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Procrastination as Self-Regulatory Failure A Systematic Review and Integrative Resolution Model

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Abstract: Procrastination affects most students and working adults. It is often mislabeled as laziness or poor time management. Contemporary research instead frames it as self-regulatory failure, rooted in affect regulation, impulsivity, and temporal discounting. This article systematically reviews procrastination research published between 2005 and 2026. It maps how self-regulatory failure operates across academic, health, digital, and workplace contexts. It then proposes an integrative resolution model. A systematic review was conducted across PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed. Peer-reviewed studies with an explicit self-regulation framing were included. Thematic synthesis identified convergent mechanisms across domains. Four dominant theoretical accounts emerged: Temporal Motivation Theory, the Strength Model of Self-Control, the Emotion-Regulation Account, and the Research Domain Criterion framework. Findings converge on an intention–action gap driven by short-term mood repair. Existing models remain culturally narrow and rarely integrate non-Western volitional constructs. To address this gap, the article introduces the SANKALP Model, a seven-stage integrative framework. It bridges Western self-regulation theory with the Indian psychological constructs of *nişkāma karma* and *samatva*. Seven testable propositions and two illustrative vignettes demonstrate its applied logic. Procrastination is best understood as a culturally situated self-regulatory failure. The SANKALP Model offers an initial testable pathway toward volitional recovery, providing a structured basis for future empirical and applied validation, and extending procrastination theory beyond its Western-individualist foundations.

Keywords: *Procrastination; Self-regulatory failure; Temporal motivation theory; Emotion regulation; Volitional control; Indian Knowledge Systems; Karma-yoga; SANKALP model; Academic delay behavior*

1. Introduction

Procrastination is common among students, employees, and professionals worldwide (Steel, 2007). It is often dismissed as laziness or weak time management. This framing overlooks decades of empirical research. Contemporary psychology instead treats procrastination as self-regulatory failure (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). It reflects a breakdown in

affect regulation, impulse control, and goal prioritization. People delay tasks despite expecting worse outcomes later (Steel, 2007). Prevalence estimates make the scale of the problem clear. Steel's (2007) meta-analytic review estimated that most college students procrastinate regularly on academic tasks. Comparable patterns appear among working adults across many occupations. This prevalence holds

across cultural and national boundaries, suggesting procrastination reflects a broadly shared human vulnerability rather than an isolated cultural phenomenon.

This gap between intention and action carries real costs. Academic procrastination lowers performance and raises stress (Flett et al., 2012). Bedtime procrastination shortens sleep and worsens mood (Kroese et al., 2014). Digital procrastination fragments attention and delays daily tasks (Siebers et al., 2024). These costs accumulate across a person's academic, occupational, and personal life. Despite this evidence, procrastination research remains fragmented across domains. Academic, health, digital, and workplace studies rarely reference one another. Each domain has developed separate measures and models. This isolation limits theoretical integration and applied progress.

Existing systematic reviews reinforce this fragmentation. Most focus narrowly on one context, such as academic delay or bedtime avoidance (Turner & Hodis, 2023). Few reviews synthesize findings across domains under one self-regulatory-failure framework. Fewer still examine culturally diverse volitional constructs. This gap matters for theory and practice alike. A unified account could clarify which mechanisms generalize across contexts. It could also guide interventions that transfer across different life domains.

A further limitation concerns cultural scope. Most procrastination theories originate from Western, individualist research traditions. These traditions emphasize personal willpower and internal cognitive control. Non-Western psychological traditions offer additional constructs relevant to volitional recovery. Indian Knowledge Systems, in particular, describe action, attention, and effort in ways rarely tested empirically alongside Western self-regulation models. This review pursues three aims. First, it systematically synthesizes procrastination research published between 2005 and 2026. Second, it identifies shared mechanisms and persistent theoretical gaps. Third, it proposes an integrative resolution model.

The proposed model, SANKALP, extends existing self-regulation theory. It draws on Indian Knowledge

Systems, particularly *niṣkāma karma* and *ekāgratā*. These constructs describe non-attached action and sustained attention. Uniting Western self-regulation theory with these constructs serves two goals. It broadens the cultural foundation of procrastination theory. It also offers an initial, testable pathway toward volitional recovery, intended as a basis for future validation rather than a finished clinical tool.

The costs of unresolved procrastination extend well beyond individual discomfort. Missed deadlines affect academic standing, employment evaluations, and health outcomes over time. Chronic delay also strains relationships, when others depend on timely completion of shared tasks. Addressing procrastination therefore holds relevance for clinicians, educators, and organizational leaders alike. This interdisciplinary relevance motivates a review spanning multiple applied domains, rather than one confined to a single professional audience. Readers in clinical psychology, educational research, organizational behavior, and cross-cultural psychology each stand to benefit from this integrated account.

