Students' career decision-making self-efficacy: Lessons for recruitment marketing in different cultures

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Abstract:

Little is known about recruiting across cultures. Understanding students' career-decision making motives helps recruiters to align marketing activities with expectations of their future employees. Career-decision-making self-efficacy of students Austria and Ukraine is analysed with EI and academic performance as variables. Students from an individualistic, low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance culture rank higher in planning their career than students from a collectivistic, high-power distance, high uncertainty avoidance culture. EI has positive effects on CDSE with larger effects in Austria. Academic performance has positive effects on CDSE in Ukraine. Implications for recruitment marketing are discussed based on signalling theory and the value-based model of recruitment.

Keywords: cross-cultural marketing, recruitment marketing, career decision-making self-efficacy.

1 Introduction

Even in these turbulent times, companies should think of 'a world after the crisis'. And in this world, global talent recruiting will be still important and relevant. However, as stated by Ma and Allan (Ma & Allen, 2009) little is known about recruiting across cultures, and most existing studies have been conducted in U.S. A better understanding of the students' motivation and drivers in their career-decision making process can help company recruiters to align their employer marketing activities with the expectations of their future employees. Hence for employers, sending appropriate signals via employer branding reduces potential employees' information costs and make them more likely to accept an employer's offer (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010). In this contribution, career-decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE) of business students in two countries is compared, with the variables of 'culture', 'emotional intelligence', and 'academic performance' analysed. Business students in Ukraine and Austria were the subjects of the analysis. Cultural background along Hofstede's dimensional model (Hofstede, 2011), trait emotional intelligence (EI) (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007) and self-reported academic performance were used to explain variation in (CDSE) and its dimensions. Whereas CDSE has been used as an instrument to investigate students' capabilities and assessment to plan and organize their future career, cross-cultural comparisons are rare. This contribution combines student career decision-making self-efficacy in a cross-cultural context with lessons derived for recruitment marketing and employer branding.

2 Recruitment marketing and employer branding

Recruitment marketing consists of all the marketing tools used to attract the right profiles from within a pool of applicants (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The relationship of to-be-employees and employers is characterized by information asymmetry (Michael, 1974). Knowledge about the variables that determine students' 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 and career-paths in accordance with their values and lifestyle. Employers who have an understanding of the instrumental (functional) and symbolic attributes that make them attractive to future employees do have a significant recruitment advantage (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

3 Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

Career decision-making is a complex process that involves environmental as well as individual characteristics (Gati, Landman, Davidovitch, Asulin-Peretz, & Gadassi, 2010). Many factors play a role in an individual's career decision making process and expectations (Li, Hazler, & Trusty, 2017). Social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) accentuates cognitive and personal factors like personality, self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals associated with academic performance. One of the most influential notions related to self-efficacy and career development it the concept of CDSE (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). CDSE is defined as 'an individual's degree of belief that he or she can successfully complete tasks necessary to making career decisions' (Mau, 2000, p. 368-369). It refers to several competencies in behavioural domains, such as goal setting and planning, career-related problem solving, or accurate self-appraisal. Goal setting refers to how one is able to set priorities in order to manage successfully her/his professional advancement. Planning denotes the possibility to establish plans for the future and to identify career paths. Problem solving states the ability to solve career choice problems and reach a socially acceptable and personally satisfying solution. Self-appraisal labels the extent to which a person can accurately assess her/his career-relevant abilities, values, and interests (Betz & Luzzo, 1996).

4 Empirical context: Ukraine and Austria

In the current study, two contrasting cultures are compared in assessing CDSE of business students, namely Austria and Ukraine. Table 1 depicts cultural dimensions of both countries.

