



# Incremental variance of the core self-evaluation construct compared to fluid intelligence and personality traits in aspects of decision-making

Annamaria Di Fabio\*, Letizia Palazzeschi

Department of Psychology, University of Florence, Italy

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of fluid intelligence, personality traits and core self-evaluation in relation to aspects of decision-making (career decision-making difficulties, decisional styles, indecisiveness). The Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM), the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ), the Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES), the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ), the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire (MDMQ), and the Indecisiveness Scale (IS) were administered to 143 Italian high school students. The study revealed that the core self-evaluation construct added a significant percentage of incremental variance compared to variances due to fluid intelligence and personality traits with respect to aspects of decision-making. The results highlight the role of the core self-evaluation construct and its relationship with aspects of decision-making thereby offering new research and intervention perspectives.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Decision-making and individual variables

Career decision-making is a complex process in which a number of variables play a role: individual variables (Nilsson et al., 2007); situational variables related in particular to decisional problems (Campbell & Cellini, 1981); and contextual variables such as employment opportunities, exposure to vocational options and information, economic resources, employment and educational discrimination (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005). Analysis of the literature reveals a growing interest in the study of the individual variables related to decision-making processes as individual resources for coping with situational and contextual variables (Nilsson et al., 2007). The relevance of self-evaluation is configured in the study of individual variables in decisional processes (Watson, 2001) and specifically in decision-making processes in career decision-making (Savickas, 2005). This article will therefore focus on a promising area of research in respect of the core self-evaluation construct (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997), the positive self-concept, which has not been studied sufficiently empirically in relation to decision-making, in particular comparing it with traditional variables such as fluid intelligence and personality traits.

Early research on decision-making was dominated by normative models and probabilistic studies strongly influenced by economic theory (Luce & Raiffa, 1957) thus emphasizing the cognitive aspects of decision-making. In relation to the specific role of fluid intelligence in decision-making processes, a study by Rigas, Carling, and Brehmer (2002) revealed that greater fluid intelligence was linked to better performance in dynamic decision-making tasks regarding decisions made by individuals in real-time based on changes occurring in the environment.

Because various studies have shown that individuals do not always use rational procedures when making decisions, the attention has broadened to include other individual variables (Nilsson et al., 2007). Personality in decision-making is now a recognized factor (Tokar, Fischer, & Subich, 1998). Regarding specific relationships between career decision-making difficulties and personality traits, as defined according to the model by Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996), more emotionally stable individuals seem to perceive fewer decisional difficulties (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Relationships have also emerged (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009) between career decision-making difficulties (Gati et al., 1996) and the Extraversion and Neuroticism dimensions. Even research on decisional styles emphasizes the influence of personality variables (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006; Watson, 2001). Regarding the presence of links between decisional styles, as defined according to the model by Mann, Burnett, Radford, and Ford (1997), and personality traits, as conceptualized according to the Big Five Model, an analysis of the literature shows the following relationships: an inverse relationship between Avoidance and Extraversion (Di Fabio &

\* Corresponding author. Address: Dipartimento Di Psicologia, Università degli Studi di Firenze, via di San Salvi, 12 Complesso di San Salvi, Padiglione 26, 50135 Firenze, Italy. Tel.: +39 (0)55 6237850; fax: +39 (0)55 6236047.

E-mail address: [adifabio@psico.unifi.it](mailto:adifabio@psico.unifi.it) (A. Di Fabio).

Busoni, 2006); a positive relationship between Vigilance and Conscientiousness (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006); a positive relationship between Procrastination and Neuroticism (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006; Watson, 2001); an inverse relationship between Procrastination and Extraversion (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006; Watson, 2001) and between Procrastination and Conscientiousness (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006); a positive relationship between Hypervigilance and Neuroticism (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006); and an inverse relationship between Hypervigilance and Extraversion (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2006). Indecisiveness is linked to higher levels of Neuroticism (Jackson, Furnham, & Lawty-Jones, 1999).