This review deliberately excludes procrastination arising primarily from diagnosed psychiatric conditions. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and major depressive episodes can produce delay behavior through distinct clinical mechanisms. Including these populations would conflate subclinical self-regulatory failure with symptoms of diagnosed disorders. This scope decision keeps the review's theoretical claims focused and internally consistent. Procrastination, as examined here, refers to subclinical, everyday delay. It differs from delay stemming from a diagnosed clinical impairment.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews four theoretical accounts of procrastination. Section 3 details the systematic review method and the SANKALP Model's development approach. Section 4 synthesizes findings across four thematic domains. Section 5 discusses cross-cutting mechanisms and cultural limitations. Section 6 introduces the SANKALP Model, with propositions and vignettes. Section 7 outlines practical and policy implications. Section 8 concludes with the article's core contribution.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

This section defines procrastination across contexts, then reviews four theoretical accounts informing the present synthesis.

2.1 Defining Procrastination Across Life Domains

Procrastination is the voluntary delay of an intended action, despite expecting worse outcomes (Steel, 2007). This definition applies across several life domains. Academic procrastination involves delaying coursework or study tasks. Bedtime procrastination involves delaying sleep without external constraints (Kroese et al., 2014). Digital procrastination involves task delay driven by smartphone and social media use (Siebers et al., 2024). Workplace procrastination involves delaying job-related duties despite deadlines. Organizational behavior research has increasingly examined how job design and managerial framing influence this workplace pattern.

2.2 Distinguishing Procrastination from Related Constructs

These domain definitions share a common structure. Each involves a clear intention, an available opportunity to act, and a voluntary delay despite both. This structure distinguishes procrastination from related but distinct constructs. Laziness implies low motivation toward any action at all. Task avoidance can reflect a reasoned, adaptive choice under some circumstances. Procrastination specifically involves acknowledged, self-defeating delay of a valued intention. A person procrastinating typically recognizes the costs of delay while still choosing to delay. This pattern differs from simple forgetting or genuine reprioritization.

2.3 Four Theoretical Accounts

Four theoretical accounts dominate current research. Each offers a distinct explanation for why intention fails to produce timely action.

Temporal Motivation Theory frames procrastination as a motivational calculation (Steel & König, 2006; Steel, 2007). Motivation rises with a task's expectancy of success and its value. Motivation falls as delay to reward increases and as impulsiveness rises. Tasks with distant rewards therefore receive

weaker motivational pull. This theory explains why deadlines close to the present increase task engagement. It also explains why highly impulsive individuals show steeper procrastination patterns than others. The theory integrates elements from expectancy-value theory and hyperbolic discounting into one motivational equation.

The Strength Model of Self-Control treats self-control as a limited resource (Baumeister et al., 2007). Exercising self-control in one task can deplete capacity for the next. Procrastination, under this view, reflects resource exhaustion rather than unwillingness. However, this account faces replication challenges. Job et al. (2010) found that depletion effects depend partly on personal beliefs about willpower. People who view willpower as unlimited show less depletion after effortful tasks. This suggests depletion is not a fixed biological limit. It may instead reflect learned expectations about one's own capacity.

The Emotion-Regulation Account reframes procrastination as short-term mood repair (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). People delay aversive tasks to escape negative feelings in the present moment. This repair prioritizes immediate comfort over the well-being of one's future self. Sirois et al. (2019) extended this account to bedtime procrastination. Self-compassion buffered the emotional discomfort driving delayed sleep onset.

The Research Domain Criterion framework links procrastination to broader biobehavioral systems (Shalev, 2018). It situates procrastination within positive valence and cognitive control systems. This framework connects procrastination research to clinical and neuroscience literature. It also highlights procrastination's transdiagnostic relevance across distress-related conditions. Anxiety, depression, and perfectionism frequently co-occur with chronic procrastination patterns.

2.4 A Complementary Lens: *Niṣkāma Karma* and *Samatva*

Each of these four theories illuminates part of the picture. Yet none fully addresses why people become so attached to task outcomes. Indian Knowledge Systems offer a complementary lens here. The

construct of *niṣkāma karma* describes action performed without attachment to results (Dubey et al., 2024). Related work links this orientation to lower psychological distress (Gannamraju & Chembrolu, 2025). The construct of *samatva*, or equanimity, similarly describes stability amid uncertain outcomes. Together, these constructs suggest that reducing outcome-attachment may lower avoidance directly. This differs from only managing avoidance's downstream emotional consequences. A person practicing *samatva* may experience less anticipatory anxiety before beginning a difficult task. This mechanism differs subtly from Western emotion-regulation strategies, which typically manage emotion after it arises.

2.5 Measurement Instruments and the Comparative Theoretical Matrix

Measurement instruments have evolved alongside these theoretical accounts. General procrastination

scales capture trait-level tendency toward delay across situations. Domain-specific scales, such as instruments measuring bedtime or academic procrastination, capture more targeted behavior patterns. This measurement diversity supports the domain-by-domain synthesis presented in Section 4. It also complicates direct comparison across studies using different instruments. This review adopts a middle position, treating procrastination as one construct expressed differently across contexts.

