Cross-cultural differences in career planning capabilities of students: Learnings for recruitment marketing and employer branding.

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Abstract:

In many countries, there is a shortage of skilled employees. Employees are customers, and recruitment and employer branding are vehicles to find and retain talented employees as a valuable human resource. It is a long-term strategy to manage awareness and attraction of a company for employees. Recruiters and employer marketers have to understand students' career choice behaviour in order to prepare customized arguments to attract the most talented students. This study informs about relationships between students' career planning capabilities, performance and trait emotional intelligence (TEI) in two countries with different educational and cultural conditions. Findings reveal that different EI facets relate to students' career planning capabilities. The cultural background of the students as well as academic performance influence career planning capabilities. Implications for recruitment marketing and employer branding across cultural environments are provided.

Keywords: Employer marketing, employer branding, recruitment, emotional intelligence, career choice, cross-cultural marketing.

Track: International Marketing and Marketing in Emerging Countries

1. Introduction

Employees are customers who must be recruited and retained; Recruitment marketing consists of all the marketing tools used to attract the right profiles from within a pool of applicants (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding is *'… the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employment company'* (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). It is important for recruiters and employer marketers to have a good understanding of the expectations and planning horizons of their future 'customers' (employees) and international employer branding experts should know about cross-cultural differences in the anticipations and outlooks of their target group. Knowledge about the drivers and moderators of career planning capabilities allows specifying customer-oriented arguments for recruitment marketing and employer branding. Personal as well as cultural factors may have an influence on students' capabilities to set career goals, plan first steps into a professional career, solve career finding related problems, and develop personal interests, self-efficacy and career-path in accordance with their values and lifestyle.

2. Conceptual framework

Career planning theories: Gottfredson (1981) introduces a developmental process that builds on self-concept, but also focuses on external forces such as sex roles, intellectual level, accessible alternatives (social space) as well as employment opportunities and economic conditions. Brown and Lent (Brown & Lent, 1996) call attention to possibly challenging contextual factors such as barriers on the ways from education to employment. Specific personal interests in a career path may not be enough to shape career intentions and confidence if stumbling blocks are hovering over them. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) relies on personal variables like personality, self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals, performance, and persistence behaviour. (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002)

Emotional intelligence (EI): Following Lawler (2001), EI plays a role in performing decisive processes. Consequently, career decisions and its antecedents may also be affected by the level of EI of future employees. Kidd (1998) states that emotional experience, expression, and communication are missing when discussing career decision making skills, career management skills, and career resilience. The concept of self-efficacy is present in most career planning theories. Trait emotional intelligence (TEI) theory is based on the concept of emotional self-efficacy, comprising self-perceived skills and behavioural dispositions on lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, 2010). TEI theory is

applicable throughout different contextual settings, and it has been used in academic contexts already (e.g. (Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004).

Culture and environmental circumstances: Various intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to culture play a role in students‘ career choice. Teachers’ and educators’ cultural background plays a significant role in the process of youth’s career decision-making. There is variation in environmental circumstances that influence the career choice and were related to the cultural and economic situation of the country in question. (Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey, & Malau-Aduli, 2018) Lee (Lee, 2001) analyzed outcome expectations and professional development opportunities of young people and found that career maturity, confidence, and outcome expectations were culturally based. Howard et al. (Howard, Ferrari, Nota, Solberg, & Soresi, 2009) reported differences with respect to self-efficacy in collectivist and individualistic cultures, namely that in collectivist cultures self-efficacy was linked to congruence with parents versus in individualistic cultures adolescents were more encouraged to become independent. Austria and Ukraine have been selected as they are different in cultural as well as economic terms. Table 1 depicts main dimensions of interest in the context of this study. Ukraine is an emerging market according to the IMF and the Emerging Markets Bond Index Monitor (J.P. Morgan). The population of Eastern, Southern Central regions of Ukraine is organically combined post-Russian and post-Soviet cultural values including distrust of private property, strong collectivism, the absence of political self-organization, ironic scepticism about political parties and their leaders (Blyznyuk & Lepeyko, 2016). Austria is a developed market economy with a social focus by taking into account the weaker members of society. It is moderately individualistic with moderately high levels of self-confidence and work-discipline. (Tompos, 2015)

	Austria	**Ukraine**
Power Distance *	11	92
Individualism *	55	25
Masculinity *	79	27
Uncertainty avoidance *	70	95
GDP per capita **	37,941 USD	34,681 USD
Unemployment **	4.7	9.3
University enrolment (2014) **	79.1 %	82.6 %
Labor force development (2013-2019) **	+3.7 %	-6,9 %

Table 1. Selected cultural and economic differences Austria – Ukraine. *) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010); **) (World Bank, 2019)

Based on career planning theories, trait EI theory and cultural differences between Ukraine and Austria, a variance in the relationship of trait EI dimensions and career planning capabilities is expected. The effects of the trait EI dimensions ‘self-control’, ‘sociability’,

'emotionality', and 'well-being' on 'career planning and goal setting', 'career related problem solving', and 'career related self-appraisal' are investigated with respect to cultural differences of Austria and Ukraine. Also, it is suggested that EI and academic performance have an effect on the confidence of respondents with their career choice capabilities.

