has been defined as the “*thief of life*”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Perlow, L. A. (1999). The time famine: Toward a sociology of work time. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 51-81.

<sup>36</sup> Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L. (2000), *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being*, in *American Psychologist*, v. 55, p. 68-78.

<sup>37</sup> Macan, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> As out outlined by Al Khatib AS, Time management and its relation to students’ stress, gender and academic achievement among sample of students at Al Ain University of science and technology, UAE. *International Journal of Business and Social Research (IJBSR)* 2014;4(5):47-58

<sup>39</sup> Van Eerde W. (2003) Procrastination at Work and Time Management Training, *The Journal of Psychology*, 137:5, 421-434.

<sup>40</sup> Sabini, J., & Silver, M. (1982). *Moralities of everyday life*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Tice, D. M., & Baumeister, R. F. (1997). Longitudinal study of procrastination, performance, stress, and health: The costs and benefits of dawdling. *Psychological Science*. 8, 454-458.

<sup>42</sup> Tracy B. (2013). *Time management*. New York, NY: AMACOM, p. 67.

There are many root causes of procrastination, since the phenomenon involves many psychological aspects<sup>43</sup>: people may adopt dilatory behaviors when motivation or enthusiasm are lacking, when they are worried about failing or when they engage in perfectionist tendencies. Therefore, procrastination cannot be defined solely as a “time management issue”, but rather is an “emotional management issues” that affects the way we use our time, the way we pursue our goals and the overall results of our work.

Yet, procrastination is one of the most discussed topics in the field of time management, because it is a highly diffused behavior among people<sup>44</sup> that affects the use of time resources.

One of the most recurring cause of procrastination is the emotional state connected with the fear of failure. This trait may also be connected with perfectionist tendencies. Individuals who possess the trait procrastination tend to believe they are not capable or are inadequate to perform a certain task and that assignments or job demands are too numerous and/or difficult.<sup>45</sup> It has been studied that it is plausible that a connection exists between procrastination and an individual’s sense of competence, meaning that a low self-perception of competence may rise fear of failure and therefore lead to procrastinating behaviors.<sup>46</sup> It follows that an intervention that targets general perceived competence and ability to successfully complete certain tasks can potentially reduce the risk of procrastination. Other than the specific primary competences that are necessary to engage in a professional activity, time management should be considered as a secondary skill that enables individual to have a better self-perception of their ability to perform certain tasks. The perceived control of time may help in increasing self-confidence in the possession of the necessary competences.

Indeed, the relationship between time management and procrastination has been studied in the sense that the first can have a positive impact on the second. Lay and Schouwenburg in 1993<sup>47</sup> presented the result of a research that intended to study the positive or negative relation between time management skills and procrastination, as well as between time management and negative states as agitation or depression. According to the study, a better perceived control of time (improved through time management skills) is able to reduce behaviors related to procrastination. This reduces, as a consequence, the occurrence of dilatory behavior, agitation and depression.

Van Eerde in 2003<sup>48</sup> argued that time management training can decrease significantly avoidance behavior and can lessen overall procrastination in employers. Similarly, other researchers<sup>49</sup> have concluded that people with more training in relation to time management

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<sup>43</sup> Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.

<sup>44</sup> Procrastination affects between 40 and 70 percent of university students and is closely related to academic performance (see Pastana, J.V. and Codina, N. (2014), “The academic performance of university students: their temporary perspectives and procrastinating tendencies”, in en Pérez-Serrano, G. and De-Juana Oliva, A. (Eds), *Education and Youth in Times of Change*, pp. 1-27).

<sup>45</sup> Ellis, A., & Knaus, W. J. (1977). *Overcoming procrastination*. New York: Institute for Rational Living; Solomon, L. J., & Rothblum, B. D. (1984). Academic procrastination: frequency and cognitive behavioural correlates. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 31, 503-509; Kachgal, M. M., Hansen, L. S., & Nutter, K. J. (2001). Academic procrastination prevention/intervention: Strategies and recommendations. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 25, 14-24.

<sup>46</sup> Haghbin, M., McCaffrey, A. & Pychyl (2012). T.A. The Complexity of the Relation between Fear of Failure and Procrastination. *J Rat-Emo Cognitive-Behav Ther*, vol. 30, 249-263.

<sup>47</sup> Lay, C., & Schouwenburg, H. (1993). Trait Procrastination, Time Management, and Academic Behavior. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 8, 647-662.

<sup>48</sup> Van Eerde W. (2003) *Procrastination at Work and Time Management Training*, cit.

<sup>49</sup> Gallander, M., Dilouya, B., Mark, S., Pratt, M., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J. and Adams, G. (2011), “Academic achievement in first-year university: who maintains their high school average?”, *High Education*, Vol. 62 No. 4, pp. 467-

are able to better control procrastination, through a more equitable allocation of time to tasks.

