Chapter #7

GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON THE TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF CAREER INDECISION

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence (EI) contributes to career decision-making. In the paper, the influence of trait EI on career decision-making, specifically on career indecision and career decision-making difficulties, plus gender differences, is investigated in a sample of 156 high-school students (M_{age}: 17.7 /SD=.40/; 59% of females) by t-test, correlation and regression analysis. Trait EI was assessed by *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form* (*TEIQue-SF*; Petrides, 2009), career decidedness by *Career Decidedness Scale* (*CDS;* Lounsbury, & Gibson, 2011) and career decision-making difficulties by *Emotional and Personality Career Difficulties Scale* (*EPCD*, Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008). Results: 1. no inter-gender differences in the global trait EI, emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties, and career decidedness; 2. a general trend of positive relations between trait EI and career decidedness and negative relations between trait EI and career decision-making difficulties; 3. trait EI as a significant negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties, over and above decidedness in both samples, where trait EI predicted a significant 8% of unique variance in career decision-making difficulties after controlling for decidedness level in females sample and up to 5% in males sample supporting the incremental validity of trait EI, and its potential to predict difficulties in career decision-making.

Keywords: trait emotional intelligence, career indecision, career decidedness, career decision-making difficulties, inter-gender differences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Career decision-making can be a stressful experience, often manifested by decision-making difficulties. It is especially important at the end of the 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 indecision constructs. The relationships between EI and career indecision is important to explore, as the resulting information will contribute to both research-based knowledge for vocational psychology and to career guidance practice as well. Another important issue in career decision-making is related to **gender differences** noted in a number of career development constructs such as career choice anxiety or generalized indecisiveness (Puffer, 2011). Within EI research, significant gender distinctions are found in the scores from the various published measures (Bar-On, 2000; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000). Specifically, in the area of EI within career decision-making, the study of Puffer (2011) exposed important gender differences in how certain competencies in the Mayer and Salovey´s EI model positively associated with particular career constructs for women and other for men.

Career indecision is defined as difficulties encountered by individuals while making career-related decision and refers to all problems and challenges that need to be addressed prior to, during, or after the decision-making process (Saka et al. 2008, p. 403). We can differentiate between temporary, developmental indecision on one side and more pervasive, chronic indecisiveness derived predominantly from personality and emotional factors. Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Peretz, & 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.

In the meta-analytical study, Martincin and Stead (2015) included both indecision and indecisiveness as their topic of interest as **difficulties in career decision making.** They considered the concept of difficulties in career decision making as "an umbrella term for anyone who is having trouble making a decision, whether this is a transient state of indecision or a pattern of difficulties resulting in indecisiveness" (p.4). Career indecision denotes problems during the career decision-making process, and it has various sources involving also personality and emotional variables (Gati, 2013) being included in definitions of career decision-making difficulties domain or career indecision (Kelly, & Lee, 2002) or in taxonomies of career decision-making difficulties.

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 they located variables consistently found to be correlated with career indecision and indecisiveness. They proposed a hierarchical taxonomy with three major clusters of difficulties – pessimistic views, anxiety, and self-concept and identity – that are subdivided into 11 specific categories based on finer distinctions. The first major cluster – *pessimistic views* – refers to negative cognitive biases and perceptions. The second major cluster is defined as *anxiety* referring to the possible effects of anxiety on specific aspects of the decision-making process. The third major cluster is labelled as *self-concept and identity* referring to developmental personality aspects of an individual. 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 by Sollárová, 2016; 2017) proving no significant inter-gender differences in either the global emotional and personality career decision-making difficulties scores or its three major cluster scores (Saka et al., 2008).

The literature reveals a growing interest in studying individual variables associated with the career decision-making process. 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 (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009), yet has been rarely studied. 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; Puffer, 2011; Dahl, Austin, Wagner, & Lukas, 2008; Pilárik, 2015; Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012). The studies indicate that EI is inversely associated with decision-making difficulties and that EI also explains a significant percentage of the incremental variance when compared with personality traits in explaining the impact on the career decision-making difficulties involved in Gati´s model (Di Fabio, & Palazzeschi, 2009). In another study, Di Fabio et al. (2012) examined the role of personality traits, core self-evaluation, and EI in career decision-making difficulties. They found that EI adds

significant incremental variance compared with personality traits and core self-evaluation in predicting career decision-making difficulties.