Table 1 compares these four theories directly. It makes explicit a shared blind spot: none directly addresses outcome-attachment as a driver of avoidance. This gap motivates the integrative model proposed in Section 6. These four theories are not mutually exclusive. Many researchers now treat discounting, depletion, and emotion regulation as complementary components within a single procrastination episode, rather than as competing explanations.

Table 1 Comparative Theoretical Matrix of Procrastination Theories

Theory	Core Mechanism	Key Citation	Primary Limitation
Temporal Motivation Theory	Motivation as a function of expectancy, value, delay, and impulsiveness	Steel & König (2006); Steel (2007)	Assumes relatively uniform discounting across contexts
Strength Model of Self-Control	Self-control as a limited, depletable resource	Baumeister et al. (2007)	Depletion effects show replication challenges (Job et al., 2010)
Emotion-Regulation Account	Procrastination as short-term mood repair	Sirois & Pychyl (2013)	Underspecifies a structured pathway to volitional recovery
RDoC Self-Regulation Failure Framework	Links procrastination to positive valence and cognitive control systems	Shalev (2018)	Largely biobehavioral; limited cultural specificity

Note. This table compares the four dominant theoretical accounts reviewed in Section 2, highlighting the shared gap that motivates the SANKALP Model in Section 6.

3. Methodology

This section describes two related procedures. The first is the systematic review that grounds Sections 2, 4, and 5. The second is the model development process that produced the SANKALP Model in Section 6.

3.1 Systematic Review Approach

This review searched four databases: PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed. The search covered records published between 2005 and 2026. This range captures foundational self-regulation theory alongside the most recent domain-specific studies.

Eligible studies met two criteria. First, they had to be peer-reviewed. Second, they had to frame procrastination explicitly through a self-regulation lens. Studies explaining delay solely through diagnosed clinical conditions, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or major depressive disorder, were excluded. This exclusion keeps the review's scope aligned with subclinical, everyday procrastination, as stated in Section 1.

Search terms combined "procrastination" with domain-specific terms, including "academic," "bedtime," "digital," and "workplace." Titles and abstracts were screened first for relevance. Full texts of potentially eligible studies were then read against the inclusion criteria above.

Quality appraisal followed the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool, which accommodates the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs found across this literature (Hong et al., 2018). Two reviewers appraised each included study independently. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Interrater agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa (McHugh, 2012).

Included studies then underwent thematic synthesis. Findings were first coded openly, then grouped into descriptive themes within each domain. These descriptive themes were compared across domains to identify convergent mechanisms. This comparison produced the three cross-cutting mechanisms reported in Section 5: temporal discounting, affect-avoidance, and depleted volitional capacity.

3.2 Model Development Approach

The SANKALP Model was developed through conceptual mapping rather than new data collection. This mapping proceeded in four steps.

First, the four theoretical accounts reviewed in Section 2 were examined for a shared limitation. All four theories explain avoidance but underspecify a path back to sustained action. None directly addresses outcome-attachment as a driver of delay.

Second, candidate Indian Knowledge Systems constructs were identified for their conceptual fit with

this gap. Constructs were prioritized when existing empirical or applied work already linked them to psychological outcomes. Examples include *niṣkāma karma*'s association with lower distress (Gannamraju & Chembrolu, 2025) and Dubey et al.'s (2024) analysis of duty-based, non-attached action.

Third, each selected construct was paired with a specific self-regulatory mechanism from Sections 2 and 5. This pairing produced seven stages. Each stage combines one psychological mechanism with one Indian Knowledge Systems construct.

Fourth, one testable proposition was written for each stage, specifying a measurable comparison. Two composite, non-clinical vignettes were then drafted to illustrate how the seven stages might apply in practice. These vignettes are illustrative only. They do not constitute evidence that the model works.

4. Thematic Synthesis of Findings

This section synthesizes findings across four thematic domains, highlighting convergent and divergent mechanisms.

4.1 Academic Procrastination

Academic procrastination represents the most studied domain in this literature. Steel's (2007) meta-analytic review found consistent links between procrastination, impulsiveness, and low self-efficacy. This meta-analysis remains a foundational reference point for subsequent academic procrastination research. Flett et al. (2012) identified automatic negative thoughts as a distinct predictor of academic delay. These thoughts include self-doubt and anticipated failure, arising just before task engagement. Anxiety frequently mediates the relationship between these cognitions and observed delay. Abdi Zarrin et al. (2020) extended this picture. They found that fear of failure and weaker self-regulation subscales jointly predicted academic procrastination among university students. Tao et al. (2025) further linked stronger self-regulated learning strategies to lower academic procrastination and higher academic success among college students, using structural equation modeling. Together, these findings support a discounting-plus-cognition model of academic procrastination. Reducing negative automatic thoughts alone appears insufficient.