Table 1: Cultural differences Austria – Ukraine. (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

	Austria	Ukraine
Power Distance	11	92
Individualism	55	25
Masculinity	79	27
Uncertainty avoidance	70	95

Ukraine as a post-Soviet culture is characterized by a high level of **collectivism** and the absence of (political) self-organization (Blyznyuk & Lepeyko, 2016). In collectivist cultures self-efficacy is linked to congruence with parents (Howard, Ferrari, Nota, Solberg, & Soresi, 2009). Austria, in contrast, has a moderately high score in individualism. The level of **power distance** is high in Ukraine. Power distance reflects the extent of uneven power distribution in social structures (family, organizations, institutions, or society as a whole) and tolerance to inequality. Ukrainian culture has a higher level of internal inequality and more hierarchical pyramid structures. (Wackowski & Blyznyuk, 2017). Austria's score on the power distance dimension is one of the lowest overall (Hofstede et al., 2010), i.e. unequal power distribution is less tolerated. With respect to education, Austrian students do not feel that criticism of their professors should be avoided or even is harmful to them (Apfelthaler et al., 2007) and students do not perceive high hierarchical distances between them and their teachers. The cultural dimension of **masculinity vs. femininity** refers to methods of motivating people to perform work to achieve their goals. Cultures with a high level of masculinity (Austria) prefer active behavior with a dominance of traditional male values such as success, money, wealth, ambition, career, competition (Tompos, 2015). Higher levels of femininity (Ukraine) rather refers to passive target behavior with aspects of harmony and inclination to compromise, quality of life and care for others. **Uncertainty avoidance** reflects the degree to which members of a society cope with anxiety by minimizing the risk of making wrong decisions. Ukraine scores very high in uncertainty avoidance, thus Ukrainians feel very much threatened by ambiguous situations. Austria ranks lower, but still has a certain preference for avoiding uncertain situations, however, to a lesser extent. Career decisions are complex and comprise a certain level of uncertainty and ambiguity (Taber, 2013). Hence, the level of uncertainty avoidance might have an effect on the process of career decision making.

5 Hypotheses development

The first set of hypotheses relies on Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions framework. Ukrainian students live and learn under the condition of collectivism, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance and a feminist culture. Mau (2000) found that for collective-oriented cultures students rely less on their individual abilities than on group efforts. Ukrainian students, thus, may have lower levels of self-efficacy concerning their individual career-planning capabilities. In contrast, Austrian students, as representatives of an individualistic country, may rely more on their capabilities to construct their future environment individually. Furthermore, the presence of a high power distance (like in Ukraine) might create the assumption that making plans for the future is highly subject to the activities of superiors (parents, political and business leaders), hence the importance of career planning is lower than in cultures with lower power distance (like Austria). Ukraine culture is described as more feminine than masculine, hence characteristics like planning, ambitious fighting, and competitive acting are less important. For Austria, as a country with a high masculinity score, the opposite might be true.

Actively managing and troubleshooting is also not a characteristic of a feminine culture like Ukraine, and, finally, at a high level of power distance goal directed behaviour (Sue-Chan & Ong, 2002). As Earley (1999) states, power distance correlates with the importance placed on high status group members' collective judgments. Hence, own problem-solving skills are not as important as in low power distance cultures, because one can rely on the fact that other people help with guidance and judgement. In contrast, masculine societies lend larger significance to tangible success.

Lastly, students' self-appraisal, i.e. a self-assessment of whether they are confident to make a career-decision, which is congruent to their values and life expectations, is compared for the Ukrainian and the Austrian sample. Research suggests that people in collectivistic cultures have interdependent self-appraisal and such in individualistic cultures have independent self-appraisal (Kolstad & Horpestad, 2009). Furthermore, in cultures that are more oriented towards masculinity, authorities and in-group members promote students to position themselves unambiguously in accord with the individual status assigned to them in the class-collective, thereby fostering adequate self-appraisals. Lastly, a high level of uncertainty avoidance might students be less confident in appraising their future career to be congruent with their values and lift expectations. It is proposed that *Austrian students have a higher level of (a) career planning self-efficacy, (b) career organizing and managing, and (c) career-related self-appraisal than Ukrainian students ($H1_{a-c}$)*.

