

# MOTIVATION, DECISION-MAKING, AND SELF-REGULATORY PROCESSES IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS' ATTAINMENT OF EMERGING ADULTS

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## Abstract

The period of emerging adulthood, between the ages of 20 and 30, is characterized by discovery, new possibilities but also instability, which is often reflected in the fluctuation of life plans due to a number of external or internal factors. Planning and achieving goals in key life domains can thus pose a great challenge during this period. However, until now, not much research attention has been paid to the specificities of goal attainment during the transition to adulthood. Therefore, in a larger longitudinal study of 150 participants aged 20 to 30 years ( $M = 23.5$ ;  $SD = 3.6$ ), we aimed to examine the moderating effect of decision-making styles on the relationship between autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and changes in effort and action crisis related to goal attainment in core life domains of emerging adulthood. A statistically significant moderating effect of rational decision-making style was found on the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in effort to achieve educational goals. Furthermore, a significant moderating effect of intuitive decision-making style was found (a) on the relationship between autonomous motivation and changes in effort to achieve personal growth goals, (b) on the relationship between autonomous motivation and changes in action crisis when achieving educational and relationship/family goals, and (c) on the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in action crisis when achieving relationship/family goals. Additionally, a statistically significant moderating effect of avoidant decision-making style was found on the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in action crisis when achieving personal growth goals. As such, the results pointed out the importance of understanding the motivation and decisional tendencies of emerging adults in the context of the changes that can subsequently occur in exerting effort and overcoming obstacles when achieving goals from various life domains. These findings contribute to existing knowledge and can not only stimulate further research studies but can also be applied in training activities aimed at self-development and adaptive techniques used for setting and achieving goals of emerging adults.

**Keywords:** *Motivation, decision-making, action crisis, emerging adulthood.*

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## 1. Introduction

The achievement of specific goals is influenced by different factors. A variety of previous research studies and literature have discussed the importance of motivation, effort, and self-regulation in connection with the process of goal attainment (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2018). Recent studies have also focused on decision-making processes playing important part as well (e.g., Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021). However, there are other variables that also need to be considered, such as the life stage and its specificities impacting not only the goal people set to achieve but also the way they go about it and changes they make in the process. One of the more challenging life periods is the emerging adulthood, a period regarding individuals aged 20 to 30 years. This period is often characterized by discovery and new possibilities as well as confusion and instability related to fluctuating life plans (Luyckx, De Witte, & Goossens, 2011). These plans are influenced by all kinds of internal and external forces, which oftentimes lead to difficulties in achieving some goals, especially if they are of existential nature and relate to the core of identity of individuals. Key areas in which the emerging adults set most of the important goals include education, personal growth, relationships, and work. All these areas are more or less regarded by each person and may require different strategies when achieving specific goals, especially if the individual experiences an action crisis when putting a lot of effort into achieving a goal while being repeatedly faced with overwhelming obstacles and failures (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013).

The objective of this study was to examine the role of decision-making styles in connection to relationship between motivation and changes in effort and action crisis when achieving specific goals in all key life areas of emerging adults.

## 2. Methods

A hundred and fifty young adults aged 20 to 30 years ( $M = 23.5$ ;  $SD = 3.6$ ) participated in a larger longitudinal study. Part of this study focused on decision-making styles, motivation, effort, and action crisis related to goals in key life domains such as education, personal growth, relationships and work. Every variable except for decision-making styles was measured in both phases of the research in order to see changes that can occur in time. There was a one-year gap between the two phases.

The mostly used three (out of five) decision-making styles – rational, intuitive and avoidant style – were measured using relevant statements from the General Decision-Making Style scale (GDMS; Scott & Bruce, 1995). Each decision-making style was measured by five items.

The autonomous and controlled motivation was measured using four items (Milyavskaya et al., 2015; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) as used in previous related studies (e.g., Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021).

The effort was measured by an item asking how hard the participants are trying to achieve the goal (Werner et al., 2016), which was used in previous related studies as well (e.g., Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021).

The action crisis was measured by six items composing the Action Crisis Scale (ACRIS; Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013).