Addressing the discounting of distant academic rewards likely requires complementary intervention components. Most academic procrastination research relies on self-report measures, which may inflate associations through shared method variance. Behavioral measures of actual task delay remain comparatively rare across this literature.

4.2 Bedtime Procrastination

Bedtime procrastination represents a newer but rapidly growing domain. Kroese et al. (2014) defined it as delaying sleep without external constraints. Their later work confirmed that general self-regulation capacity predicts bedtime delay directly (Kroese et al., 2016). Kühnel et al. (2018) extended this domain through a daily diary design. They found that self-control resources available in the evening, alongside chronotype, jointly predicted same-day bedtime procrastination. Sirois et al. (2019) extended this domain further by testing emotion regulation directly. Self-compassion reduced bedtime procrastination by lowering the emotional discomfort of ending the day's activities. This finding parallels the emotion-regulation account described in Section 2. Bedtime procrastination further illustrates a distinctive feature: the delayed behavior, sleep, carries no external deadline or evaluator. This absence of external pressure highlights how purely internal, self-imposed intentions can still fail through the same regulatory mechanisms.

4.3 Digital Procrastination

Digital procrastination has emerged alongside near-universal smartphone use. Siebers et al. (2024) examined fragmented, "sticky" smartphone use patterns directly. Their study tracked real-time phone use alongside self-reported task delay across several days. Frequent, brief phone checks fragmented attention across the day. This fragmentation, rather than total screen time alone, predicted subsequent task delay. Klingelhofer et al. (2026) approached this domain from the opposite direction. Using experience-sampling data from 237 young adults, they found that stronger goal conflicts predicted voluntary digital disconnection. This disconnection, in turn, was associated with less procrastination. Together, these two studies suggest that both the causes of digital distraction and the deliberate strategies used to counter

it warrant continued research attention. This distinction carries direct relevance for digital wellness policy, discussed further in Section 7. Broader cross-cultural synthesis work similarly links sustained digital exposure to attention collapse and burnout (Mallick, 2026). This work reinforces attention fragmentation as a mechanism worth addressing directly, rather than through screen-time limits alone.

4.4 Workplace and General-Life Procrastination

Workplace and general-life procrastination remain comparatively underserved by recent systematic synthesis. Recent work has begun to address this gap directly. Metin et al. (2016) developed and validated a measure of procrastination at work. This measure distinguishes workplace procrastination from related constructs such as cyberloafing and counterproductive work behavior. Their work situates workplace procrastination explicitly as a self-regulatory failure of work tasks, consistent with the framing adopted throughout this review. Sirois et al. (2017) found consistent associations between multidimensional perfectionism and procrastination severity more broadly. Socially prescribed perfectionism, involving fear of others' judgment, showed the strongest association. Goal proximity also moderates workplace delay; tasks with distant deadlines receive less immediate engagement. Breaking distant deadlines into smaller, proximal milestones may therefore reduce delay more effectively than reminders about the final deadline alone. Comparing across all four themes, self-report measures dominate the available evidence base. Direct behavioral tracking remains comparatively underused outside the digital-procrastination literature.