The second hypothesis deals with the question whether EI has an effect on CDSE. Young et al. (1997) address the energizing and activating role of emotions in career exploration and decision-making activities in terms of how career possibilities are appraised by adolescents. Studies suggest that individuals with high EI have a stronger emotional awareness and a greater tendency to integrate thoughts and actions into their emotional experiences (Di Fabio, 2012). As such, EI may influence individuals' career planning and organizing processes. Emmerling and Cherniss (2003) demonstrated that individuals with higher EI identify their interests and values more clearly and communicate them more effectively during the career counselling process. With respect to culture, collectivistic orientation was significantly associated with greater emotional intelligence and better mental health outcomes (Bhullar, Schutte, & Malouff, 2012). Similarly, Gunkel et al. (2014) show that especially collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation have a positive influence on the different dimensions of emotional intelligence. We propose that *trait EI has stronger effects on students' career decision making self-efficacy for Ukrainian than for Austrian students (H2)*.

The relationship of academic performance and career decision making capabilities has been discussed in several studies. Kuncel et al. (2004) found that cognitive abilities are related to evaluations of creativity and potential. Also Lent et al. (1986) found a relationship of academic performance and self-efficacy with vocational interest and the range of perceived career option. In collectivist and high-power distance cultures, students are very much dependent on their teachers' judgement in their achievement believes. Students' self-efficacy is linked to congruence with parents or superiors (Howard et al., 2009). This is also supported by Mau (2000) stating that the presence of a high power distance leads to making plans for the future being highly subject to the activities of superiors (e.g. teachers). Better grades, as an expression of teachers' positive judgement, nurture career related self-efficacy and self-appraisal in these countries. H3 reads: *Academic performance has stronger effects on students' career decision making self-efficacy for Ukrainian than for Austrian students.*

6 Methodology

This study uses a questionnaire distributed to students at two universities, one in Austria, and one in Ukraine. Students from two Universities' undergraduate programmes specializing in

Marketing Management participated in the study. 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: 14 of 25 items of the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSES) (Taylor & Betz, 1983) were used. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was computed to reveal underlying factors of the construct. A principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted. One item ('talk with a person already employed in a field I am interested in') had weak loadings on all factors, so it was eliminated and EFA was recalculated. KMO test of sampling adequacy was sufficient (.876), as well as Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2=634,062, p=.000). The remaining 13 items explained 53,43% of the variance with three factors which were - in accordance with the original intention of Betz and Luzzo (1996). They were labeled 'career-related planning and goal setting' (α=.707), 'career-related problem solving' (α=.728), and 'career-related self-appraisal' (α=.713). Planning and goal selection and 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. Self-appraisal factor refers to the extent one accurately assesses her/his career-relevant abilities, values, and interests. 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 et al., 2007). A global trait EI score was computed (α=.855). Academic performance was self-assessed by the students on a 1-100 scale. Gender and age were self-reported by the respondents.
Procedure: Paper and pencil questionnaires were used in class. For Austrian students, a German version of the measures was translated and retranslated. Ukrainian students received the original English version. Those students, however, have an excellent command of English as this is an enrolment criterion of the University where the study took place.

7 Analysis of data and results

First, bivariate correlations of all variables were calculated. Table 2 shows the correlations between the variables employed in this study.

Table 2: Bivariate correlations of all variables

Correlations

	Age	Gender	Country	Global TEI	Acad. Perf.	CRPG	CRPS	CRSA	CDSE
Age		0.079	.294**	0.068	0.035	.177*	0.125	-.193**	0.094
Gender			0.100	0.134	0.132	.222**	0.047	-0.040	0.153
Country				0.134	-0.056	.214**	.305**	-0.118	.259**
Global TEI					.242**	.372**	.442**	.208**	.600**
Acad. Perf.						0.122	.180*	.155*	.259**
CRPG							0.000	0.000	.656**
CRPS								0.000	.578**
CRSA									.486**
CDSE									

