

## IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON CAREER CHOICE IN EARLY ADULTHOOD: A REVIEW<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to trace how the phenomenon of emotional intelligence interacts with the process of choosing an appropriate and desirable career for any individual in early adulthood. To this end, leading theoretical models of emotional intelligence are first compared. Important aspects and manifestations in young adulthood are indicated. A theoretical review of various studies that demonstrate a correlation between emotional intelligence and career choice is presented, and the influence of a variable such as gender is indicated. The conclusions drawn are cause for further reflection and research on emotional intelligence and career orientations in order for each adolescent to reach the ultimate need, according to Maslow, which is to self-actualize and achieve well-being in his or her life.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, career choice, early adulthood

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period marked by intense dynamics, a transition between childhood and adulthood, filled with different challenges. During this stage, many changes take place related to emotional, physiological and cognitive development, which bring with them different opportunities for the unfolding of each individual's potential.

The role that emotions play in our society, and more specifically in the workplace, has sparked a great deal of interest in the scientific community as well as the general public. Emotions play an important and often misunderstood or unknown role in the decision-making process about a future profession in the life of any young person. Career choice is not a single decision made spontaneously, but the result of a series of decisions. Decisions about which values are important, which tasks and activities the young individual finds interesting, what level he or she wishes to reach, and how work roles will interact with non-work roles, as well as what information to seek and how to seek it, are important aspects in the decision-making process. As the world we live in is characterized by increased volatility and change, the ability to use emotions in the career choice process can become a critical skill needed to cope with the demands and challenges of different occupations.

### NATURE AND LEADING THEORETICAL MODELS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The topic of emotional intelligence is a subject of interest for both popular and academic literature. In recent decades, numerous studies have been conducted that establish the importance of emotional intelligence, what it entails, how it interacts with various cognitive, behavioral, and life constructs, and how to enhance and effectively use and apply it, to improve a person's quality of life and well-being. Programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence are being incorporated in various settings and various courses to develop this phenomenon are being presented in organizations, universities, schools and other institutions.

The question naturally arises, what is emotional intelligence? As with all other constructs, the term "emotional intelligence" must be defined. There are various schools and views that aim to accurately describe and measure emotional intelligence. One of the most common conceptions is that emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Goleman, 2001). Thorndike, a prominent psychologist in the field of learning, teaching, and intelligence, found that humans possess several types of intelligence, one of

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which has been called social intelligence, or the ability to understand and manage individuals among themselves and to act wisely in human relationships (Thorndike, 1920). Subsequently, David Wechsler, the founder of intelligence tests and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), described nonverbal and verbal elements of intelligence. The nonverbal elements, which include emotional, personal, and social factors, he later found to be essential in predicting an individual's ability to succeed in life (Wechsler, 1958). Later, Gardner's multiple intelligences (1983) also mentioned the importance of emotional expression in organizational behavior. Emotional intelligence represents two of the seven intelligences categorized by Gardner (1983): interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, and the other five intelligences include verbal, logical, visual, kinesthetic, and musical intelligences. Gardner refers to interpersonal intelligence as the ability to understand other people, their motives for behavior, work style, and attitude, while intrapersonal intelligence- as the ability to set a norm for oneself and use it in life. Research in the area of emotional intelligence is mainly influenced by three leading theorists- Bar-On, Mayer and Salovey, and Daniel Golman. Reuven Bar-On, a prominent researcher and originator of the term "emotional quotient" views emotional intelligence as understanding oneself and others, connecting with people, adapting and coping with the immediate environment to be more successful to its conditions (Bar-On, 1997). Salovey and Mayer (1990) named emotional intelligence as "a subtype of social intelligence separate from general intelligence, which consists of the ability to manage one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate and use this information to guide and manage thinking and actions". They later expanded their model and defined emotional intelligence as the ability of an individual to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to understand feelings; the ability to understand emotion; and the ability to regulate emotions to contribute to emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Daniel Golman, a psychologist and scientist, discovered the works of Salovey and Meyer in the 1990s. Inspired by their findings, he began to conduct his own research in this area and eventually wrote the book *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995), the landmark book that introduced both the public and private sectors to the idea of emotional intelligence. Weinberger (2002b) offers a summary of research in the area of emotions, including emotional intelligence. His summary divides research on emotions into three areas- (a) sociological; (b) psychological; and (c) human resource development. The foundation of research on emotional intelligence is found in early work on emotions and intelligence. Initial research in the area of emotions was in the sociological and psychological fields. Sociologically, early researchers looked at areas such as "emotional labor," "emotional contagion," rules of feeling, emotion, and rationality. In terms of psychology, the realm of emotions and motivation, empathy and mood has been explored.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE CAREER CHOICE PROCESS

Choosing a career is one of the most important and difficult decisions for students, as the transition from student to working person is a significant turning point in their lives and can be a source of confusion. Self-efficacy in career decision making is considered to be a key factor influencing the career orientation process (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, & Gati, 2013).

