

DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEMATIC GOAL ATTAINMENT

Simona Ďurbisová

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Safarik University (Slovakia)

Abstract

The decision-making and the goal attainment are widely researched and undoubtedly intertwined areas. However, research into the connection between aspects of the decision-making process and the problems occurring during specific stages of the goal attainment process is somewhat lacking. Based on previous work, our study focuses on exploring the existence of a connection between the action crisis, the decision-making styles, and the newly specified aspects of the decision-making process. This paper presents results of a longitudinal study consisting of four phases. Ninety-seven people aged 25 to 65 ($M = 38,8$; $SD = 9$) participated in this study. The Action Crisis Scale (ACRISS; Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013) was used to measure manifestations of the action crisis, and the General Decision-Making Style scale (GDMS; Scott & Bruce, 1995) was used to measure five decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous. Moreover, to explore selected aspects of the decision-making process occurring during the goal attainment process, 16 newly formed items were used. Significant relationships were found between the action crisis and the rational, avoidant and spontaneous decision-making style. Several other significant relationships were found between the action crisis and the aspects of the decision-making process, such as the momentary decision to end the goal attainment process, to give up the goal or to make changes in the means of the goal attainment. The momentary decision-making certainty, the thoughts reflecting on the costs of ending the goal attainment process or ruminating on previously made decisions were also connected to the action crisis. These results point out to the changes in the decision-making and a preference of certain decision-making styles when obstacles and failures to attain the goal pile up. Knowledge of these relationships may help in preventing as well as resolving goal attainment problems. While keeping in mind limits of this study, these findings may inspire much needed future research and practical applications.

Keywords: *Action crisis, decision-making process, decision-making styles, goal attainment.*

1. Introduction

Achieving different kinds of goals is part of our everyday lives. Once the goal is set, a person applies different strategies to attain it. However, this process is rarely without any obstacles. When there are too many seemingly unconquerable obstacles and piled up failures after putting a certain amount of effort into achieving the goal, an action crisis may arise (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013). The action crisis can lead to active questioning of the desirability and attainability of the goal, and the benefits and the costs of the next steps can come into question (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013; Herrmann et al., 2019) – deliberations not usually typical for the active stage of the goal attainment process (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2018). Whether the action crisis will have a positive or negative effect on the outcomes of this process depends on various factors. Every stage of the goal attainment process is accompanied with a certain mindset (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2018) and it is clear the decision-making process plays an important part in this. The decision-making has been widely researched, mainly in terms of decision-making styles. However, when it comes to specific aspects of the decision-making that may be of importance during the different stages of the goal attainment, the research is somewhat lacking.

Our objective was to provide some insight into the relationship between the action crisis and the decision-making – specifically five decision-making styles (Scott & Bruce, 1995) and chosen aspects of the decision-making process based on our previous works (Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021; Durbisova & Bavolar, 2021).

2. Methods

A larger longitudinal study was carried out for a period of nine months, consisting of four phases (the fourth phase was focused only on the evaluation of previous phases and possible future changes). The study examined the processes of the decision-making and goal achievement.

Ninety-seven employees – most of them employed at Slovak Universities or EURES (European Employment Services) – aged 25 to 65 (M = 38,8; SD = 9) participated in this study (75,3% women).

The Action Crisis Scale (ACRISS; Brandstätter & Schöler, 2013) consisting of six items was used in the first three phases of the study to measure aspects of the action crisis – conflict, setbacks, implemental disorientation, ruminating, procrastinating and disengagement impulses.

The General Decision-Making Style scale (GDMS; Scott & Bruce, 1995) was used to measure five decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous. The scale consists of 25 statements, each decision-making style measured by five items.

Considering the lack of methods exploring the decision-making process, new items were formed. Based on theoretical background (Ballard et al., 2018; Brandstätter & Schöler, 2013; Herrmann et al., 2019; Lebeau et al., 2018) and our previous research (Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021; Durbisova & Bavolar, 2021), sixteen items focusing on the aspects of this process were used in the second and third phase of the study – in the middle stages of the goal attainment process. These items explore momentary (“at-the-moment”) micro-decisions and aspects of the decision-making process accompanying the process of goal achievement (e.g., momentary decisions to make changes in the effort, tempo, time, demands or the means when trying to achieve a goal, decisions to continue or end the goal achievement process, thoughts about benefits and costs of continuing or ending the goal achievement process, etc.).