CRPG = Career related planning and goal setting, CRPS = Career related problem solving,
CRSA = Career related self-appraisal, CDSE = Career decision-making self-efficacy
Pearson correlation coefficient
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To test the first hypothesis (differences between Austrian an Ukrainian students with respect to their career-decision making self-efficacy), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to reveal difference between the groups. Two groups (Austrian vs. Ukrainian students) were compared. Age and gender were added as covariates. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p=.002), and Box's test of equality of covariance matrices was insignificant

(p=.066), hence there were no violations of assumptions to conduct MANOVA. There was a statistically significant difference in CRPG, CRPS, and CRPA based on the students' country of studies, F (3, 151) = 7.198, p = .000; Wilk's Λ = 0.875, partial η2 = .125. Because MANOVA was significant for the ‚country of studies' variable, the univariate ANOVA results were examined. Figure 1 shows the graphical interpretation of the sub-factors for both countries. A main effect of country was found for career related planning and goal setting, *F* (1,156)=5.55, p=.020. Ukrainian students (M=-.286, SD=1.156) reported significantly less career related planning and goal setting self-efficacy than did Austrians (M=1.490, SD=.892). A main effect was also found for career related problem solving, *F*(1, 156)=14.086, p=.000. Ukrainian students (M=-.3415, SD=.1.075) reported significantly less career related problem solving self-efficacy than did Austrians (M=.238, SD=.86). The main effect for career related self-appraisal was not significant (*F* (1,156)=.252, p=n.s). Ukrainians and Austrian students did not differ significantly on the reported career related self-appraisal. (Figure 1). Confirming H1a and H1b, Austrian students showed higher levels of career related planning and goal setting and career-related problem solving self-efficacy. H1c (self-appraisal) could not be confirmed statistically significant.

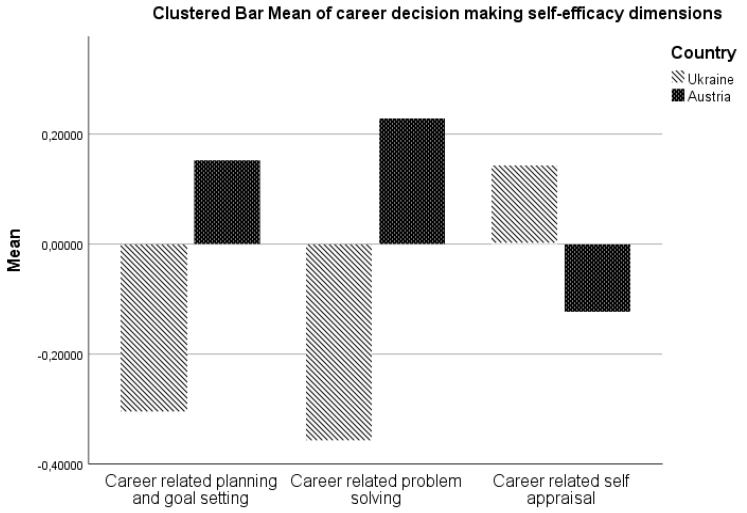

Figure 1: Mean differences of CDSE dimensions in Austria and Ukraine

The second and third hypotheses were related to the effect of EI and academic performance on career decision making self-efficacy. Multiple regression was used to test if EI and academic performance significantly predicted participants' CDSE. Age and gender were used as controls. The results of the regression indicated that, for Ukraine, EI explained 29.5% of the variance (R^2=.332, β=.369, p=.001). For Austria, EI explained 65.5% of the variance (R^2=.455, β=.655, p<.001). Only for Ukraine, a significant effect of academic performance (β=.295, p=.009) was found. To reveal the effect of EI and academic performance also on the level of the CDSE subscores (planning and goal setting, problem solving, self-appraisal), multiple regression was computed for each dimension individually. For career related planning and goal setting, the effect of EI was much larger in Austria (β=.576, p=.000) than in Ukraine (β=.289, p=.027). Similar, for career related problem solving, the effect size of EI was higher (β=.624, p=.000) than in Ukraine (β=.362, p=.004). Interestingly, the effect of EI on career related self-appraisal was insignificant for Ukraine (β=.147, p=.283), whilst is was significant for Austria (β=.347, p=.004). At the same time, for Ukraine, the effect of academic performance on career related self-appraisal became significant (β=.262, p=.005), whilst there was no significant relationship of academic performance and career related self-appraisal in Austria (β=.072, p=.437).