A person's relatively accurate self-assessment of his or her abilities, such as intelligence, abstract thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills (e.g., self-efficacy; Ackerman, 1997), leads to certain career paths, and these abilities are further developed in their respective careers.

The problem of matching personality traits to career or professional interests is conceptually more variable. The issue of personality-career path matching was originally addressed in Holland's (1959) theory of career interests. Holland suggested that vocational interests reflect an individual's personality and abilities, and career choice decisions based on these interests are based on personality characteristics. Holland's theory identifies six basic personality orientations that can describe different professional attitudes: realist, exploratory, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Initial research confirmed the model's ability to distinguish between university discipline and occupational choice (e.g., Antony, 1998). However, there is growing skepticism regarding the extent to which Holland's model has the necessary predictive validity to provide robust information about the types of traits that are suggestive of career choice compared to the validity of personality structure (De Fruyt & Mervielde, 1996). On the other hand, there is growing evidence that certain personality traits (as measured by either Hans Eysenck's personality questionnaire or the five-factor model of personality traits) are more consistently associated with certain career paths than others (e.g., Corulla & Coghill, 1991).

To increase knowledge about the effects of emotions on career decisions, researchers introduced the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) to examine career-related issues (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Carson & Carson, 1998). In the last decade, EI has been accepted as a key variable in explaining career choices and success (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012). Various studies and theories of emotional intelligence point to the interdependence between emotion and cognition in decision making. The emotions experienced during this process have implications for the perception of risk associated with specific career options, how much an individual self-examines and self-explores, and how they will process information related to career choices. Such abilities are hypothesized to facilitate the career choice process and lead to decisions that are more satisfying to career-related interests, values, and aspirations.

The indirect relationship between career choice and emotional intelligence is based on the well-documented links between emotional intelligence and certain personality traits. For example, elements of this phenomenon (as measured by the MSCEIT) are associated with openness and cooperation (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Kafetsios & Petratos, 2005). Given that openness and cooperation are two personality traits that are prevalent in the scholarly writings of social science followers (Harris, 1993; Kline & Lapham, 1992; Rubinstein & Strul, 2007), it might be expected that social science followers would demonstrate high emotional intelligence. Moreover, Caruso et al. (2003) found consistent positive relationships between all parts of the MEIS and sensitivity as an item on the 16 PF multifactor personality questionnaire, as well as a consistent negative relationship with autonomy as a component of the questionnaire.

The body of evidence on the relationship between personality traits, career paths, and EI items is certainly greater than that concerning EI ability (e.g., Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). For example, reflecting the particularity of emotional self-efficacy in trait and mixed models of emotional intelligence, trait models are typically positively associated with extroversion, cooperation, and conscientiousness, and negatively associated with neuroticism (Brackett & Mayer, 2003). Therefore, given the close relationship between EI traits and personality, it might be expected that the observed relationships between personality traits in the five-factor model and career may also count toward EI traits as they reflect emotional self-efficacy.

The table below presents some of the leading researchers and the relationships they have found between emotional intelligence and career orientation.

**Table 1: Emotional intelligence and career choice**

Researchers	Established correlation
Brown et al.2003	Emotion is used to explain career development behaviour
Di Fabio et al. 2011, 2012, 2013	Emphasises the role of emotional intelligence and its relationship to career choice difficulties
Zhou Jiang 2014	Emotional intelligence positively influences self-efficacy in career choice

Given that individuals high in EI have stronger emotional awareness and a greater tendency to integrate thoughts and actions into their emotional experiences, EI may influence individuals' exploration and career choices (Di Fabio et al., 2013; Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003). Di Fabio et al.'s (2013) study of Italian youth between the ages of 18 and 29 reported a close relationship between EI and self-efficacy in the career choice process, with a mean correlation coefficient ( $r = .48, p < .01$ ). These studies suggest that young individuals who are able to perceive, generate, control, and regulate emotions are more likely to have positive attitudes toward career decision tasks (Brown et al., 2003).

Later, in 2016, a study of undergraduate students at the University of California, Sacramento, USA, demonstrated that EI is positively associated with determination and negatively associated with career delineation. The positive relationship between EI and determination supports the results of Di Fabio's previous study (Fabio & Kenny, 2011; 2012). This correlation is relevant for career counsellors as it finds that EI influences determination and hence career path choice.

