Chapter #4

THE ROLE OF TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES AND (CAREER DECISION) SELF-EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

The emotional intelligence and career decision-making analysis contributes to research-based knowledge and to career-counselling practice. The study analyzes trait emotional intelligence (further on EI) in the process of career decision-making, i.e. career decision-making difficulties, general self-efficacy and career-decision self-efficacy assessed in a sample of 322 Slovak high school students before second career-choice. The measures: Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009), Emotional and Personality Difficulties Scale (EPCD; Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008), General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer, & Jeruzalem, 1993), Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). The statistical analysis: negative relations between global career decision-making difficulties and self-efficacy (general, career-decision), positive relations between self-efficacy (general, career-decision) and trait EI, and negative relations between trait EI and global career decision-making difficulties and their factors. The regression analyses: trait EI was a significant negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties, over and above career-decision self-efficacy. Trait EI is a predictor of more stable, pervasive emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties, above and over studied personality-related and career-related self-efficacy. Trait EI relevance and career decisions self-efficacy in the career-decision process are emphasized with practical implications for diagnostics and intervention within career-counseling.

Keywords: trait emotional intelligence, career indecision, career decidedness, career decision-making difficulties, self-efficacy (general and career decision).

1. INTRODUCTION

Career decision-making is typically a stressful experience, often manifested by decision-making difficulties. It is especially important at the end of adolescence period when high school students face challenges to make a choice regarding their future studies or a work profession. Career decision-making combined with personality variables is a well-researched empirical area. However, there is a place for further exploration by incorporating the emotional intelligence (EI) construct in relation to career decision-making constructs.

Career indecision is defined as difficulties encountered by individuals while making career-related decisions and refers to all problems and challenges that need to be addressed prior to, during, or after the decision-making process (Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008, p. 403). It can be differentiated between temporary, developmental indecision on one side and more pervasive, chronic indecisiveness derived predominantly from personality and emotional factors. Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Peretz, and Gati (2013) describe the first construct, indecision, as momentary or short-term issues blocking individuals from decision-making. The construct of indecisiveness is described as a more chronic and consistent issue that hinders individuals´

abilities to make decisions in various contexts and situations and is considered closer to a trait than a state. A large body of evidence has provided support for the assumption that indecisiveness leads to many deficits in the decision-making process.

Career indecision denotes problems during the career decision-making process, and it has various sources being included in definitions or taxonomies of career decision-making difficulties domain or career indecision (Kelly, & Lee, 2002). Saka et al. (2008) developed a theoretical framework for analyzing the emotional and personality-related aspects of career-decision-making difficulties. Based on the existing literature the authors located variables consistently found to be correlated with career indecision and indecisiveness. Based on the proposed model the authors developed the Emotional and Personality Career Difficulties Scale (EPCD) and empirically verified the above-mentioned model (in Slovakia verified by Sollárová, 2016).

The literature reveals a growing interest in studying individual variables associated with the career decision-making process. The concept of self-efficacy offers a potential to be studied both as a personality-related as well as career-related variable in the process of career decision-making. Self-efficacy is regarded as a self-evaluation that leads to a belief in one´s own abilities to complete tasks or attain a defined level of achievement (Bandura, 1997). Bandura´s concept of self-efficacy was integrated into the career decision-making process by Hacket and Betz (1981) and defined as "career decision self-efficacy" explained as an individual´s belief that s/he is capable of successfully completing tasks and specific behaviors required in career decision-making (Taylor & Betz, 1983). The concept is based on the theory of self-efficacy and the theory of career maturity, syntetized by Taylor and Betz (1983) who constructed the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE) based on this conceptualization. The construct is based on the behavioral indicators that characterize the five areas of competency for making career choices – accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future and problem solving. The research by Betz and Klein-Voyten (1997) and Jaensch, Hirschi, and Freund (2015) showed that career decision self-efficacy acts as a significant predictor of career indecision. A meta-analysis by Choi et al., (2012) investigated the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and a selection of related variables including gender, age, race, self-esteem, vocational identity, career barriers, peer support, vocational outcome expectations, and career indecision. Self-esteem, vocational identity, peer support, vocational outcome expectations, and career indecision were all found to be correlated statistically significantly with career decision-making self-efficacy. Career indecision was found to have a strong negative correlation with career decision-making self-efficacy. Choi et al.´s work (2012) demonstrated that personality aspects can play a key role in career decision-making self-efficacy. Apart from personality traits, the specific role of the career decision-making process is generally recognized and agreed upon among researchers (Martincin, & Stead, 2015).