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis, CDSE total.

Coefficients[a]

Country	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
Ukraine	1	(Constant)	-2.746	.837		-3.281	.002
		Age	-.007	.028	-.025	-.233	.817
		Gender	.290	.251	.124	1.153	.253
		Academic Performance	.030	.007	.437	4.053	.000
	2[b]	(Constant)	-4.591	.953		-4.816	.000
		Age	-.007	.026	-.027	-.266	.791
		Gender	.197	.236	.085	.837	.405
		Academic Performance	.020	.007	.295	2.705	.009
		Trait EI	.519	.154	.369	3.366	.001
Austria	1	(Constant)	-.973	.708		-1.373	.172
		Age	.014	.028	.047	.507	.613
		Gender	.154	.199	.072	.775	.440
		Academic Performance	.009	.005	.163	1.735	.085
	2[c]	(Constant)	-5.662	.739		-7.657	.000
		Age	.005	.021	.017	.247	.806
		Gender	.051	.151	.024	.336	.738
		Academic Performance	.004	.004	.071	.993	.323
		Trait EI	1.010	.110	.655	9.204	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Career decision making self-efficacy
b. $R^2 = .332$
c. $R^2 = .455$

8 Discussion

It has been demonstrated that the cultural variable has an effect on students' CDSE. Austrian students (representing an individualistic, masculine low-power distance and medium high uncertainty avoidance culture) and Ukrainian students (archetypal for collectivistic, feminine and high levels of power distance and high uncertainty avoidance) differ in their confidence to plan, manage and appraise their future professional career. Austrian students rank higher in their belief to plan their future career as well as to solve career related problems. Austrian students are used to take individual responsibility and to be held responsible for their decisions, which might be the reason for higher levels of self-efficacy in planning and managing their career development. These findings are in line with Oettingen's (1995) cross-cultural study with students on their general study-related self-efficacy. For Ukrainian students, representing members of a collectivist and high power-distance culture, self-efficacy is linked to their level of congruence with their parents and teachers. They might be less encouraged by the latter ones to develop self-sufficiency and independence (Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey, & Malau-Aduli, 2018). Ukrainian students, in contrast, show higher levels of self-appraisal with respect to their future career. The have a higher trust in themselves to find the ideal job that fits into their preferred lifestyle. These findings were not statistically significant but, as the tendency is opposite to what was stated in the hypothesis, it should be mentioned as an interesting aspect. The relationship of trait EI and CDSE was investigated for both cultures. Trait EI was found to have a positive effect on CDSE in Austria as well as in Ukraine. These findings support Boyatzis et al.'s argument (Boyatzis, McKee, & Goleman, 2003), that emotionally intelligent people are adaptable, transparent, innovative, and conscientious about new challenges to perform well in their jobs. The findings are also in line with Liptak (2005), who is arguing that '*EI seems to be an excellent framework to use in helping college students find a job and succeed in the workplace*' (p. 171). The relationship of EI and CDSE was much stronger in Austria. For Ukrainian students, in contrast, a significant effect of academic performance and CDSE beliefs (mostly contributed through the career related self-appraisal dimension) suggest that those students believe they are capable of achieving only as much as their teachers' judgements suggest.

This is a typical pattern for collectivist and high-power distance societies. Evidently, better grades nurture career related self-efficacy and self-appraisal in these countries.