Research exploring the relations between EI and career difficulties is limited, especially studies using trait EI models. This is the rational for examining the Petrides´ trait EI model and emotional and personality based difficulties in career-decision-making verification (Sollárová, & Kaliská, 2018). To investigate a role of trait EI as another EI model offers a new research opportunity. **Trait EI**, investigated in this study, 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) 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 Slovak *TEIQue* versions were established (Nábělková, 2012; Kaliská & Nábělková, 2015; Kaliská, Nábělková, & Salbot, 2015). Studies have not found statistical nor effect size inter-gender differences in global level of trait EI in foreign studies (Petrides, 2009; Williams, Daley, Burnside, & Hammond-Rowley, 2008) or in the Slovak setting (Kaliská et al., 2015). For short forms of TEIQue, created from the original full versions, the author recommends to assess only the global level of trait EI.

Few investigations have been conducted on EI in relation to career indecision, 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). Previous studies (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 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 paper, the influence of trait EI on career decision-making, specifically on career decidedness and emotional and personality-related career decision-making difficulties in respect to inter-gender differences is investigated in a sample of high school students.

2. OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study is focused on investigating gender differences in the studied variables and identifying gender patterns present in the whole sample.

According to previously mentioned research results it is hypothesized that there are no significant gender differences in global trait EI level from TEIQue-SF (H1); no gender differences in global EPCD score and its three clusters (H2); and referring to career decidedness measured by Lounsbury and Gibson´s Career Decidedness Scale (CDS) classified as a momentary/state indecision and to our "career decidedness" homogenous research sample (3rd year of study at high school), no gender differences in CDS scores (H3). Concerning relations between trait EI, career decidedness and career decision-making difficulties we were interested whether relations between global scores from TEIQue-SF, CDS and EPCD are comparable in both genders and are following the pattern of the whole

sample (RQ1)? We also expected trait EI in both genders to be negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties (as measured by EPCD)(H4) and positive predictor of career decidedness (as measured by CDS)(H5).

3. METHODS

3.1. Research sample

The research sample consisted of 156 high school students (average age: 17.7 /SD=.40/; 59% of females) from the central Slovak region. 6 of the students did not fulfill the CDS scale (mortality of 4%). The research sample was obtained by targeted and occasional sampling as a part of professional orientation testing. Either the parental or individual (for 18-year-olds) informed consent were 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 et al., 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 estimates of internal consistency were for the whole sample: α=.87; .86 for females; .84 for males.

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 item 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. Cronbach α for the whole group was .95, α=.97 for the females and α=.93 for males.

To evaluate career decidedness, the *Career Decidedness Scale* (**CDS**; Lounsbury, & Gibson, 2011) was used. It is a 5-item one-dimensional scale with the score range from 6 to 30, a higher score indicates a higher decidedness. Cronbach α was .95 for the whole sample and α=.94 for the females and α=.95 for the males.

All instruments exhibited reliability for internal consistency.

For data analysis, apart from descriptive statistics, the independent-samples t-test analysis was conducted to estimate the gender differences, correlation analyses were run to estimate the relations of trait EI to decidedness and career decision-making difficulties in both genders individually. And finally, a hierarchical two-step regression analysis was conducted with career difficulties as the dependent variable to examine the predictive strength of gender decidedness level and above it global trait EI level to determine the incremental validity of trait EI in both genders.

4. RESULTS

The 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 decidedness by CDS of our research sample are presented in Table 1.

Table1.
Descriptive indicators of all variables in a sample of the Slovak adolescents (N=150).

		Min	Max	AM	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
TEIQue-SF	Global Trait EI	2.47	6.63	4.81	.79	-.469	-.048	.872
EPCD	Pessimistic views	2.33	7.33	5.06	.96	-.237	-.155	
	Anxiety	1.19	9.00	5.44	1.87	-.399	-.704	
	Self-concept & Identity	1.12	7.41	4.18	1.38	.172	-.497	.945
	Global Career Difficulties	2.13	7.45	4.99	1.23	-.331	-.520	
CDS	Decidedness	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.13	.446	-.873	.949

Statistical analysis of skewness and kurtosis proves the normal distribution of the analyzed variables therefore the differences were estimated by parametric independent-samples t-test analysis and by effect-size estimates (Table 2). 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 3) followed by two-step regression analysis in Table 4.

Table 2.
Inter-gender differences and descriptive indicators of all variables.

