Perfectionism, Decision-Making and Workplace Performance

How the way we make decisions may be the missing link

The key finding:
Fear of making mistakes is linked to poorer performance, largely through its impact on decision-making.

1 What's the problem with perfectionism?

Perfectionism has two important dimensions. You can show one or both.

Failure Avoiding Perfectionism
Driven by a fear of making mistakes.

Excellence Seeking Perfectionism
A drive for high standards.

Failure avoiding perfectionism is often linked to lower workplace performance. Perfectionism, particularly the fear of failure aspect, has been increasing in Western student populations in recent decades.

2 How might decision-making explain the link?

The way we approach decisions can be more or less helpful. This study focused on three less-effective decision-making behaviours:

Procrastination
We delay making decisions.

Buck-passing
We shift responsibility to someone else.

Hypervigilant
We show panic-like behaviours.

Vigilant Decision-Making (more effective)
We carefully assess the options before deciding. This is a helpful, adaptive approach.

3 What did the research find?

The study found a clear link between fear of failure, less effective decision-making and weaker workplace performance.

Failure Avoiding Perfectionism
Fear of making mistakes

→ **Less Effective Decision-Making**
Procrastination
Buck-passing
Hypervigilant

→ **Weaker Workplace Performance**
Lower self-rated performance

70% of the observed relationship between failure avoiding perfectionism and performance was explained by less effective decision-making.

Having high standards is not enough to cancel out the decision-making difficulties associated with fear of failure.
Excellence seeking perfectionism did not significantly reduce the negative effects on performance.

4 An interesting discovery

Vigilant decision-making may be a separate, more helpful approach, rather than simply the opposite of less effective decision-making.

Higher levels of vigilant decision-making were associated with a weaker negative relationship between fear of failure and performance.

This finding is promising but needs more research.

5 Why does this matter?

Perfectionism is often considered part of someone's personality and can be difficult to change.

This research suggests a practical opportunity: rather than trying to change how perfectionistic someone is, **we may be able to improve performance by helping them make better decisions.**

6 About the research

237 employed adults who had some control over their decision-making completed an anonymous online questionnaire.

The study shows associations at one point in time, so we cannot be certain about cause and effect. More research is needed, particularly on ways to support better decision-making in the workplace.

Want to know more?
Click here or Scan to read the full Research Summary

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