



Core self-evaluation and career decision self-efficacy: A mediation model of value orientations

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ABSTRACT

This study examined two value orientations (i.e., a doing orientation, or the tendency to commit to work ethic and goals, and a mastery orientation, or the tendency to seek control over outside forces) as mediators in the relationship between core self-evaluation and career decision self-efficacy. Data were collected from 802 Chinese university students and analyzed employing structural equation modeling. Results showed that both doing and mastery orientations fully mediated the relationship between core self-evaluation and career decision self-efficacy. Mastery orientation exhibited a stronger mediating effect on this relationship than did doing orientation. These findings reveal some important mechanisms underlying the role of core self-evaluation in career decision-making processes and offer useful implications for researchers and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

A career decision is one of the most sophisticated and important decisions in one's lifetime (Jiang, 2014). Research indicates that career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) serves as a core factor that facilitates career decision-making processes (Choi et al., 2012). CDSE refers to the extent to which individuals show confidence in their competencies to successfully perform career decision-making tasks that are related to self-appraisal, collection of occupational information, problem solving, goal selection, and planning for the future (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996; Jiang, 2014). In general, individuals with higher CDSE are better able to deal with difficulties and less likely to experience psychological obstacles in making career decisions (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013; Jiang, 2014). Due to its functions in reducing concerns and stresses in diverse career behaviors, researchers suggest that it is important to explore various approaches to enhancing individuals' CDSE throughout the vocational development journey (Choi et al., 2012).

The literature suggests that core self-evaluation (CSE) is one critical variable that significantly contributes to the development of CDSE (Choi et al., 2012; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). CSE is considered to be "a basic, fundamental appraisal of one's worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person" (Judge et al., 2003, p. 304). People with positive CSE usually like themselves and are confident in their own capabilities and effectiveness in handling work and life issues, while those with negative CSE dislike themselves and feel incapable and powerless (Jiang &

Jiang, 2015). According to Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997), CSE consists of four personality traits that underlie individuals' cognitive appraisal processes: locus of control, emotional stability, generalized self-efficacy, and self-esteem. These four traits mutually interact to function in one's self-evaluation and self-conceptualization and together are deemed to represent a unique construct (Judge et al., 2003).

Researchers (e.g., Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012) contend that CSE influences career decision-making variables (e.g., CDSE) because CSE involves an evaluation focus and encompasses specific cognitive appraisals related to self-concepts (Judge et al., 2003), which, according to social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), are essential catalyzers in career choice processes. This theoretical argument is supported by empirical evidence showing that all four componential traits of CSE are significantly and positively related to self-efficacy in vocational development processes (Bullock-Yowell, Andrews, & Buzzetta, 2011; Schyns & von Collani, 2002). However, it appears that almost no empirical research has examined the relationship between overall CSE, as an integral construct, and CDSE. The lack of such examination prevents the understanding of whether overall CSE could also be related to CDSE, due to the possibility that the mutual influences of the dimensions of a construct confound the roles of this construct at the overall level (Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008). Therefore, this study focuses on overall CSE to examine its relationship with CDSE. In addition, despite the aforementioned informed evidence and conceptual basis, which may help with understanding and inferring the role of CSE in career decision-making processes (Judge et al., 2003), no answers are readily available in the literature to explain how this role can be transmitted to the development of CDSE. A more in-depth understanding of the CSE–CDSE relationship requires the mechanisms

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underlying this relationship to be revealed, in hopes of providing useful insights to career psychologists and counselors. To advance the knowledge of this area, the present study examines the CSE–CDSE linkage by considering the mediating roles of two value orientations.