		Female (N=92)				Male (N=58)					
		Min	Max	AM	SD	Min	Max	AM	SD	t-test	d-index
TEIQue-SF	Global Trait EI	2.83	6.63	4.94	.81	2.47	5.97	4.60	.73	2.68**	.44
EPCD	Pessimistic views	2.41	7.33	5.09	.99	2.33	6.50	5.02	.92	.47	.07
	Anxiety	1.19	9.00	5.69	1.89	1.62	8.52	5.05	1.79	2.08*	.35
	Self-concept & Identity	1.12	7.41	4.14	1.49	1.76	6.65	4.25	1.20	.48	.08
	Global Career Difficulties	2.13	7.45	5.08	1.28	2.25	7.04	4.83	1.15	1.22	.21
CDS	Decidedness	1.00	5.00	2.51	1.11	1.00	5.00	2.83	1.14	1.65	.28

$^*p < .05, ^{**}p < .01$

To investigate possible gender differences, two sample t-test determining a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups, was computed indicating the females´ global trait EI level was significantly higher than the males´ level ($t=2.68**$), however by assessing the so-called practical (or clinical) significance of differences, i.e. the Cohen's effect-size indicator as an intrinsic significance of the inter-divisional difference being independent of the sample size, we can state there is only a little effect size difference between genders (($d <0.50$, in Cohen, 1988). This result supports H1.

The same pattern is evident in the cluster of anxiety in career decision making difficulties in "favor" to females ($t=2.08^*$), though the Cohen´s d-index is also small. All the other clusters, as well as the global career difficulties level and the level of decidedness do

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not show any gender difference supported by Cohen´s effect size estimates. We can conclude the hypotheses H1 to H3 are confirmed by our research results.

Further analysis was based on Pearson correlation as a measure of the linear correlation between two variables in each gender separately (Table 3).

Table 3.
Correlation analysis of the variables for individual genders.

		Female (N=92)					Male (N=58)				
		2	3	4	5	6	2	3	4	5	6
TEI Que-SF	1 Global Trait EI	-.28**	-.35***	-.66***	-.50***	.28*	-.11	-.31**	-.57***	-.40**	.23
EPCD	2 Pessimistic views	1.00	.59***	.47***	.69***	-.46***	1.00	.65***	.51***	.75***	-.53***
	3 Anxiety		1.00	.71***	.95***	-.83***		1.00	.64***	.95***	-.81***
	4 Self-concept & Identity			1.00	.87***	-.56***			1.00	.83***	-.51***
	5 Global Career Difficulties				1.00	-.78***				1.00	-.76***
CDS	6 Decidedness					1.00					1.00

$^*p < .05, ^{**}p < .01, ^{***}p < .001$

Referring to the correlation analysis it can be stated that global level of trait EI was significantly negatively moderately to strongly correlated to two clusters of anxiety and self-concept and identity and global level of career difficulties for both genders. Weak correlations were found between trait EI and pessimistic views in both genders. Similar results (positive and weak relations) were found between global trait EI level and global decidedness level.

Table 4.
Hierarchical regression analysis for individual genders.

	Career Difficulties					
	Female (N=92)			Male (N=58)		
Step 1	$F(1,91)=138.98^{***}$, R^2 adj. =.603			$F(1,57)=76.251^{***}$, R^2 adj. =.569		
Step 2	$F_{change}(2,89)=23.973^{***}$, R^2 adj. =.683, **R^2_{change} =.083**			$F_{change}(2,55)=7.936^{***}$, R^2 adj. =.617, **R^2_{change} =.053**		
	Beta	t	Partial correlations	Beta	t	Partial correlations
Decidedness (Step 1)	-.779	-11.789***	-.779	-.759	-8.732***	-.759
Decidedness	-.694	-11.278***	-.767	-.704	-8.356***	-.748
Trait EI (Step 2)	**-.301**	**-4.896*****	**-.461**	**-.237**	**-2.817****	**-.355**

$^*p < .05, ^{**}p < .01, ^{***}p < .001$

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The last aim of the study was to conduct a hierarchical two-step regression analysis to determine if global level of the career difficulties as dependent variable could be predicted by the decidedness level and above it by global trait EI level in each sample group individually (as presented in Table 4).