Emotional intelligence (EI) represents an additional potentially critical variable in the career decision-making process (Farnia, Nafukho, & Petrides, 2018; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009), yet being rarely studied. Research exploring the relations between EI and career difficulties is still limited, especially the relations between trait EI models (e.g., Cooper's, Sawaf's, Weisinger's, Higg's, Schutte´s models or Petrides' model). Thus, investigating a role of trait EI as another EI model offers a new research opportunity. Trait EI, investigated in this paper, is explained by its author, Petrides (2009), as a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies. The model consists of 15 facets (13 of them forming 4 factors: emotionality, sociability, well-being and self-control and 2 independent facets of self-motivation and adaptability stand

by themselves) forming the global level of trait EI (more detailed characteristics of the factors in Petrides, 2009; Kaliská & Nábělková, 2015). Petrides (2009) also created questionnaires to measure trait EI (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – TEIQue) for three developmental stages (children, adolescents, and adults) of two forms (short and long form). In Slovakia, the satisfactory psychometric properties of full and short forms of the Slovak TEIQue versions were evidenced (Kaliská & Nábělková, 2015; Kaliská, Nábělková, & Salbot, 2015). For short forms of TEIQue, created from the original full versions, the author recommends assessing only the global level of trait EI, for the validity and reliability decreases with the number of items used to assess trait EI factors.

A very few investigations on EI in relation to career indecision have been conducted, specifically analyzing the relationship between trait EI based on Petrides´ model and emotional and personality-related aspects of decision-making difficulties based on Saka, Gati, and Kelly´s model (2008). The first attempts, conducted by Sollárová & Kaliská (2018), showed significant positive, though weak, relationships between global trait EI level and career decidedness, however significant negative moderate to strong relationship between global trait EI level and global career decision-making difficulties as well as its three factors (especially factor of self-concept and identity) in the sample of 156 Slovak high school students. Trait EI predicted a significant almost 7% of unique variance in career decision-making difficulties after controlling for decidedness level with remaining significant negative moderate correlation. In the US, the study conducted by Farnia et al. (2018), proved that trait EI accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in career indecisiveness that was not explained by the "Big Five" personality traits and that positive and negative emotions partially mediated the relationship between trait EI and career indecisiveness.

2. OBJECTIVE

The aim of this current research based on the previous results of the authors as well as on other findings in the topic of the role of EI in the career decision-making, was to 1) verify the already identified patterns of relationships between trait EI and career indecision variables, specifically between trait EI and emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties on a larger sample of Slovak high school students, involving also other personality and career related variables (general and career decision-making self-efficacy); 2) identify the character of relationships between trait EI and career decision-making difficulties; 3) explore trait EI as a predictor of the career decision-making difficulties, above other personality related and career related variables, specifically above both generalized as well as career decision self-efficacy.

In line with the research results mentioned above, we hypothesize the following: 1) H1: individuals with higher trait emotional intelligence level would display lower levels of career decision-making difficulties; 2) H2: individuals with higher level of career difficulties would self-perceive lower level of career decision-making self-efficacy and generalized
self-efficacy; 3) H3: those ones with a higher level of generalized self-efficacy would have also higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy.

Based on the research findings it is hypothesized that 4) H4: trait emotional intelligence will explain a significant percentage of incremental variance above and over career decision-making self-efficacy and generalized self-efficacy in predicting the career decision-making difficulties.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research sample

The research sample consisted of 322 high school students (average age: 17.7 /SD=.46/; 58.4% of females) from three high schools of the central Slovak region. 7 of the students did not fulfill the GSES and CDS scale (mortality of 2.2%), and 9 students did not complete or finished CDSE scale (mortality of 2.8%). The research was conducted as a part of professional career counselling and personality testing during the second career decision making process offered at their schools to Junior high school students. Either the parental or individual (18-year-old ones do not need parental approval) informed consent was signed voluntarily two weeks before testing.