With specific regard to this last point, planning has positive outcomes as concerns the development of anti-procrastination habits. Planning can make a distant outcome more tangible, because it splits a final goal in smaller processes and steps<sup>50</sup>. Indeed, the most prominent challenge when it comes to pursuing a goal is getting started with goal-directed actions. In fact, even when a goal is clear and defined, the difficulties – especially for individuals who are prone to procrastination – are inherent to transform intentions into actions. This strong relationship between “task aversiveness” and procrastination is thought the result from a conflict between attractive long-term consequences of an action and less attractive short-term consequences<sup>51</sup>: this means that a person chooses to perform a task that is more attractive in the present moment, instead of a task that is more useful for the pursue of the goal.

In the light of the above, the individuation of well-defined actions that will conduce to a goal is useful for subsequent performance. This may also help to strengthen determination and self-control, because following a plan means consciously choosing to act according to the long-term outcome rather than distracting oneself with less important tasks.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This contribution fosters the idea that time management and efficient planning skills should be acquired before an individual enters the job market. If students already face many challenges in the management of their time during their academic career and those challenges are not processed in a well-rounded and constructive way, personal tendencies and habits will occur also in professional life.

The cited studies that have addressed many aspects of time management strengthen the idea that time management skills may have beneficial effects on achievement, motivation and general goal striving. Moreover, time management now results to be an important tool in order to reach a correct work-life balance, with positive effects in both aspects of life and – most of all – for the overall wellbeing of an individual.

A general conclusion that can be drawn from the present analysis is that time management is conditioned by the existence of a multitude of subjective and psychological elements, that make it difficult to elaborate a general and absolute theory and model for time management. If the task to create a time management model valid in any circumstance for anyone seems impossible to reach – than the quest of time management becomes more narrow, but feasible and social utile: increase awareness in people about factors subjective and objective factors that usually lower efficiency in productivity and help them understand to which degree they are exposed to such factors.<sup>52</sup> This first step can usually be carried out by ways of self-assessment instruments, by which persons review their approach to work or study methodology, and environment and are called to analyze the most critical habits.

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481, doi: 10.1007/s10734-010-9399-2; Häfner, A., Oberst, V. and Stock, A. (2014), “Avoiding procrastination through time management: an experimental intervention study”, *Educational Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 352-360.

<sup>50</sup> Pham L.B., Taylor S.E. (1999). From Thought to Action: Effects of Process-Versus Outcome-Based Mental Simulations on Performance, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 25, p. 250-260.

<sup>51</sup> Wieber, Frank & Gollwitzer, Peter. (2010). *Overcoming Procrastination through Planning*. Publ. in: *The thief of time: Philosophical essays on procrastination* / ed. by Andreou C., White M.D, New York : Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 185-205.

<sup>52</sup> M.A. Wratcher & R.O. Jones (1988), A time management workshop for adult learners, in *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, p. 566 ff.

Following all the above, it is certain that the current working scenario makes it essential to manage time efficiently: the logical consequence is time management being perceived as a skill that should be learned at the university. However, this is not always the case, since soft skills are not always reserved an adequate attention within college curricula.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the acquisition of those skills results to be very much needed in the higher education environment, where students start to face challenges related to the management of workload, the coordination of different duties and responsibilities, the fulfillment of the activities of academic and personal life.<sup>54</sup> Those difficulties of college students, in absence of concrete strategies and tools to overcome them, often result in higher levels of stress and anxiety,<sup>55</sup> in lower academic performances,<sup>56</sup> in the inability to reason from a long-term perspective in setting academic goals.<sup>57</sup>

The acquisition of time management and planning skills in college may result in more effective positive outcomes if those capacities are developed through specific and well-structured training programs. Moreover, employers have become more sensitive to candidates already having acquired sets of soft skills, which are now considered valuable assets in a future employee.<sup>58</sup> University curricula should align with this demand from the employment market, giving students the possibility to be aware of the importance of soft skills.

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<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, education systems should contribute in building soft skills, as a recognition of individuals' capacity, including non-academic knowledge: in this sense Levy, P. (2000), "La cibercultura y la educación", *Pedagogía y Saberes*, No. 14, pp. 23-31, available at: [doi.org/10.17227/01212494.14pys23.31](https://doi.org/10.17227/01212494.14pys23.31).

<sup>54</sup> See the studies by B.K. Britton and A. Tesser (1991), "Effects of Time-Management Practices on College Grades", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 83 No. 3, pp. 405-410; Lay, C.H. and Schouwenburg, H.C. (1993), "Trait procrastination, time management, and academic behavior", *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 647-66.

<sup>55</sup> T.H. Macan and C. Shahani (1990), "College Students' Time Management: Correlations With Academic Performance and Stress", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 82 No. 4, pp. 760-768.

<sup>56</sup> B.K. Britton and A. Tesser (1991), *Effects of Time-Management Practices on College Grades*, cit.; Najnin Khanam, Trilochan Sahu, E. V. Rao, S. K. Kar, Syeed Zahiruddin Quazi (2017) "A study on university student's time management and academic achievement", *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, Vol. 4 No. 12, pp. 4761-4765.

<sup>57</sup> M.A. Seinz, A.M. Ferrero, A. Ugidos, *Time management: skills to learn and put into practice*, in *Education and Training*, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> M.M. Robles (2012), *Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills*, cit., p. 453 ff.; P. Klaus (2010), *Communication Breakdown*, in *California Job Journal*, v. 28, p. 1 ff.