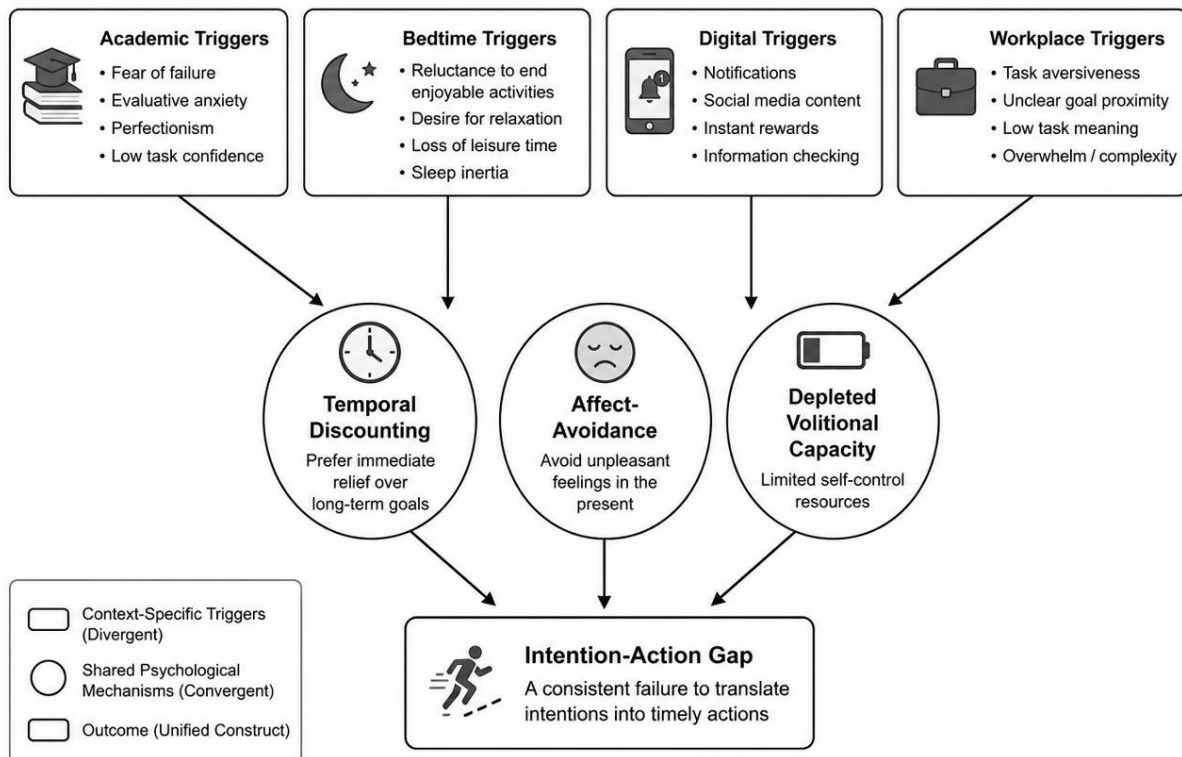
4.5 Cross-Domain Summary

Table 2 summarizes these four themes alongside their representative studies and key mechanisms. Figure 1 presents a conceptual map linking domain-specific triggers to shared underlying processes. Reviewing these four themes together reveals that procrastination research has developed largely in parallel silos. Cross-referencing between domains, such as testing whether bedtime procrastination predicts subsequent academic delay, remains rare in the current literature.

Table 2. *Thematic Synthesis Matrix*

Theme	Representative Studies	Key Mechanism	Identified Gap
Academic procrastination	Steel (2007); Flett et al. (2012); Abdi Zarrin et al. (2020); Tao et al. (2025)	Temporal discounting; automatic negative cognitions; self-regulated learning deficits	Over-reliance on self-report measures
Bedtime procrastination	Kroese et al. (2014, 2016); Kühnel et al. (2018); Sirois et al. (2019)	Self-regulation failure without external deadline; chronotype interaction; emotion regulation	Limited integration with daytime self-regulatory failure
Digital procrastination	Siebers et al. (2024); Klingelhofer et al. (2026)	Attentional fragmentation from "sticky" smartphone use; goal-conflict-driven disconnection	Sparse integration with emotion-regulation and IKS-based accounts
Workplace and perfectionism-linked procrastination	Metin et al. (2016); Sirois et al. (2017)	Outcome-anxiety avoidance; goal-proximity discounting	No attachment-based intervention yet tested

Note. This table summarizes the four thematic domains synthesized in Section 4.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Map of Cross-Domain Self-Regulatory Failure*

Note. This figure illustrates how four domain-specific triggers converge on three shared mechanisms, which together produce the intention–action gap described in Section 5.

5. Discussion — Mechanisms and Cross-Cutting Patterns

This discussion integrates review findings around shared mechanisms and considers cultural limitations in current theory. Considered together, the four thematic domains reviewed in Section 4 point toward common underlying processes, despite their surface-level differences.

5.1 Three Recurring Mechanisms

Three mechanisms recur across all four thematic domains reviewed here. The first is temporal discounting, in which distant rewards lose motivational weight (Steel & König, 2006). This mechanism appeared consistently across academic, workplace, and even bedtime contexts, where sleep's health benefits lie in the future. The second is affect-avoidance, in which present discomfort outweighs future benefit (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). The third is depleted volitional capacity, though its status remains contested (Job et al., 2010). These three mechanisms rarely operate in isolation. A student avoiding an assignment may discount its distant grade, dislike the associated anxiety, and feel genuinely fatigued from earlier tasks that day.

5.2 Why Single-Factor Interventions Underperform

This convergence explains why single-factor interventions often underperform. Time-management training alone rarely addresses the affective drivers of delay. Motivational interventions alone rarely address discounting or attentional fragmentation. Interventions combining multiple mechanisms show more consistent effects across studies. This pattern suggests procrastination is multiply determined, not reducible to one deficit. It also suggests that intervention design should match a person's dominant mechanism, rather than applying a single generic technique to every case.

5.3 The Western-Individualist Framing Problem

A further pattern concerns the Western-individualist framing shared by all four core theories. Temporal Motivation Theory, the Strength Model, the

Emotion-Regulation Account, and the RDoC framework each originated in Western research settings. Each emphasizes personal cognition, individual willpower, or internal biological systems. None examines relational or spiritual constructs common in other cultural traditions. This narrowness limits the generalizability of existing procrastination theory. It also risks pathologizing behaviors that some cultural traditions frame through collective duty or spiritual practice, rather than individual deficiency. This limitation is not unique to procrastination theory. Locus of control, a related self-regulation construct, has similarly been reconsidered through Indian philosophical frameworks (Mallick, 2025).