At step 1, the model was statistically significant and decidedness level predicted 60% of the variance in career difficulties level for females and 57% for males. Then at step 2, trait EI, was entered on its own. It was again found to be a significant negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties, over and above decidedness level in both samples while trait EI predicted a significant 8% of unique variance in career decision-making difficulties after controlling for decidedness level in females sample and up to 5% in males sample. Again in both research samples the partial correlation between trait EI and global level of career difficulties reminded statistically significant negative of moderate strength in female´s sample and of weak strength in male´s sample. These findings support the hypotheses H4 and H5 and also prove again the incremental validity of trait EI in both genders.

5. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study aims were based on the assessment of career decision-making difficulties, career decidedness, as well as trait EI level of high school students in the phase of their career decision-making before the second career choice. These were investigated by global trait EI assessed by the Petrides´ *TEIQue-SF* (2009), career decidedness by Lounsbury and Gibson´s *CDS* (2011) and career decision-making difficulties by the *Emotional and Personality Difficulties Scale* of Saka et al. (2008) in two separate research samples of Slovak high school female and male students. The aims were directed at gender differences and the relations between studied variables in respect to gender perspective.

First three hypotheses were aimed at the gender differences in the global trait EI level, emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties, and level of career decidedness. The statistical analysis showed small effect size difference in the variables supporting the hypotheses of no gender differences. The results are compatible with previous gender difference results (Kaliská et al., 2015) on the sample of Slovak high school students and also adults, and with Petrides (2009) and other foreign studies (Williams, et al., 2008). It can be assumed that both genders at the period of late adolescence can perceive, express and regulate their emotions similarly with a certain tendency of possible higher level of trait EI in females to be further verified. Career difficulties were investigated by various researchers indicating no gender difference (Saka, et al., 2008). Both genders experience similar career difficulties with a tendency of feeling more anxiety for females in career decision-making that needs to be empirically supported later on. It was expected that there would be no gender differences in a momentary/state indecision because the homogenous sample as it was is dealing with similar career difficulties. However, these two results emphasize the importance of differentiating career indecision constructs as momentary or state indecision and those that are more pervasive or chronic – might show greater differences between genders and might differ in relations with compared variables.

Correlation analysis done for both genders showed general trends of positive relations between trait EI and career decidedness and negative relations between trait EI and global career decision-making difficulties. As expected, individuals who showed higher global trait EI displayed higher career decidedness level. The result supports our previous findings (Sollárová, 2016; 2017) where the level of emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties was differentiated by the level of undecidedness of high school and university students. The students with higher level of undecidedness (related to their

study area and profession choice) showed higher level of career decision-making difficulties. Also 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). The strongest negative correlation was found between global level of trait EI and the third major cluster of difficulties defined as "self-concept and identity" corresponding with trait EI conceptualization as aspects of emotions related personality traits (RQ1). More satisfactory and expected relations were estimated in female´s sample because of the sample size, though we can claim all of the relations were of moderate to stronger strength in this sample. This tendency was also supported by regression analysis run separately for each gender, that indicate that trait EI can be a significant negative predictor of career decision-making difficulties, over and above decidedness level in both samples. Though in female´s sample trait EI predicted a significant 8% of unique variance in career decision-making difficulties after controlling for decidedness level and up to 5% it was in male´s sample. This implies that those, especially girls, involved in career decision-making are likely better able to cope with that process if they possess higher trait EI level. Professionals involved in career counseling would therefore likely benefit from information regarding a client's trait EI and adjust a career intervention accordingly.

We are aware also of several limitations of our research, e.g., choice of high school students was not equally distributed between genders; the specific research sample does not allow to generalize the results to other subject groups; usage of self-report instruments may be influenced by the desirability effect, and the study design itself. Further explorations into the specific domains of trait EI should be addressed to more clearly identifying which of the trait EI factors from Petrides´ model (well-being, self-control, emotionality, sociability) are most effective in influencing decidedness and especially more pervasive emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties (pessimistic views, anxiety, or self-concept and identity).

6. CONCLUSION

The **original contribution** of the 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, Kelly´s model of emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making difficulties). The main results support a general pattern of relations between EI and career indecision that our research support using the trait EI model as a model not studied in the relation to more stable variables of career indecision yet. The analysis also supports an idea of developing overall EI as a means to improve career decidedness and decrease difficulties in career decision-making of high school students in the phase before the second career choice. Finally, there are two significant conclusions. First results support the incremental validity of trait EI, and the trait EI can more significantly predict difficulties in career decision-making for females. Even with the sample not balanced regarding gender, these results support the idea of taking into account potential gender differences in both trait EI and career decision-making difficulties variables both in research, and especially in career guidance practice.

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