3. Results

Presented are the most significant results of correlational analyses.

As can be seen from Table 1, the action crisis was found to be in a significant positive relationship with the avoidant decision-making style in the first and second phase of the study. The spontaneous decision-making style was in a positive relationship with the action crisis mainly in the first phase of the study, while the rational decision-making style was in a significant negative relationship with the action crisis in the second phase of the study.

These results suggest that the more the action crisis is present, the more used is the avoidant decision-making style. The spontaneous style might be more preferred if the action crisis is present in the early stages of the goal attainment process. The less is the action crisis present, the more is the rational style preferred in the middle stages of the goal attainment.

Table 1. Relationship between the action crisis and the decision-making styles.

Decision-making style	Action crisis		
	1 st phase	2 nd phase	3 rd phase
Rational	-,14	-,38**	-,11
Avoidant	,46**	,46**	-,27
Spontaneous	,38**	,25	-,05

** p < 0,01

Table 2 presents found connections between the action crisis and some aspects of the decision-making process. The momentary decision to end the goal achievement process or to give up the goal was found in a significant positive relationship with the action crisis in both the second and third phase of the study. The action crisis was found to be in a positive relationship with the momentary decision to make changes in the goals demands and means of the goal attainment, as well as with the demandingness of momentary decisions, feeling of time pressure when making these decisions, thoughts on previously made decisions and costs of ending the goal attainment process. The certainty in momentary decisions was found to be in a significant negative relationship with the action crisis in the second phase of the study.

Table 2. Relationship between the action crisis and the aspects of the decision-making process.

Aspects of the decision-making process	Action crisis	
	2 nd phase	3 rd phase
2. decision to end the goal achievement process	,53**	,59**
3. decision to give up the goal	,41**	,47**
6. decision to make changes in the goal demands	,00	,35*
8. decisional certainty	-,48**	-,26
9. decisional demandingness	,20	,39*
10. time pressure	,22	,42*
11. decision to make changes in the means of the goal attainment	,49**	,19
15. thoughts on costs of ending the goal attainment process	,29*	,20
16. thoughts on previously made decisions	,33*	-,04

* p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01

These results might imply that the more the action crisis is present, the larger is inclination towards making the immediate decision to end the goal achievement process or to give up the goal

entirely, as well as deciding on making some changes in previously set goal demands. Moreover, the higher is the level of the action crisis, the more uncertain an individual might feel when making momentary decisions, especially in the early stages of the goal achievement process. Higher levels of action crisis can also be connected to saturated feelings of decisional demandingness or time pressure when making these micro-decisions, and to intensified deliberations on the costs related to ending the whole process or previously made decisions that led the individual to the situation they are in.

4. Discussion

The success of the goal achievement process can be largely affected by accumulated failed attempts to overcome obstacles and reach the goal. This can result in giving up or making some changes to resolve the situation. These changes are usually conscientiously made since the individual is deliberating the characteristics of the goal and the goal-achievement process. Our study's aim was to explore the connection between the action crisis and the decision-making process.

The results suggest there is a connection between action crisis and some decision-making styles, specifically the rational, avoidant, and spontaneous decision-making style. These results are in line with the reasoning of some authors (Riaz et al., 2012; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2019), such as the connection between the avoidant style and neuroticism which can be reflected in higher intensity of action crisis, or connection between the rational style and conscientiousness in which case the meticulous approach to analyze potential alternatives might be in relation to lower intensity of the action crisis.

The action crisis was also found to be in a relationship with some of the aspects of the decision-making process, such as momentary decision to end the goal attainment process, to give up the goal or to make changes in the means of achieving this goal, and the decisional certainty, thoughts on the costs of ending the goal attainment process or previously made decisions that have affected it. Some of these results are in line with reflections of other authors (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013; Herrmann et al., 2019; Lebeau et al., 2018) about the action crisis and its connection to thoughts on costs and benefits of the next steps, rumination, efforts to find alternative goals, threatened self-worth etc.

While keeping in mind the limits of the study – such as the disadvantages of a longitudinal study, characteristics of the participants and used methods – these results provide new information about some specifics of the connection between the goal attainment and the decision-making processes. This can provide a stepping stone for future studies and practical application of the gained knowledge that would focus on helping to prevent as well as resolve problems related to the goal attainment.

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