## 3. Results

Presented are the most significant results of moderation analyses. Significant moderation effects of the decision-making styles on relationships between motivation and changes in effort and action crisis have been found in three goal domains (Table 1). The intuitive decision-making style was moderating the relationship between autonomous motivation and a) changes in action crisis in education domain, b) changes in effort in personal growth domain, and c) changes in action crisis in relationships domain. This style was also found to moderate the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in action crisis in relationship domain. The rational style was moderating the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in effort in education domain. Lastly, the avoidant style was moderating the relationship between controlled motivation and changes in action crisis in personal growth domain.

Table 1. Moderation effect of decision-making styles on changes in effort and action crisis.

Goal domain	Motivation and decision-making styles									
	Changes / Style	Autonomous motivation				Changes / Style	Controlled motivation			
		b	SE	Z	p		b	SE	Z	p
Education	Action crisis / IS	0,16	0,08	2,03	0,04	Effort / RS	-0,03	0,01	-2,05	0,04
Personal growth	Effort / IS	-0,05	0,02	-2,02	0,04	Action crisis / AS	0,14	0,05	2,78	0,00
Relationships	Action crisis / IS	0,20	0,07	2,89	0,00	Action crisis / IS	-0,10	0,04	-2,26	0,02

Note: AS – avoidant style, IS – intuitive style, RS – rational style

As can be seen from Table 2, the relationship between the motivation and changes in effort and action crisis differ according to the levels of rational, intuitive and avoidant decision-making style. Regarding educational goals, changes in action crisis rise with the rise of intuitive decision-making style when there is higher autonomous motivation. On the other hand, when higher controlled motivation is present when pursuing educational goals, changes in effort rise with the rise of rational style up until its average level and then decline when it reaches high levels. Regarding goals of personal growth, changes in effort decline with the rise of intuitive decision-making style when there is higher autonomous motivation, but changes in action crises rise with the rise of avoidant decision-making style when there is higher controlled motivation. Regarding relationship goals, changes in action crisis rise with the rise of intuitive decision-making style when there is higher autonomous motivation, but they decline when there is higher controlled motivation.

Table 2. The effects of motivation on changes in effort and action crisis on different levels of decision-making styles.

Goal domain	Motivation	Changes / Style	Levels of decision-making style								
			Low (-1SD)			Average			High (+ 1SD)		
			b	Z	p	b	Z	p	b	Z	p
Education	Autonomous	Action crisis / IS	0,11	0,25	0,79	0,69	2,52	0,01	1,26	3,79	0,00
	Controlled	Effort / RS	0,18	2,16	0,03	0,07	1,44	0,14	-0,02	-0,39	0,69
Personal growth	Autonomous	Effort / IS	0,29	1,34	0,17	0,04	0,38	0,70	-0,19	-1,59	0,11
	Controlled	Action crisis / AS	-1,48	-4,13	0,00	-0,83	-3,20	0,00	-0,19	-0,54	0,58
Relationships	Autonomous	Action crisis / IS	-0,41	-0,95	0,34	0,39	1,03	0,30	1,21	2,32	0,02
	Controlled	Action crisis / IS	0,35	1,33	0,18	-0,05	-0,23	0,81	-0,45	-1,56	0,11

Note: AS – avoidant style, IS – intuitive style, RS – rational style

#### 4. Discussion

Successful goal attainment depends on a variety of factors, such as changes in self-regulatory strategies and decision-making. Even though these connections were previously researched, few of the studies focused on them in the context of turbulent period of emerging adulthood. This study therefore focused on shedding some light on these processes with regards to different goal domains.

The results suggest various moderating effects of decision-making styles on relationship between autonomous and controlled motivation and changes in action crisis and effort of people when attaining goals related to education, personal growth, and relationships. The intuitive decision-making style was found to have an important effect in all three goal domains, especially when autonomous motivation was present. Based on these results it is possible to conclude that regulating one's process of attaining specific goals is connected not only to the nature of one's motivation but also to the preferred decision-making style, the life domain the goal relates to, and the specifications of one's current life period. Our results support and build upon previous findings of connections between decision-making styles and action crisis, motivation and effort (e.g. Gambetti & Giusberti, 2019; Bavolar, Lovas & Durbisova, 2021).

While there are some limits of the study related to used methods, length of the study, no comparison with participants of different ages etc., these findings provide important insight into the complexity and specifications of the processes that might affect successful attainment of goals in various life domains and periods. As such, this paper contributes to better understanding of these processes and can stimulate further research and practical application of training self-developmental activities.

#### Acknowledgments

This research work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract no. APVV-19-0284.

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