5.4 Outcome-Attachment as an Underexamined Driver

Outcome-attachment offers one underexamined driver worth highlighting here. Many procrastination episodes involve fear tied to a task's outcome, not the task itself. Ego-investment in performance can heighten anticipated failure and evaluative anxiety. This attachment intensifies the very discomfort that emotion-regulation accounts describe. Reducing attachment to outcomes, rather than only managing resulting emotion, may offer a more direct intervention target. The perfectionism findings reviewed in Section 4 support this reasoning. Socially prescribed perfectionism, involving fear of others' judgment, showed the strongest link to procrastination severity (Sirois et al., 2017). This pattern reflects outcome-attachment directed toward external evaluation, rather than toward the task itself.

5.5 Bridge to the SANKALP Model

Indian psychological traditions describe this reduction explicitly. *Niṣkāma karma* frames action as valuable independent of its result. *Samatva* frames emotional stability as achievable regardless of outcome. Recent applied research supports the psychological relevance of these constructs (Gannamraju & Chembrolu, 2025). Neither construct has yet been tested directly within procrastination intervention research. This represents a clear empirical

opportunity, given the theoretical plausibility outlined above. This gap motivates the model introduced next. Section 6 proposes an integrative framework combining established self-regulation mechanisms with these Indian Knowledge Systems constructs. It retains empirical grounding while extending procrastination theory beyond its current cultural boundaries.

6. The SANKALP Model: An Integrative Resolution Framework

6.1 Rationale

Existing theories describe self-regulatory failure well but underspecify recovery. Few offer a structured pathway from delay back to sustained action. The SANKALP Model addresses this gap directly. Its name draws on the Sanskrit word *sankalp*, meaning resolute intention. This naming reflects the model's core aim: rebuilding volitional resolve after failure, rather than only explaining why failure occurs. The model retains the empirical mechanisms reviewed in Sections 2 and 5. It adds a structured sequence for applying them, moving from awareness toward sustained action.

6.2 The Seven SANKALP Stages

The model proposes seven sequential, cyclical stages. Each stage pairs a psychological mechanism with a corresponding Indian Knowledge Systems construct.

Stage S — Self-Monitoring involves noticing the avoidance impulse as it arises. This stage draws on *sākṣī bhāva*, or witness awareness (Singh, 2023), a reflective, non-reactive stance toward one's own mental states. Practically, this involves a brief pause before switching away from an intended task.

Stage A — Affective-Avoidance Disruption involves naming the emotion driving delay. Labeling discomfort explicitly reduces its automatic influence over behavior. This stage draws on a construct provisionally termed *Bhāva-Paricaya*, an emotion-awareness construct. The construct provisionally termed *Bhāva-Paricaya* draws on two independent classical strands, not a single attested source. Ghosh's (1967) translation of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* establishes *bhāva* as a technical term for psychological states —

permanent, transient, and involuntary — that underlie emotional experience and its outward expression. Shukla's (1973) critical edition of Asaṅga's *Śrāvakabhūmi* separately identifies *paricaya* (*paricayabala*, "power of familiarity") as one of six *balas* that stabilize attention through sustained, deliberate engagement with an object of awareness. Read together, these sources support a construct in which an emotional state (*bhāva*) becomes available to conscious processing through repeated familiarization (*paricaya*). Simply identifying an emotion as "anxiety" or "boredom" can create enough psychological distance to prevent immediate avoidance.

Stage N — Nishkama Karma Reframing involves reframing the task as action without attachment to outcome. This stage draws on *niṣkāma karma* (Dubey et al., 2024), reducing the outcome-anxiety identified in Section 5. Rather than avoiding a feared result, the person acts because the action itself holds value.

Stage K — Karma-Yogic Engagement involves scripting the task as duty rather than preference. Framing work as a responsibility lowers the decision threshold required to begin. This stage draws on *karma-yoga* (Dubey et al., 2024), the practice of dedicated, outcome-independent action.

Stage A — Attention Anchoring involves sustaining focus once a task has begun. This stage draws on *ekāgratā*, or single-pointed concentration, a construct examined within Patañjali's yoga philosophy (Pattni, 2016). Brief anchoring practices, such as focused breathing, support sustained engagement during effortful work. This stage directly counters the fragmentation pattern documented in digital procrastination research (Siebers et al., 2024; Klingelhofer et al., 2026).

Stage L — Lakshya Clarity involves aligning the task with a clearly stated goal hierarchy. This stage draws on *lakṣya*, meaning a defined aim or target. Clear goal alignment counters the discounting mechanism central to Temporal Motivation Theory.

