



Batch-proofing: An antidote to procrastination

By Steve Vijayan

Procrastination is ubiquitous. In some instances, it is due to batching, when you let your work pile up and you process all your work at once. A few examples: mail piling up in your mail holder, dishes piling up in your kitchen sink or dirty clothes piling up in your clothes basket.

Here is one example of how batching causes procrastination. Say you are responsible for washing dishes in your home. Your family has breakfast at around 8:30 a.m. After everybody is finished, you collect dirty dishes and put them in the kitchen sink. You do not feel like washing right away so you rinse and wash after lunch.

Around 10:30 a.m., other dishes from snacks and coffee cups land in the sink. Now you look at the pile in the sink and think, "This will take me 15 minutes to rinse dishwasher-safe items and hand-wash non-dishwasher items, but I do not feel like spending 15 minutes to do it now." A few hours go by and it's time for lunch, generating more dirty plates, cutlery and dishes.

In a few hours, the same scenario plays out after dinner, when you notice the sink is overflowing and you must wash all the dishes accumulated over the day in one sitting. It takes a good 30 to 45 minutes to complete the job, along with some back ache and stress.

What happened in this example is that procrastination led to batching, which in turn led to more procrastination.

So how to break this vicious cycle? Ideally, if dirty dishes are washed immediately, there will be no pile (batch). In Lean terminology, this practice is called one-piece flow, a concept where you completely process each item before going to the next without allowing a batch to build up. In the dish-washing example, you would wash dishes from breakfast before having lunch. However, it is human nature to

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In our example, the size of the kitchen sink created the option to procrastinate; the larger the sink, the more dishes it can hold and the longer you can put off the consequences. In my previous home, the kitchen sink was so small it could hold no more than two medium-sized dishes, and if I did not wash dirty dishes right away, they would overflow onto the countertop. The small size of the sink made me wash my dishes more frequently and batch-proofed the dish washing process.

There are many examples of batching in the healthcare industry. One example where batching occurs in healthcare and where batch-proofing

could help is related to the timely closure of patient encounters by providers.

In outpatient specialty clinics, physicians and providers are required to enter notes in the electronic health record (EHR) for every encounter and close the encounter in the EHR for two important reasons, according to Dr. Neil Rellosa. First, the patient's primary care provider will be able to access notes from the specialty care physician only if the encounter is closed in the EHR. Second, only after the encounter is closed can the physician bill the insurance provider. Physicians and providers have the option to enter notes and close the encounter after multiple hours or even days after seeing the patient.

If encounters are not closed quickly, it can negatively affect the continuity of patients' care and delay reimbursement.

What if the encounter-closing process was batch-proofed? What does batch-proofing look like in that scenario? I will leave that for physicians and administrators to figure out.

Do you have the option to batch and procrastinate in your workplace or industry? Are there batching-enablers that you can identify and batch-proof? ❖

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