3.2. Research methods

Trait EI was assessed by the short Slovak version of *the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF,* Kaliská, Nábělková, & Salbot, 2015) created by Petrides (2009). The instrument consists of 30 items answered by a seven-point Likert scale (1 – completely disagree to 7 – completely agree), a higher rating indicate a higher level of trait EI. Reliability estimate in the sense of inner consistency was for the whole sample: α=.87.

To assess career decision-making difficulties, participants responded to the Slovak version of *the Emotional and Personality Career Difficulties Scale (EPCD,* Saka et al., 2008). The scale consists of 53 items, each statement representing one of 11 difficulty categories, answered on a 9-point scale (1 – does not describe me to 9 – describes me well). The total score and the sum from the three clusters (Pessimistic Views; Anxiety; Self-concept and Identity) were calculated. Higher scores indicate greater career difficulties in that certain area. Reliability estimates in the sense of inner consistency were for the whole sample: α=.94.

Career decision self-efficacy was assessed by *The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form (CDSE-SF)* (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). The scale includes 25 items divided into five scales, namely, accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem solving. The answers were obtained using a scale with five alternatives, ranging from 1 = not at all confident to 5 = totally confident. The total score on the scale was calculated by adding the responses to the 25 items; higher scores indicated higher levels of career decision self-efficacy. Reliability estimates in the sense of inner consistency were for the whole sample: α=.91. Studies of the dimensionality of the CDSE (e.g. Taylor & Betz, 1983) suggest that the scale is primarily a general measure of career decision-making self-efficacy rather that self-efficacy expectations for five career decision skills.

Generalized self-efficacy was assessed by *the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES*; Slovak adaptation by Košč, Heftyová Schwarzer, & Jeruzalem, 1993). The scale is a 10-item scale that is designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life. The scale with 5 options, ranging from 1 = not relevant at all to 4 = exactly true. The scale is unidimensional; higher score indicates higher generalized self-efficacy. Reliability estimate in the sense of inner consistency was for the whole sample: α=.82.

Apart from descriptive statistics, *correlation analyses* were run to estimate the relations of trait EI to career decision-making difficulties, generalized self-efficacy and career decision self-efficacy. Further on a *hierarchical three-step regression analysis* was conducted to discover the determination on global level of the career difficulties as dependent variable. It

was predicted by the generalized self-efficacy, and also career decision self-efficacy level and above it by global trait EI level to support also the incremental validity of trait EI in our research sample.

4. RESULTS

The basic descriptive indicators for global trait EI assessed by TEIQue-SF questionnaire, for three main clusters and global level of career difficulties assessed by EPCD, and the level of generalized self-efficacy by GSES and of career decision self-efficacy by CDSE of our research sample are presented in Table 1.

Table1.
Descriptive indicators of all variables in a sample of the Slovak adolescents (N=313).

		Min	Max	AM	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
TEIQue-SF	**Global Trait EI**	2.47	6.63	4.83	.72	-.473	.345	.872
EPCD	Pessimistic views	1.50	7.33	4.89	1.01	-.253	.117	
	Anxiety	1.19	9.00	5.32	1.87	-.338	-.673	
	Self-concept and Identity	1.00	7.94	4.19	1.34	.119	-.357	.944
	Global Career Difficulties	1.79	7.89	4.89	1.22	-.280	-.379	
GSES	Generalized Self-efficacy	1.50	4.00	2.95	.46	-.254	.069	.817
CDSES	Career Decision Making Self-efficacy	1.84	4.88	3.47	.59	-.075	-.308	.907

Descriptive indicators in Table 1 enable to compare the global trait EI level of the research sample to the Slovak percentile norms for the late adolescence created by norm sample of N = 387; AM_{age} = 16.6; /SD= 0.5/ (Kaliská, Nábělková, & Salbot, 2015, p. 49). It can be concluded that the global trait EI level (AM=4.8) of this research sample is reaching the 57th percentile. It can be also concluded all of the observed inner consistencies of the instruments estimated by Cronbach´s alpha coefficients reach acceptable values.