Stage P — Prayatna Sustenance involves renewing effort through short, scheduled recovery periods. This stage draws on *prayatna*, meaning

sustained, deliberate effort. Structured recovery, rather than depletion-driven withdrawal, supports continued engagement across a task's duration. This stage directly

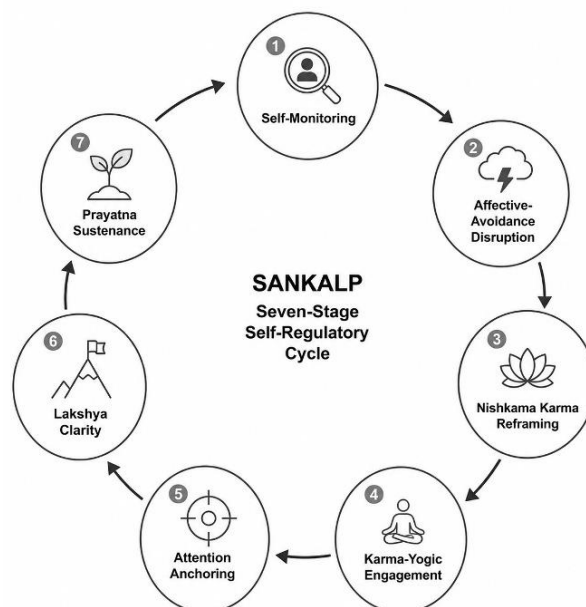
addresses the replication concerns surrounding ego depletion. It treats recovery as a planned practice rather than an involuntary collapse.

Table 3. *SANKALP Stage Mapping*

Stage	Mechanism	IKS Construct	Intervention Technique	Proposition
S — Self-Monitoring	Discounting/affect awareness	Sākṣī bhāva (witness awareness)	Brief mindfulness check-in before task-switching	P1
A — Affective-Avoidance Disruption	Emotion labeling	Bhāva-Paricaya	Affect-labeling exercise	P2
N — Nishkama Karma Reframing	Outcome-anxiety reduction	Niṣkāma karma	Outcome-detachment reframing script	P3
K — Karma-Yogic Engagement	Duty framing	Karma-yoga	Duty-based task scripting	P4
A — Attention Anchoring	Sustained focus	Ekāgratā	Single-pointed focus practice	P5
L — Lakshya Clarity	Goal-hierarchy alignment	Lakṣya	Goal-mapping exercise	P6
P — Prayatna Sustenance	Effort renewal	Prayatna	Structured recovery cycles	P7

Note. This table maps the seven SANKALP stages described in Section 6, linking each mechanism to its corresponding construct, technique, and testable proposition.

Figure 2. *SANKALP Cyclical Process Model*



Note. This figure depicts the seven SANKALP stages arranged in a circular, cyclical flow, reflecting the model's recursive and selectively applicable structure described in Section 6.

6.3 Testable Propositions

Seven propositions follow directly from the model's structure.

- **P1:** Higher self-monitoring frequency will predict lower procrastination severity.
- **P2:** Affect-labeling before task onset will reduce measured onset delay.
- **P3:** Nishkama karma reframing will reduce outcome-anxiety more than standard cognitive reappraisal.
- **P4:** Duty-framed task scripting will shorten intention–action latency, relative to preference-framed scripting.
- **P5:** Attention-anchoring practice will reduce task-switching frequency during work sessions.
- **P6:** Goal-hierarchy clarity will moderate the relationship between discounting and delay.
- **P7:** Structured effort-recovery cycles will reduce same-day relapse into avoidance, relative to unstructured rest.

Each proposition specifies a measurable mechanism and a testable comparison. Future empirical work can evaluate these propositions using experimental or longitudinal designs. Support for early-stage propositions would not guarantee support for later ones. This allows partial validation of the model.

The model's scope carries clear boundary conditions. SANKALP addresses subclinical procrastination, consistent with this review's overall scope. Individuals whose delay stems primarily from diagnosed clinical conditions may require additional or alternative treatment approaches. These approaches should apply alongside, rather than instead of, these seven stages. The seven stages need not always occur in strict sequence.

6.4 Illustrative Vignettes

Two original composite vignettes illustrate the model's applied logic. Neither depicts a real individual.

These vignettes illustrate the model's internal logic. They are not evidence of its effectiveness, which remains to be tested empirically.

Vignette A — Ananya's Deadline Spiral. Ananya, a graduate student, repeatedly delays a required thesis chapter. She fears critique from her supervisor more than she dislikes the writing itself. Applying Stage S, she notices her impulse to check messages instead of writing. Applying Stage A, she labels the feeling as evaluative anxiety, not simple boredom. Applying Stage N, she reframes the chapter as an act of scholarly contribution, independent of her supervisor's reaction. This reframing reduces her outcome-anxiety enough to begin drafting. Over subsequent sessions, she applies Stage K by treating daily writing as a scholarly duty, scheduled like any other responsibility.

Vignette B — Vikram's Digital Drift. Vikram, a mid-career professional, delays a quarterly report through repeated smartphone checking. His attention fragments across short, frequent app checks throughout the afternoon. Applying Stage A, he anchors his attention using a brief, focused breathing practice before starting. Applying Stage L, he aligns the report with his stated goal of professional advancement. Applying Stage P, he schedules two short breaks rather than allowing open-ended phone use. Applying Stage S in later sessions, he notices the urge to check his phone before acting on it, arriving earlier than in previous sessions.