3. Methodology

This study uses a questionnaire distributed to students at two universities in Austria, and in Ukraine. Participants were selected from undergraduate programmes, both specializing in Marketing Management. A total of 153 responses was collected, of which 99 were female, 54 were male, 86 were from Austria and 67 were from Ukraine.

Instruments: Developed by Taylor and Betz (Taylor & Betz, 1983) and validated and shortened by Betz et al. (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996), the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSES) is widely used and has been validated in several countries. The instrument measures (a) career-planning related problem solving, (b) goal setting and planning, and (c) appraisal of own values and expectations. *The self-appraisal factor* refers to the extent one accurately assesses her/his career-relevant abilities, values, and interests. *Goal selection and planning* refers to the extent one can set priorities and establish plans in order to manage successfully her/his professional advancement. *Problem solving* refers to the extent one is able to figure out alternative coping strategies and solve career choice problems when outcomes do not go as intended; and that alternative leads to an integrative, socially acceptable, and personally satisfying solution (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). 14 items of the CDSES scale were used. EI was assessed by using the trait EI questionnaire (TEIQue) in its short version (30 items), a self-report measure of emotional self-efficacy (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). The instrument does not require 'right' or 'wrong' answers and therefore is applicable in multiple contextual settings. Academic performance was self-assessed by the students on a 1-100 scale.

Procedure: Paper and pencil questionnaires were given to students in class. For Austrian students, a German version of the instruments was used. Ukrainian students received an English version. Those students, however, had a confirmed excellent command of English as this is an enrolment criterion of the Ukrainian University where the study took place. To compute career-choice capability factors according to the CDSES scale, an exploratory factor analyses was conducted with PCA and Varimax rotation. KMO test of sampling adequacy was sufficient (.863), as well as Bartlett's test of sphericity (Sig=.000). The factor model suggested by Betz et al. (Betz et al., 1996) was confirmed, the total variance explained was

.523 %. The three factors were labelled ‘goal setting and planning’ (α=.709), ‘problem solving’ (α=.713), and ‘self-appraisal’ (α=.757), respectively.

To compute trait EI scores, Petrides’ (Petrides, 2001) scoring syntax was applied to produce four factors, ‘well-being’ (α=.723), ‘self-control’ (α=.631), ‘emotionality’ (α=.720), ‘sociability’ (α=.701) and a ‘total TEI’ (α=.859). ‘Self-control’s’ internal consistency was slightly below the threshold value of .7.

4. Analysis of data and results

Data was analysed using bivariate correlations, independent sample t-tests and split-group analysis using SPSS v. 25. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables.

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Age	148	5	20,88	3,74
Academic Performance (1-100)	143	10	75,39	15,48
Emotional Intelligence	153	0	5,20	0,70
Well-Being	153	0	5,73	0,86
Self-control	153	0	4,78	0,90
Emotionality	153	0	5,16	1,04
Sociability	153	0	5,06	0,91
Goalsetting and Planning (Z)	142	11	-0,01	1,00
Problem Solving (Z)	142	11	0,02	0,96
Self Appraisal (Z)	142	11	0,03	0,94
Career Choice Total Score (Z)	153	0	0,02	0,97

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	99	64,7	64,7	64,7
Male	54	35,3	35,3	100,0
Total	153	100,0	100,0	
Austria	86	56,2	56,2	56,2
Ukraine	67	43,8	43,8	100,0
Total	153	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the main variables

Main effects: A bivariate correlation was computed to highlight relationships of EI-scores and career planning capability scores in both countries. Table 3 shows significant and strong correlations of EI dimensions with career choice factors especially in Austria, less in Ukraine. ‘Goal setting and planning’ has strong correlations with ‘self-control’ and ‘well-being’ in both countries, whilst ‘self appraisal’ only in Austria is strongly correlated with the EI dimension of ‘sociability’ and only weakly with ‘emotionality’ in Ukraine.