Statistical analysis of skewness and kurtosis proves the normal distribution of the analyzed variables therefore the relations were estimated by parametric statistical analyses. The variable relation estimate was carried out using parametric Pearson correlation analysis (r) enabling to determine the direction and strength of relations between variables (Table 2) followed by three-step regression analysis in Table 3 where global trait EI level was entered as the last one.

Table 2.
Correlation analysis of the variables (N=313).

		2	3	4	5	6	7
TEIQue-SF 1 **Global Trait EI**		-.307 ***	-.343 ***	**-.608** ***	**-.476** ***	**.618** ***	**.552** ***
EPCD	2 Pessimistic views	1.00	.547 ***	.472 ***	.682 ***	-.191 **	-.343 ***
	3 Anxiety		1.00	.683 ***	.946 ***	-.358 ***	-.536 ***
	4 Self-concept and Identity			1.00	.853 ***	-.481 ***	-.598 ***
	5 Global Career Difficulties				1.00	**-.417** ***	**-.592** ***
GSES	6 Generalized Self-efficacy					1.00	**.592** ***
CDSE	7 Career Decision Making Self-efficacy						1.00

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Referring to the correlation analysis it can be stated that global level of trait EI was negatively correlated to all the scales and global level of career difficulties (supporting H1). The career decision self-efficacy entered into positive significant strong correlations with trait EI and generalized self-efficacy. Then career decision self-efficacy and generalized self-efficacy were strongly positively related to each other (supporting H3), and both constructs were strongly negatively related to career decision-making difficulties (supporting H2).

Further on there was a hierarchical three-step regression analysis conducted to determine if global level of the career difficulties as dependent variable could be predicted by the career decision-making self-efficacy level (Step 1), generalized self-efficacy level (Step 2) and global trait EI level (Step 3) to support also the incremental validity of trait EI. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Hierarchical regression analysis.

		Career Difficulties	
	Step 1	$F_{(1,305)}=171.360$***, R^2 adj. =.358	
	Step 2	$F_{change}(2,304)=2.421$, R^2 adj. =.361, $R^2_{change}=.005$	
	Step 3	$F_{change}(3,303)=12.564$***, R^2 adj. =.384, $R^2_{change}=.025$	
	Beta	T	Partial correlations
Career Decision Making Self-efficacy (Step 1)	-.600	-13.090***	-.600

Career Decision Making Self-efficacy	-.547	-9.648***	-.484
Generalized Self-efficacy (Step 2)	-.088	-1.556	-.089
Career Decision Making Self-efficacy	-.486	-8.322***	-.431
Generalized Self-efficacy	.005	.084	.005
Trait EI (Step 3)	**-.211**	**-3.545*****	**-.200**

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$*

A three-step hierarchical regression was performed to investigate the prediction potential of trait EI of career decision-making difficulties level and at the same time to prove the incremental influence of trait EI over and above the career decision self-efficacy and generalized self-efficacy. The career decision self-efficacy was entered at step 1, then the career decision self-efficacy and generalized self-efficacy at step 2 and at step 3, there were both constructs followed by the global level of trait EI.

We can summarize two models (at step 1 & 3) were statistically significant. The career decision-making self-efficacy level predicted almost 36% of the variance in career difficulties level. Then at step 3, trait EI, was entered on its own above the career decision self-efficacy and generalized self-efficacy. Only the model with trait EI was found to be a significant negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties, over and above career decision self-efficacy level (H4). The generalized self-efficacy lost its influence. Trait EI predicted a significant almost 3% of unique variance in career decision-making difficulties after controlling for career decision self-efficacy level supporting incremental validity of trait EI with remaining partial correlation of $r = -.200$.

5. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The research ambition aimed at exploring and verifying relationships between trait EI and career indecision variables, specifically between trait EI and emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties, involving also other personality and career related variables (generalized and career decision self-efficacy). They were based on the assessment of career decision-making difficulties, trait EI, generalized and career decision self-efficacy of high school students in the phase of their career decision-making before the second career choice.