It has been argued that consistent and robust models of the role of EI in career psychology are important for researchers and consultants making theoretical and practical inferences (Puffer, 2011). As mentioned above, various studies have been conducted in Western countries, such as Italy and the United States. It is interesting to note whether the role of EI in career choice extends beyond research in Western culture, and in particular, what the situation is in East Asian countries that are different in culture and mentality from Western societies. For this reason, Di Fabio (2012) states that the examination of Western findings in other cultural contexts is valuable. Therefore, a study of youths from China and South Korea (Zhou Jiang, 2014) was conducted to find out the relationship between EI and self-efficacy in career orientation, and whether there are national and gender differences in this relationship. The results showed a positive relationship between self-efficacy and EI, indicating that as students' EI increased, their confidence in the career choice process also increased. Put differently, Chinese and South Korean students who exhibit greater abilities in assessing their own emotions and those of others, and using and managing their emotions in various activities are likely to have greater self-efficacy in career choice. It is clear from this research that young people's ability to use emotions to support their personal goals and achievements is particularly influential in career decision making. These findings corroborate previous studies conducted in the United States (e.g., Brown et al., 2003) and Italy (e.g., Di Fabio et al., 2013) that document a positive relationship between EI and career orientation. Similar to the present study, Brown et al. (2003) found that the appropriate handling of emotions and feelings among U.S. students was the strongest predictor of self-efficacy among EI factors. Therefore, it seems that EI is useful in career decision making, especially when individuals understand how to use their emotions to achieve their goals. This finding can be generalized to a broad international context, although more research in this direction is needed.

Another study is being done at a large university in the United Kingdom (Angeli Santos Weiwei Wang Jenny Lewis, 2018). It examines the abilities derived from emotional intelligence that are key in decision making and the role of self-efficacy in career choice as a potential mediator in the relationship between EI and choice difficulties. Regression and mediation analyses indicated that EI was negatively associated with occupational decision difficulties and that the results were most pronounced when assessing personality emotions. EI was positively associated with self-efficacy, with serving with emotions having the strongest result. Self-efficacy was found to largely mediate the relationship between general and specific EI abilities and career choice difficulties observed in self-evaluation and emotion handling and various difficulties.

Although general principles of emotional function that are applicable to career decision making (i.e., agency theory) can be applied to most situations, the specific relationship of emotions to career decisions can be differentiated by cultural background or by gender. Career decisions are always complex and accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity (Taber, 2013), and thus the consequence of uncertainty avoidance can be influential in the career decision-making process.

Various studies have examined the role of gender on EI and self-efficacy in career choice. Sutarso, Baggett, Sutarso, and Tapia (1996) reported higher scores for women on three subscales of EI-adjustment, self-control, and empathy than for men, arguing that women tend to be more empathetic, supportive, and emotionally aware than men (Brown et al., 2003). Although these findings have been supported by a number of studies (e.g., Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; McIntyre, 2010; Schutte et al., 1998; Tapia, 1999), several contradictory results have also been reported in studies of EI and its relationship to gender differences. For example, Petrides and Furnham (2000) found that men's self-reported EI scores were higher than women's. Other researchers (e.g., Bar-On, 1997a) have failed to find gender differences in scores for total EI. Because of this inconsistency, Brown et al. (2003) conclude that it is difficult to determine male-female patterns of EI without further investigation. Their study of U.S. college students failed to show significant gender differences in the relationship between EI, self-efficacy, and career orientations. Although such studies are rarely conducted in Asia, the literature points to a very different phenomenon in East Asian cultures. For example, Mau (2000) found that Taiwanese male students had significantly higher self-efficacy in career choice, as opposed to females, while American students-both male and

female-scored the same on this construct. He argues that in Asia, women have lower social status than men and are at a disadvantage in decision making, making them more likely to lack confidence in making career decisions. While this generalization seems quite strengthened due to the reference to a study from Taiwan, it is supported by research conducted in other parts of Asia, such as mainland China (Lee, Fiske, Glick, & Chen, 2010), South Korea (Seguino, 1997), and Vietnam (Guilmoto, 2012). Furthermore, Malti, Killen, and Gasser (2012) reported that differences in social status can help endow individuals with different emotional attributes and processing styles. Consistent with Brown et al. (2003), research in China and South Korea failed to find a moderating effect of gender on the relationship between EI and career choice efficacy. Brown et al. explain this by the fact that previously reported gender discrepancies in EI were not large enough to affect the strength and direction of the relationships between EI items and self-efficacy in occupational decision making.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, while the empirical research base is only beginning to accumulate, several models of career development and success suggest the important role of EI. Researchers and practitioners in career counseling should be open to developments in this area. Emotional intelligence is a valuable and increasingly popular psychological construct. In addition to the evidence of the interrelationship between individual abilities to understand and manage emotional experiences and subjective well-being in modern life, there are reasons to view emotional intelligence as a potential tool for choosing an appropriate career and coping with the difficulties that accompany this process. And all of this would lead to a successful career. Therefore, it is more than necessary to continue and deepen research work on the components of emotional intelligence and its relationship with personality traits, temperament and self-efficacy of the individual in orienting and choosing a suitable career that develops the full potential of the person.

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