### 1.2. Core self-evaluation

As mentioned earlier, a promising area of research in relation to career decision-making is core self-evaluation (Judge et al., 1997). Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoresen (2003) recently referred to this construct in terms of a fundamental self-evaluation on perceived value, effectiveness and individual skills. More specifically, the construct refers to a concept of a higher order defined by four more specific factors: self-esteem, self-efficacy, the tendency to have a negative cognitive/explanatory style and locus of control (Judge et al., 1997). An analysis of the literature shows that extensive psychological research has been conducted on the separate traits that have a bearing on core self-evaluation but that relatively little research has been done on these traits together as a distinct construct (Judge et al., 1997). Where they have been considered together, they are usually treated as separate variables without seeing them as constituting a possible common framework (Hornner, 1996). However, recent studies on self-esteem, self-efficacy, the tendency to have a negativistic cognitive/explanatory style and locus of control together (Judge et al., 1997, 2003) have found that these constructs constitute a single factor suggesting that they could be considered indicators of a latent construct of a higher order, namely the core self-evaluation construct. Research has recently begun on the possible role of the core self-evaluation construct in decision-making processes thus highlighting the relationship between this construct and decisional variables such as career decision-making difficulties, decisional styles and indecisiveness (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2010).

### 1.3. Aim and hypotheses

Against this background, the present study sought to examine the relationship of fluid intelligence, personality traits and the core self-evaluation construct with aspects of decision-making (career decision-making difficulties, decisional styles, indecisiveness) among students attending the last two years of high school. The aim was to determine whether the core self-evaluation construct is better able to explain the percentage of incremental variance compared to fluid intelligence and personality traits specifically in relation to decisions about one's future career path (career decision-making difficulties) and decisional processes in general (decisional styles and indecisiveness). The choice of school students was determined by the desire to study this theme in depth in a scholastic context, specifically in students facing a significant choice and transition at the end of high school. This choice was also consistent with Di Fabio and Busoni's (2010) previous study, which indicated that the core self-evaluation construct in this area did not appear to have been sufficiently investigated. The following hypotheses were accordingly made:

(H1) The core self-evaluation construct will add significant incremental variance beyond the variance accounted for by fluid intelligence and personality traits in relation to the CDDQ decision-making difficulties and will show an inverse relationship with

each of the three CDDQ dimensions (Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, Inconsistent Information).

(H2) The core self-evaluation construct will add significant incremental variance beyond the variance accounted for by fluid intelligence and personality traits in relation to the MDMQ decisional styles and will show a positive relationship with the MDMQ Vigilance decisional style and an inverse relationship with each of the three maladaptive MDMQ decisional styles (Avoidance, Procrastination, Hypervigilance).

(H3) The core self-evaluation construct will add significant incremental variance beyond the variance accounted for by fluid intelligence and personality traits in relation to indecisiveness and will show an inverse relationship with indecisiveness.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Participants

One hundred and forty-three students attending the last 2 years of high school in the Tuscan school system participated in the study. All the students enrolled in the last 2 years of high school in the school system were invited to participate. With regard to gender, 69 (48.25%) of the participants were boys and 74 (51.75%) were girls. With regard to the type of school attended, 63 (44.06%) of the students attended a technical school and 80 (55.94%) attended a college preparatory high school. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 19 years ( $M = 17.51$ ,  $SD = .64$ ).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM)

The Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) test by Raven (1962) was used to evaluate fluid intelligence. The test is subdivided into two series of items consisting respectively of 12 (Series I) items and 36 (Series II) items from which the participants had to choose one response from among eight possible alternatives. The first series was used for practice purposes, and the second series was used as an efficiency test. With regard to the reliability of the Italian normative sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .91.

#### 2.2.2. Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ)

The Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 1993) was used to evaluate personality traits. The questionnaire had 132 items consisting of response options in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = *Absolutely false* to 5 = *Absolutely true*. The questionnaire distinguished five fundamental personality dimensions and ten sub dimensions (two for each scale). In the Italian normative sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .81 for Extraversion, .73 for Agreeableness, .81 for Conscientiousness, .90 for Emotional Stability and .75 for Openness.

#### 2.2.3. Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES)

The Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES, Judge et al., 2003) in the Italian version by Di Fabio and Busoni (2009) was used to evaluate the core self-evaluation construct. The Italian version of the scale was obtained through back-translation of the original version of the CSES by Judge et al. (2003).

The questionnaire had 12 items consisting of response options in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. The reliability coefficient of the Italian version of the scale was good:  $\alpha = .84$  (Di Fabio & Busoni, 2009).

#### 2.2.4. Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire

The Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ, Gati et al., 1996), short version (34 items), in the Italian version

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