First three hypotheses were aimed at studying relations among the variables involved. Correlation analysis showed negative relations between global career decision-making difficulties and both self-efficacy measures (generalized and career decision), positive relations between the two self-efficacy measures (generalized and career decision), and negative relations between trait EI and global career decision-making difficulties. The findings on negative relations between global career decision-making difficulties and both self-efficacy measures (generalized and career decision) support previous findings of Betz et al. (1996), Choi et al., (2012), Jaensch, et al. (2015) who have found inverse relationships between career decision self-efficacy and career indecision, specifically career decision-making difficulties as defined in Saka, Gati and Kelly's (1996)

model and identified by the CDDQ measuring almost exclusively developmental aspect of career decision-making difficulties. Using the EPCD in our study, the research results supported the above-mentioned findings as valid also for other measures of career indecision, specifically for emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties as defined in the model of Saka et al. (2008). The result suggests that students with more pervasive, stable emotional and personality-related career decision-making difficulties show lower self-efficacy regarding their own abilities. This result suggests that students who believe in their own ability show higher readiness to make career decisions. Conversely, individuals who do not trust their skills seem not to handle career choices well because they might avoid decision tasks and therefore remain undecided longer.

The findings on negative relations between global career decision-making difficulties and general self-efficacy provide the evidence that self-efficacy (both generalized and career decision) seem to be important in the career decision-making process, again not only in the context of more developmental aspects of career decision-making difficulties, but also in case of more pervasive, stable emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties (as specified in the model by Saka et al., 2008). The result confirms that a negative appraisal of individual worthiness is associated with more career decision-making problems. This could imply that negative self-perceptions lead to problems in career decision-making.

As expected, individuals who showed higher global trait EI displayed less career decision-making difficulties, both in overall difficulties and in all three clusters of difficulties as defined in the model by Saka et al. (2008). In studying the role of EI in career decision-making difficulties, Mayer-Salovey´s ability-based model and Bar On´s model as the so-called mixed model linking EI with personality and abilities, have been mostly investigated (Di Fabio, & Palazzeschi, 2009; Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012). The studies indicate that EI is inversely associated with decision-making difficulties. Research findings support these previous studies and support the higher generality of the pattern of relationship between EI and career decision-making difficulties as being independent from the EI model compared (apart from Mayer-Salovey´s ability-based model and Bar On´s model the pattern is valid also for trait EI model by Petrides). And also the independence from the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties compared (besides Gati´s model of developmental aspects of career decision-making difficulties, it is valid also for Saka, Gati, and Kelly´s model focused on more pervasive, stable emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties) has been supported.

The results support the previous findings related to the role of other EI models, specifically Mayer-Salovey´s ability-based model and Bar On´s model in career indecision, (Di Fabio, & Palazzeschi, 2009; Di Fabio, et al., 2012) and extend the findings on EI inverse association as valid not only for relatively developmental aspects of career decision-making difficulties, but also for more pervasive, stable emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties. Trait EI also explains a significant percentage of the incremental variance when compared with other personality and career related variables (generalized and career decision self-efficacy) in explaining the impact on the career decision-making difficulties involved in Saka, Gati, and Kelly´s model.

There have been several limitations, especially the choice of high school students from one region in Slovakia; the specific research sample does not allow to generalize the results to other subject groups; usage of self-report instruments interfering to minimize the desirability effect, and the study design itself. Despite the mentioned limitations of the present study, the results are encouraging.

6. CONCLUSION

The original contribution of the research study is in investigating the relations of trait EI and career indecision constructs using the models not studied together yet (i.e., the Petrides´ model of trait EI and the Saka, Gati, and Kelly´s model of emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties). The main results support quite general pattern of relations between EI and career indecision. Research findings of inverse relationships between career decision self-efficacy and emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties as defined by Saka et al. (2008) extended previous findings as valid also for more pervasive, chronic aspects of career indecision. It is also discovered that trait EI explains a significant percentage of the incremental variance when compared with personality and career related variables (generalized and career decision self-efficacy) in explaining the impact on more stable aspects of career decision-making difficulties. The result also empirically supports the relevance of both trait EI and especially career decision self-efficacy in the career decision process. The practical implications are seen in personality diagnostics and subsequent interventions within career counseling as a means to strengthen the effectiveness of career decision making in career choice and in career development. Trait EI has a potential to help especially the Junior high school students to cope better with challenging situations in their "second career-decision making phase".

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