1.1. CSE, CDSE, and value orientations

According to Lent et al. (1994), individual value orientations play crucial roles in career choice processes, where multiple cognitive mechanisms exist. The literature indicates that value orientations, which are largely developed through self-evaluative experiences in the fundamental social learning process (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Lent et al., 1994), can potentially influence people's psychological states (e.g., CDSE) in career decision-making (Jiang, 2014). On the one hand, Rokeach's (1973) theory of human value systems proposes that general personality traits (e.g., CSE and its componential traits) are antecedents to value orientations, which, while relatively stable, are reprioritized by self-reflective and self-evaluative experiences and by social expectations (Bandura, 2001; Olver & Mooradian, 2003). This theoretical perspective is supported by empirical findings, which reveal that personality traits can lead to value development (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994). Particularly, research has shown that CSE significantly contributes to the formation of value orientations (Avery, 2003). On the other hand, social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) views value orientations as factors that affect one's career expectations and decisions. It is argued that when individuals have intrinsic work-related value orientations, they find the career decision-making process easier and thus develop higher CDSE (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). This argument is empirically supported by Choi et al.'s (2013) study showing significant effects of intrinsic work values (e.g., a high work ethic) on CDSE. Furthermore, in light of career construction theory (Savickas, 2002), individuals come to understand, evaluate, and describe themselves before fully engaging in career development where CDSE matters. This process, which relates to self-evaluation, emphasizes the importance of value orientations in people's adaptation to career environments. This perspective is line with Schwalbe (1985) that self-evaluation related attributes help shape and adjust one's value orientations in a way that people develop career-related confidence, which accumulates from, and facilitates, vocational adaptation. Taken together, these theoretical backgrounds suggest that value orientations may be able to establish a bridge linking CSE to CDSE.

This study explores two value orientations from Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) value framework that are specific to work and careers: the doing orientation and the mastery orientation. From a vocational perspective, the doing orientation refers to the tendency to commit to goals and show a strong work ethic, and the mastery orientation reflects one's tendency to seek control over outside forces in dealing with career and work environments (Jiang, Gollan, & Brooks, 2015). These two value orientations are chosen because they are in alignment with the two essential elements in career decision-making processes—namely, the exploration of self and the exploration of the occupational environment (Choi et al., 2013). Empirical researchers have successfully operationalized these value orientations in work/career specific contexts (Jiang et al., 2015; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001).

1.2. The mediating role of doing orientation

As noted earlier, doing orientation involves commitment to goals, professions, or work ethics. CSE can influence CDSE partly due to its ability in fostering the embodiments of doing orientation such as goal-setting and career task motivation (Erez & Judge, 2001). For instance, individuals with positive CSE tend to be more optimistic and thus more motivated to engage in career and work goals and tasks consistently. These motivations accumulate to foster positive attitudes and beliefs toward work ethics, goals, and professions (a reflection of high doing orientation, Erez & Judge, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961), which

may reduce psychological obstacles and increase confidence in facing future career environments (Jiang, *in press*). This conceptual basis in the literature implies the potentiality of doing orientation in constituting part of the connecting mechanism of the CSE–CDSE relationship.

Hypothesis 1. Doing orientation mediates the relationship between CSE and CDSE.

1.3. The mediating role of mastery orientation

In career contexts, mastery orientation involves individuals' beliefs of, and attitudes toward, vocational environments. Scholars argue that self-evaluation processes extend to individuals' appraisals of environments, leading them to reflect on the fit between the self and the environment (Jiang & Jiang, 2015; Judge et al., 1997). According to prior researchers (Gianakos, 1995; Lent et al., 1994; Savickas, 2002), such environment-related appraisals and reflections assist in forming personal mastery orientation, which guides people's thinking that the career contexts are controllable and manageable, and subsequently develop their positive career perceptions (e.g., CDSE). Based on these theoretical arguments, it appears plausible to predict that CSE relates to CDSE via mastery orientation.

Hypothesis 2. Mastery orientation mediates the relationship between CSE and CDSE.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were undergraduate students from a state-run Chinese university, which recruits students from throughout China. Faculty members invited students to participate during class time. Voluntary students answered a paper-and-pencil questionnaire and returned the completed questionnaire to the lecturer immediately. The questionnaire contained an informed consent form. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous, and that only the research team would have access to the data. Finally, 802 students returned usable questionnaires (valid response rate = 94.35%). Of these students, 485 (60.5%) were female. They aged from 17 to 25 years (mean = 20.43; standard deviation = 1.40).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Core self-evaluation (CSE)

CSE was measured employing Judge et al.'s (2003) 12-item scale. These items were developed to assess one's overall CSE based on four personality traits: self-esteem, locus of control, emotional stability, and generalized self-efficacy. A sample item is, "Overall, I am satisfied with myself". Respondents answered these items on a Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)". The Cronbach's alpha for CSE was .71.

2.2.2. Value orientations

Following Jiang et al. (2015), this study used items from Maznevski, DiStefano, Gomez, Noorderhaven, and Wu (1997) value orientation scales to measure doing (eight items) and mastery (seven items) orientations. A sample item for doing orientation is, "It's human nature to place more importance on work than on other activities". A sample item for mastery orientation is, "It's important to try to prevent problems you may encounter in your life". Respondents answered these items on a Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)". The Cronbach's alphas for doing and mastery orientations were .73 and .69, respectively.

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