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Comparing ability and self-report trait emotional intelligence, fluid intelligence, and personality traits in career decision

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of ability and trait emotional intelligence (EI), fluid intelligence, and personality traits in career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness. The Advanced Progressive Matrices, Big Five Questionnaire, Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale: Short Form, Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, and Indecisiveness Scale were administered to 194 Italian high school students. These results highlighted the potentially important role of self-reported EI in career decisions.

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1. Introduction

The growing interest in emotional intelligence (EI) and its relationship to career decisions (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012a; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008b; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009a) follows from the suggestion of a possible link between the role of understanding and managing emotions and career decision-making (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003). Individuals with higher EI are more aware of their emotions and are more able to integrate emotional experiences with thoughts and actions. As a consequence, EI could be an important variable in the process of career exploration and career decision-making (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003).

Several recent empirical studies have been conducted regarding the relationship of EI to factors associated with decision making including career indecision (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008b, 2009a; Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, & Gati, 2013; Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012), decisional styles (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012a), and indecisiveness (Di Fabio et al., 2013). This research has been extended to explore possible links between EI and various career decision-making processes including career decision-making self-efficacy (Brown, George-Curran,

& Smith, 2003; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008a), social support (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012b) and scholastic and academic success (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009b; Kenny, Di Fabio, & Minor, in press). However, just as there are many factors that influence career decisions and choices, EI is not a singular construct. The two major models of EI referred to as ability and trait EI vary further in how they are assessed as well as the facets defining each.

The present study focused on the particular role that different EI models might serve, along with fluid intelligence and personality, in career decision self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness. Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's ability to successfully complete tasks required in making career decisions (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). Inverse relationships have been consistently found between career decision-making self-efficacy and career indecision (Betz et al., 1996; Guay, Ratelle, Senecal, Larose, & Deschenes, 2006). Career decision-making self-efficacy is considered an important factor in the process of choosing a career and in career paths construction (Betz et al., 1996), especially during uncertain economic times like the present. Preliminary research data has shown a relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy associated with making career decisions and EI (Brown et al., 2003).

Career indecision refers to problems that emerge during the career decision-making process (Osipow, 1999). Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996) presented a model that differentiates between career decision-making difficulties that may occur before and after the start of the career decision-making process. The first type refers to a lack of readiness in which the person is not able to initiate the

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decision-making process. The second type can be subdivided into lack of information (the person does not possess the information necessary to make an informed career choice) and inconsistent information (the person perceives inconsistencies in the information used in determining career choice). It is important to underscore that career indecision is generally considered a normal phase of people's life (Osipow, 1999; Savickas, 2004) in contrast to general indecisiveness that refers to a chronic inability to make decisions in different contexts and situations (Frost & Shows, 1993).

More recently, studies have pointed to the promising role of EI in both career decision (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008b, 2009a) and in indecisiveness (Di Fabio et al., 2013).

Emotional intelligence has been extensively studied and described (e.g., Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009) and has also certainly been critiqued (e.g., Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2007). While there are many different measures intended to assess EI, they are essentially based on two very different models that distinguish between ability-based EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and self-report EI (Bar-On, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001). Ability EI is more closely related to the cognitive abilities underlying and required in the processing and use of emotional information (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Self-reported EI is more akin to personality traits and focuses on the self-reported perception and evaluation of emotions and their capacity to manage emotionally based situations. One trait EI model proposed by Petrides and Furnham (2000), Petrides and Furnham (2001) represents a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions that shows relationships with fundamental personality dimensions (Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001) such as the Big Five (Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003). Another well known trait EI description was proposed by Bar-On (1997) that defines EI along the major facets of interpersonal, intrapersonal, stress management, and adaptability. Research has shown that ability and self-reported EI are not correlated with each other. In contrast, the different self-reported EI models show overlap (Bracken & Mayer, 2003) but also some unique variance reflected in their measurement (Ferrández, Hernández, Bermejo, Ferrando, & Sáinz, 2012; Freudenthaler, Neubauer, Gabler, Scherl, & Rindermann, 2008). Ability-based and self-reported trait EI appear to have different relationships with decisional styles (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012a). While both are related to decision-making style, trait EI would appear to have the stronger relationship.

On the basis of these findings, it is important to further determine if the same specificity regarding different EI models will emerge in relation to other decisional variables such as those focused on career decisions.

1.1. Aim and hypotheses

Following from the framework delineated above, the present study examined the role of both ability and trait EI together with fluid intelligence and personality in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness among Italian high school students. Furthermore, there was interest in whether the two self-report trait EI measures accounted for the same or a different percentage of incremental variance in career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness. The following hypotheses were accordingly formulated.

(H1) Self-reported trait EI according to Bar-On (1997) model will add significant incremental variance beyond that accounted for by fluid intelligence, personality traits and ability-based EI in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness.

(H2) Self-reported trait EI assessed by the TEIQue will add significant incremental variance beyond that accounted for by fluid

intelligence, personality traits and ability-based EI in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision and indecisiveness.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

All the students enrolled the last 2 years of high school in the Tuscan school system were invited participated in the study. The final sample ($N = 194$) ranged in age from 16 to 19 years ($M = 18.02$, $SD = .78$); 82 (42.27%) of the participants were boys and 112 (57.73%) were girls.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM)

The Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM, Raven, 1962), Italian version (Di Fabio & Clarotti, 2007), was used to evaluate fluid intelligence. The test is composed of two series of items consisting respectively of 12 (Series I) items and 36 (Series II) items from which the participants choose the correct response from among eight possible alternatives. The Cronbach reliability was .91.

2.2.2. Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ)

The Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 1993) is composed of 132 items with responses made on a Likert scale format ranging from 1 = *Absolutely false* to 5 = *Absolutely true*. In the Italian normative sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were: .81 for Extraversion, .73 for Agreeableness, .81 for Conscientiousness, .90 for Emotional Stability, .75 for Openness.

2.2.3. Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)

The Italian version (D'Amico & Curci, 2010) of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT, Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) was used to evaluate ability-based EI. The 141 items provide a total score (EI Quotient) and four branch or dimension scores: Perceiving Emotions (PE), Facilitating Thought (FT), Understanding Emotions (UE), Managing Emotions (ME). Split half reliabilities were .90 for PE, .77 for FT, .75 for UE, .72 for ME (D'Amico & Curci, 2010).

2.2.4. Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory (Bar-On EQ-i)

The Italian version (Franco & Tappatà, 2009) of the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory (Bar-On EQ-i, Bar-On, 1997) evaluated self-reported trait EI. The 133 items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = *Not at all true of me* to 5 = *Absolutely true for me*. The total score) and scores for five principal dimensions have the following reliabilities: .91 for Intrapersonal, .84 for Interpersonal, .81 for Adaptability, .87 for Stress Management, .83 for General Mood, and .95 for the Emotional Quotient (EQ) (Franco & Tappatà, 2009).

2.2.5. Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form (TEIQue)

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue, Petrides & Furnham, 2004) also using the Italian version by Di Fabio (2013) is another often used self report measure of trait EI. The questionnaire is composed of 153 items consisting of response options framed in a 7-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 7 = *Completely agree*. The questionnaire provides a total score, and scores for four principal dimensions: Well-being, Self-Control, Emotionality, Sociability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Italian version were: .91 for Well-being, .84 for Self-control, .87 for Emotionality, .86 for Sociability, .93 for the total score.

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