Both vignettes demonstrate the model's sequential logic. Stages can be applied selectively, depending on which mechanism dominates a given delay episode.

7. Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

This section translates review findings and the SANKALP Model into applied guidance, addressing clinical, educational, and research implications in turn.

7.1 Clinical and Counseling Applications

Clinical and counseling practice can draw directly on the SANKALP sequence. Brief, structured interventions could introduce clients to self-monitoring

and affect-labeling first. These initial stages require minimal training and can be practiced within a single session. Later stages, involving reframing and attention practice, may suit longer-term therapeutic work. Nishkama karma reframing may particularly benefit clients whose delay stems from perfectionism or fear of evaluation. This approach complements, rather than replaces, standard cognitive restructuring.

7.2 Organizational Applications

Organizational settings offer a further application context beyond education and clinical work. Managers could introduce duty-framed task scripting during onboarding or project planning, drawing on the workplace-specific evidence reviewed in Section 4 (Metin et al., 2016). Framing responsibilities as shared organizational duties, rather than optional preferences, may reduce workplace delay without requiring individual therapy.

7.3 Educational and Digital-Wellness Applications

Educational institutions face growing pressure to address digital-era procrastination specifically. Siebers et al. (2024) linked fragmented smartphone use directly to academic task delay. Klingelhofer et al. (2026) showed that deliberate digital disconnection can reduce procrastination when goal conflicts are high. Campus digital-wellness policies could incorporate attention-anchoring practices into study-skills programming, targeting use patterns rather than blanket screen-time restrictions.

7.4 Measurement Development

Measurement development represents a necessary next step for this research program. No validated self-report instrument currently captures SANKALP-specific mechanisms. Future work should develop and validate a corresponding scale, following established procedures for psychometric instrument development. Item development should draw on existing procrastination and self-regulation measures. It should also add subscales specific to outcome-attachment and attention-anchoring.

7.5 Future Research Priorities

Four priorities define the broader future research agenda. First, cross-domain validation should test

whether SANKALP stages operate similarly across academic, digital, and workplace contexts. Second, longitudinal designs should test the directional relationship between procrastination and psychological distress. Third, cross-cultural replication should examine whether *niškāma karma* and *ekāgratā* function similarly outside Indian cultural contexts. Fourth, intervention studies should directly compare SANKALP-informed programs against existing single-mechanism interventions, using randomized designs with active control conditions.

The Focus trial protocol illustrates the kind of registered, outcome-focused design this agenda calls for (Åsberg & Bendtsen, 2023). It evaluates a brief digital procrastination intervention among Swedish university students. Its results, once published, will offer a useful comparison point for SANKALP-informed intervention trials.

These priorities collectively extend procrastination research beyond description toward tested, applicable resolution. They also position Indian Knowledge Systems as testable contributors to global psychological science, rather than as purely philosophical traditions. Achieving this integration requires sustained collaboration between psychological researchers and scholars of Indian philosophy. This collaboration should ensure conceptual fidelity alongside empirical rigor.

8. Conclusion

This conclusion synthesizes the review's central contribution and reflects on the broader significance of treating self-regulatory failure as a cross-culturally relevant phenomenon.

8.1 Summary of Contributions

Procrastination is best understood as self-regulatory failure, not personal weakness. This reframing carries implications for how educators, clinicians, and organizations respond to chronic delay. Four Western theories, reviewed here, each explain part of this failure. Temporal Motivation Theory explains discounting. The Strength Model explains resource limits, despite replication challenges. The Emotion-Regulation Account explains short-term mood repair.

The RDoC framework situates procrastination within broader biobehavioral systems.

As established in Sections 2 and 5, none of these theories fully addresses outcome-attachment as a driver of avoidance. This shared gap limited both theoretical completeness and practical intervention design. The SANKALP Model addresses this gap directly, without discarding existing empirical foundations. It builds upon, rather than replaces, decades of self-regulation research.

8.2 Broader Significance and Outlook

By integrating *niṣkāma karma*, *karma-yoga*, *ekāgratā*, and related constructs, the model relocates procrastination theory outside a purely Western-individualist frame. Seven testable propositions ground the model in falsifiable, measurable claims. Two illustrative vignettes demonstrate its intended application across distinct procrastination contexts. Empirical testing of the model itself remains the necessary next step.

This integration serves scholars and practitioners in different ways. Scholars gain a testable framework bridging established theory with underused cultural constructs. Practitioners gain a structured, stage-based sequence suitable for future brief or extended intervention work, once validated. This dual relevance reflects the article's broader aim: connecting rigorous theory review to concrete, testable practice.

Future empirical testing will determine how well SANKALP's propositions hold across populations and contexts. Cross-cultural replication remains especially important, given the model's Indian psychological foundations. Nonetheless, this review demonstrates that procrastination theory can meaningfully expand beyond its current cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Self-regulatory failure, and its resolution, need not remain a solely Western psychological narrative.

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