9 Lessons learned for recruitment marketing

The lessons learned for recruitment marketing will be discussed from two perspectives. First, based on signaling theory (assuming that the to-be-employee is the less informed party (Rynes, 1989)), the information demands of students from Ukraine and Austria are discussed through the lens of this study's findings.

Table 4: Implications for recruitment marketing based on signalling theory (Michael, 1974)

Study findings	Meaning	Lessons for recruitment marketing
Austrian students are more confident in being able to plan their career and manage problems than Ukrainian	Austrian students are willing to take challenges, vs. Ukrainian students are less self-assured to solve career-related problems and make long-term plans.	Austrian students Are open to concrete challenges and sophisticated employer branding. They are used to plan ahead and to solve career-related challenges. Ukrainan students feel les confident with challenging task and problems they have to solve. They might be more attracted by confirmative messages that help them to assess whether they fit into a firm's environment. Strong employer brands with concise messages might be easier appreciated by Ukraninians.
Ukrainian students rank higher in self-appraisal of their future career	Ukrainian students are better able to evaluate their own worth, significance, or status.	
Emotional intelligence of Austrian students contributes more to CDSE than of Ukrainian students	Sociability, Emotionality, Self-control, and wellbeing are strong drivers for Austrian students, less for Ukranian	Emotionally loaded arguments, face-to-face contacts, social activities etc. do have a strong impact for Austrian students. However, to a lesser extent, this also holds for Ukrainians.
Academic performance has a strong effect on CDSE with Ukrainian students.	Owed to collectivist and high-power distance orientation, teachers' estimation of students' performance does play an important role.	In Austria, students are the right target group for recruitment marketing, In Ukraine, teachers (and other stakeholders in the university) should be targeted as their judgement and estimation is very important for the students. An employer brand should be known not only by the students, but even more by the teachers in Ukraine.

In a second step, a temporal perspective based on Ma's and Allen's (2009) value-based model of recruitment is used to derive implications for recruitment marketing. Table 3 shows some lessons.

Table 5: Implications for recruitment marketing based on the value-based model of recruitment (Ma & Allen, 2009)

Phase according to Ma and Allen (2009)	Lessons for recruitment marketing
Generate Applicants • Choice of recruitment sources (formal, informal; active, passive) • Recruitment materials (group, individual)	Austrian students like to plan and solve problems. More formal, active communication, with tasks, challenges, quizzies, might be more welcome by Austrians. Recruitment materials should be dedicated to teachers and other superiors as well in Ukraine. Formal judgement of teachers is relevant. Materials can include emotional approaches in both countries, however, the emotional involvement is higher in Austria.
Maintain Applicant status • Interview (structure) • Administration (communication, time)	In Austria, interview processes can include problems to solve, vs. in Ukraine this might be threatening due to a lower confidence in problem solving capabilities.
Influence job choice decisions • Objective (extrinsic, intrinsic) • Subjective	The final job decision in Ukraine might involve teachers' judgements, vs. in Austria the applicants themselves play a dominant role. In Ukraine, as performance (judged by others) does play an important role in creating confidence in career-planning, objective criteria to underline decisions can play a stronger role.

10 Limitations and directions for future research

Of course, this study has limitations that need to be addressed. First, the countries that have been selected for this analysis (Austria and Ukraine) differ a lot in main dimensions of Hofstede's cultural model. The findings should be generalized with caution to other countries/cultures. Secondly, the sample sizes were relatively small; hence, a replication of the study with

larger samples would be much appreciated. Thirdly, only business students were asked to participate in the survey. Research suggests that students of business and non-business disciplines are different in their value sets, or in their risk-taking behavior (Harris, 1990; Sušanj, Jakopec, & Miljković Krečar, 2015). Hence, future research might focus on other disciplines than business in order to contribute to a broader picture. Lastly, the study only measures CDSE in a cross-sectional manner, and does not include a longitudinal perspective. It would be interesting to investigate the relationship of students' CDSE and their performance in their first employments after graduation.

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