			Goalsetting and Planning	Problem Solving	Self Appraisal
AUT	Well-Being	P. Correlation	,494**	,370**	0,162
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,001	0,148
		N	81	81	81
	Self-control	P. Correlation	,462**	,246*	0,115
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,027	0,306
		N	81	81	81
	Emotionality	P. Correlation	0,180	0,168	0,053
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,108	0,134	0,639
		N	81	81	81
	Sociability	P. Correlation	,311**	,241*	,365**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,005	0,030	0,001
		N	81	81	81
UA	Well-Being	P. Correlation	,253*	0,166	0,239
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,050	0,201	0,063
		N	61	61	61
	Self-control	P. Correlation	,304*	0,121	0,027
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,017	0,351	0,834
		N	61	61	61
	Emotionality	P. Correlation	0,181	0,161	,261*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,163	0,215	0,042
		N	61	61	61
	Sociability	P. Correlation	,255*	,297*	0,152
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,047	0,020	0,241
		N	61	61	61

Table 3. Bivariate correlations of EI dimensions and career planning capabilities

Significant differences between Austria and Ukraine were found in the dimension of 'goal setting and planning', as well as an almost statistically significant difference in 'problem solving'. No differences were found in the 'self appraisal' dimension.

Figure 1 shows that the confidence of the Austrian respondents with 'goalsetting and planning' and 'problem solving' was higher than with the Ukrainian respondents whereas the 'self-appraisal' dimension scored higher in Ukraine.

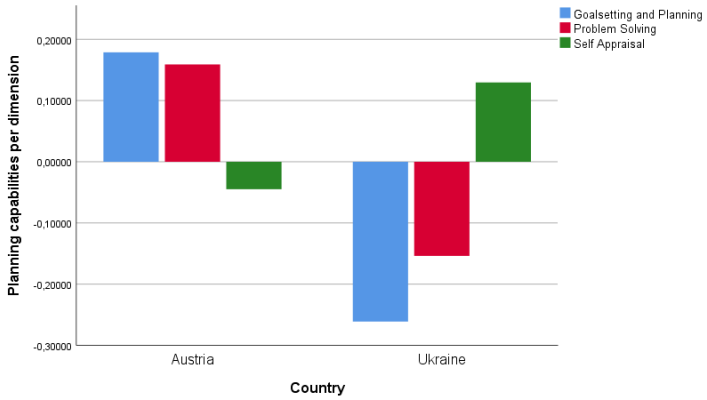

Figure 1. Career planning capabilities in Austria and Ukraine: Mean differences

Moderating effects: The moderating effect of EI on the three sub-scores of career choice capabilities was investigated. Two levels of EI (low-high) were computed, split at the median.

Country		F	Sig.	t-test for Equality of Means T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
AUT	Goalsetting and Planning	,855	,358	-3,670	79	,000	-,6524	,1777	-1,0063	-,2986
				-3,662	75,922	,000	-,6524	,1781	-1,0073	-,2976
	Problem Solving	,818	,368	-3,201	79	,002	-,5265	,1644	-,8539	-,1991
				-3,203	78,995	,002	-,5265	,1644	-,8537	-,1992
	Self Appraisal	,005	,944	-,280	79	,781	-,0563	,2016	-,4578	,3450
				-,279	77,246	,781	-,0563	,2020	-,4585	,3458
UA	Goalsetting and Planning	,136	,714	-,956	59	,343	-,2737	,2864	-,8469	,2993
				-,952	54,995	,345	-,2737	,2876	-,8502	,3026
	Problem Solving	1,698	,198	-,697	59	,489	-,2049	,2941	-,7935	,3836
				-,667	43,828	,508	-,2049	,3071	-,8241	,4141
	Self Appraisal	6,901	,011	-1,169	59	,247	-,2942	,2516	-,7977	,2093
				-1,219	57,950	,228	-,2942	,2413	-,7773	,1889

Table 4. Moderating effect of emotional intelligence on career planning capabilities

As table 4 informs, in the Austrian sub-sample EI has a moderating effect on the level of confidence with 'goal setting and planning' and 'problem solving'. At higher levels of EI, students are more confident with being able to set goals and plan their career, as well as to solve problems related to their career planning. In the Ukrainian sub-sample, no significant differences between levels of EI were found.

Figure 2 shows the differences of career choice sub-scores in Austria and Ukraine with respect to low and high levels of EI. The sub-scores 'goal setting and planning' and 'problem solving' for the Austrian sub-sample are significantly different at low and high levels of EI, with higher confidence in both scores at higher levels of EI.

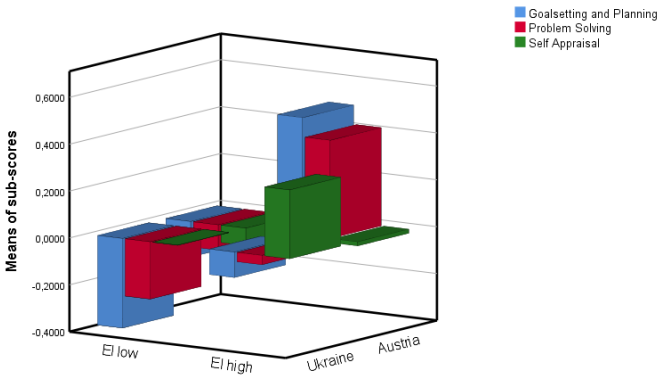

Figure 2. Moderating effect of emotional intelligence on career choice capabilities

The moderating effect of academic performance on career choice capabilities was analysed. Two levels of academic performance (low-high) were split at the median.

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
AUT	Goalsetting and Planning	,209	,649	-,187	77	,852	-,0414	,2210	-,4815	,3987
				-,181	28,727	,858	-,0414	,2287	-,5093	,4265
	Problem Solving	,513	,476	-1,644	77	,104	-,3325	,2022	-,7351	,0701
				-1,807	35,838	,079	-,3325	,1840	-,7057	,0407
	Self Appraisal	,378	,541	,500	77	,618	,1205	,2408	-,3591	,6001
				,458	26,631	,651	,1205	,2631	-,4197	,6607
UA	Goalsetting and Planning	,340	,562	-1,038	52	,304	-,3206	,3089	-,9405	,2991
				-1,045	51,507	,301	-,3206	,3069	-,9366	,2953
	Problem Solving	2,273	,138	-,694	52	,491	-,2229	,3213	-,8677	,4219
				-,684	43,350	,498	-,2229	,3259	-,8801	,4343
	Self Appraisal	,423	,518	-,450	52	,654	-,1239	,2752	-,6762	,4282
				-,453	51,798	,653	-,1239	,2737	-,6734	,4254

Table 5. Moderating effect of academic performance on career choice capabilities

In both countries, there are no significant differences between low and high academic performance with respect to the three dimensions of career choice capabilities (table 5).

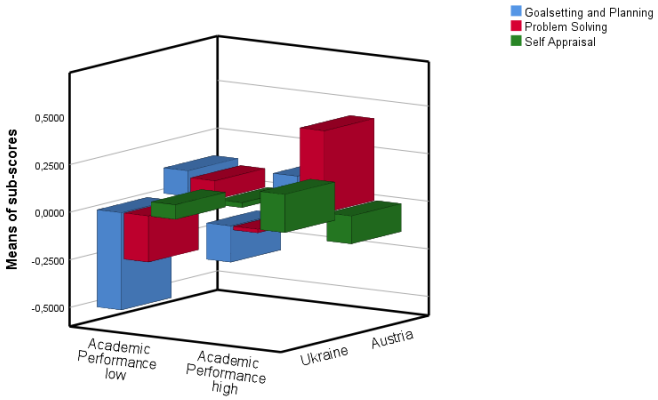

Figure 3. Moderating effect of academic performance on career choice capabilities

Figure 3 shows the differences of career choice sub-scores in Austria and Ukraine with respect to low and high levels of academic performance. However, these differences are not or only marginally ('problem solving' in the Austrian sub-sample) significant.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Firstly, it was found that Austrian students score significantly higher in their 'goal setting and planning' as well as 'problem solving' dimensions. That goes in line with cultural assumptions of a higher individualism and task orientation of Austrians according to cultural dimensions. In Ukraine, in contrast, the 'self-appraisal' dimension (i.e. *'I want to know where I want to be and whether the position will fit to my lifestyle'*) is more important and attractive. Watson (Watson, 2006) describes this 'being-vs-doing'-effect with respect to occupation and culture. Recruitment marketers can expects more focused and self-confident candidates in

Austria, whilst they should concentrate more on explaining the future job in the context and the set of values of the candidates in Ukraine. Secondly, the effect of EI on career choice capabilities was found to be significant. Higher levels of EI account for higher confidence in career choice capabilities. For employer branding, this could help to prepare their arguments in a way that 'emotionality' and 'sociability' related aspects are emphasized over just facts. Finally, academic performance does not have a significant influence on career planning capabilities. Recruiters might not rely on 'grades' only when addressing students with job offerings or career perspectives.

6. Limitations and directions for future research

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size and the restriction to two countries only. Larger samples, collected in different countries, could shed more light on the variance of career choice capabilities of students in different cultural and economic situations. Secondly, only business students have been investigated. Maybe different disciplines, like engineering or ICT, might yield different results. Lastly, in future research, it would be interesting to find additional variable, like e.g. job or internship experience, parents' biography, educational styles, etc. and include those in the analysis.

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